
Dissertation

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By
Gregory J. Kupsky, M.A.
Graduate Program in History

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Kevin Boyle, Advisor
Professor Alan Beyerchen
Professor Peter Hahn
ABSTRACT

Historians generally assume that the assimilative process was complete for German-Americans by 1930. This assumption, while generally valid, has precluded study of ethnic societies that operated in subsequent years, as Nazism created a new crisis in U.S.-German relations. The purpose of this dissertation is to fill that void by examining a range of German-American organizations and individuals who aspired to ethnic leadership in the interwar and post-World War II periods. It broadens our understanding of how ethnic institutions retained vitality and influence in a period when German-Americans as a whole were entering the mainstream of American society.

This study shows that German-American organizations across a broad ideological spectrum saw the controversy over Nazism as a chance to reassert themselves in the public sphere and advance existing goals. At the same time, it shows that the political environment of the 1930s and 1940s necessitated a new understanding of ethnicity. The most successful institutions aligned themselves with the “conformist nationalism” of the era, as European ethnicities operated within state-sanctioned limits, celebrating both Americanism and whiteness. Finally, investigation reveals a considerable degree of negotiation in this process. The U.S. government, too, faced constraints as it promoted a celebration of American pluralism in wartime. It needed to display a loyal German America, a fact that many individuals and organizations used to their advantage.
The dissertation comprises six cases. The first two deal with leaders who had espoused German ethnic nationalism during the First World War. The rise of Nazism created a divergence between them, as German-American Jews faced rejection by the Reich and began to distinguish between the German nation and the German state. Other nationalists, such as George Sylvester Viereck, stubbornly adhered to an existing model of German chauvinism through the 1930s. Viereck faced federal prosecution for working as a Nazi propagandist, becoming a popular symbol of disloyalty.

Two cases deal with established German-American elites who sought a balance between enthusiasm for the “New Germany” and detachment from what they saw as its excesses. The aggressive Steuben Society cultivated ties to the Reich to establish its ethnic leadership, but retreated into a hyper-patriotic stance when these activities became a liability. Victor Ridder, publisher of the *New Yorkers Staats-Zeitung*, the nation’s largest German newspaper, cultivated a constituency of both pro- and anti-Nazis. His equivocations and his dealings with Germany brought him under suspicion, but his prominence protected him from punishment.

Groups on the German-American political left had consistently opposed Nazism, earning them greater credibility by the outbreak of the Second World War. German socialists used this position to forge links with the exiled Social Democratic Party and to advocate for a “soft peace” after the war. Finally, the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation took an ostensibly apolitical stance, calling for the preservation of “pre-Hitler” German culture. Because it tied its programming tightly to American ideals—and American interests—it acquired a useful alliance with the state that lasted into the early Cold War.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While not the first to say so, I am among the most sincere in the belief that I could not have completed this project by myself. First, I was fortunate to secure a wide range of financial support. The State Historical Society of Missouri’s Brownlee Award aided work in St. Louis. A Lubin-Winant Fellowship from the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute brought me to the FDR Library. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania’s Balch Fellowship and the German Historical Institute’s Horner Library Fellowship sponsored research in Philadelphia. The GHI also provided a Doctoral Fellowship that smoothed the transition to writing. I received a humbling amount of assistance from The Ohio State University, beginning with six years as a Graduate Associate. The Sonkin-Bergman-Wasserman Scholarship aided my early work. A Graduate School Matching Tuition and Fee Award made it feasible to accept external funding. The Humanities College provided two Research Small Grants, while the History Department matched the College awards and sponsored me with two summer fellowships.

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I come at last to those whom I will never, ever be able to thank enough. My friends inside and outside academia have followed my progress with interest and good humor. I have been lucky to join the Buehrig family, whose warmth and support have been second only to my own family. Drew and Lori Kupsky, my brother and sister-in-law, are the best librarians, siblings, and friends that one could ever have. My parents, Jack and Suzie, have given me far more than life. Their confidence in me kept me going at times when my own had given out. I could not be more proud to be their son. Finally, my wife Amanda is my inspiration every day. Because of her, all of the challenges and frustrations have been worth it. It is to Amanda, and to the little one on the way, that I dedicate this dissertation.
VITA

June 19, 1980 ............................................. Born, St. Louis, Missouri

May 1998 ......................................................... Chaminade College Preparatory School
St. Louis, Missouri

June 2002 .............................................................. B.A. History, Cum Laude, with Honors
Knox College
Galesburg, Illinois

May 2004 .............................................................. M.A. U.S. History, University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee

September 2004 – Present .................................. Graduate Associate
Department of History
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS


“‘We, Too, Are Still Here’: German-Americans in St. Louis, 1919-1941.” Missouri Historical Review 103:4 (July 2009), 212-225.

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<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES</td>
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<td>CSMF</td>
<td>CARL SCHURZ MEMORIAL FOUNDATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY</td>
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<td>GSP</td>
<td>GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA</td>
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<td>GSV</td>
<td>GEORGE SYLVESTER VIERECK PAPERS SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSP</td>
<td>HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA</td>
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<td>JDC</td>
<td>JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARA</td>
<td>NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION</td>
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<td>NCSA</td>
<td>NATIONAL CARL SCHURZ ASSOCIATION PAPERS, HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA</td>
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<td>RG</td>
<td>RECORD GROUP</td>
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<td>UAGD</td>
<td>UNITED AMERICANS OF GERMAN DESCENT</td>
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INTRODUCTION

On the night of Thursday, October 27, 1932, over five hundred German-Americans gathered at the Hotel Astor in New York City. As delegates to the First German-American National Congress they hoped to reverse decades of ethnic decline and restore a sense of pride within the country’s German communities. They planned a new national movement to protect ethnic Germans and, perhaps, create an organized political force.¹

The leadership for the Congress comprised the country’s high profile, politically connected Germans. The keynote speaker, former U.S. ambassador to Germany Alanson Houghton, stressed the need to “place the German element in a position … that corresponds to its contributions.” Charles Nagel of St. Louis, formerly a member of the Taft administration, urged ethnic Germans to assume greater prominence in industry, culture, and politics. Present throughout the proceedings was Victor Ridder, the publisher of the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, the largest German daily in the United States. As president of the German-American Conference of New York, he served as

benevolent host to the delegates. He called for a spirit of self-sacrifice and cooperation as delegates discussed ways to work together to revitalize America’s German communities.²

For four days delegates tackled the problem of ethnic decline with sessions dedicated to key issues. The common theme was a need to organize the nation’s constellation of German clubs and organizations. On the cultural side, academics discussed the problem of maintaining the German language through formal instruction. A resolution called for the creation of a national German university and a German art institute to counter the Anglocentrism of existing institutions. The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation led a session on intellectual exchanges between the United States and Germany, securing a resolution for a national fundraising effort for that purpose.³

The elite Steuben Society, formed to defend German-Americans’ rights in the wake of the Great War, assumed leadership of the political portion of the Congress. Its members railed against the Versailles treaty and called for a fight to remove pro-Allied bias from school textbooks. Meeting in the depths of the Great Depression, they urged the delegates to lead a movement for a five-day workweek and a system of social insurance. Finally, Rabbi Max Malina delivered an address on German-American Jews.

Calling German the “language of modern Judaism,” he boasted that the German-Jewish veterans’ organization had never abandoned its use of German. To be a good American, Malina asserted, one could never give up his German-ness. He called for a central

³ “Der deutsche Unterricht in Stadt, Staat und Land,” Erster National-Kongress, 14-15;
“Förderung deutscher Kulturarbeit,” 16; “Exchange of Professors and Students,” 17-18; “German Thought – A Fertilizing Agent,” 23-4; CSMF Minutes, June 16, 1932, Box 1, Folder 6, NCSA.
organization of religious congregations to welcome immigrants and protect German traditions among Jews and Gentiles alike.\textsuperscript{4}

As the proceedings came to a close, Victor Ridder hailed them as a great success. After German-Americans had time to discuss the Congress’s ideas, he hoped, a second Congress could provide more concrete proposals. Already, he said, one could sense “a new spiritual orientation in German-Americandom.” The Steuben Society’s publication regaled readers with a detailed account of the meeting, boasting of the Society’s role in the proceedings. The \textit{American Monthly}, a pro-German publication founded in 1914, hailed the Congress as an “epoch making event.”\textsuperscript{5} Not since before the hysteria of the First World War had organized German America spoken so confidently.

But the spirit of unity shattered almost immediately. Three months after the First Congress, Adolf Hitler became the German chancellor, and reports of mistreatment of Jews in Germany increased. The Second German-American Congress, held in Philadelphia in October 1933, planned a flagship “German Day” on October 6 and hoped that an apolitical posture would maintain cohesion. The pro-Nazi Friends of the New Germany stood out as an obvious—and ominous—addition to the list of sponsors. Elsewhere, Jewish groups had broken away or been expelled from German-American umbrella organizations, with many joining a movement to boycott imports from the Reich. The \textit{Neue Volks-Zeitung}, a socialist newspaper in New York, disavowed German


Day celebrations that it saw as tainted by National Socialism. The stress on the revitalization movement had become too great. A smaller Third German-American Congress, held in Cleveland in 1934, was the last.⁶

These ill-fated Congresses were not the first attempts to organize and empower German-Americans.⁷ To be sure, Germans constituted the largest non-Anglo ethnic group in the early twentieth century. In 1910, when the nation’s population stood at 92,000,000, a quarter of a million were German-born, another 5,780,000 were second-generation Germans, and one-fourth of Americans claimed at least some German ancestry. Beneath these numbers, though, were divisions that extended back into the nineteenth century.⁸ Organizations and newspapers normally operated on the local level, acclimating recent immigrants to life in the United States. Even in specific locales, German-Americans divided between the Kirchendeutscher (church Germans) and the

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secular Vereinsdeutscher (club Germans), and regional and class tensions created further splits. In addition, slowing immigration combined with mass culture and growing racial and class identities to erode ethnic communities.\textsuperscript{9}

A large group of affluent German-Americans pushed against this trend. For a variety of reasons—rising ethnic nationalism after the 1871 unification of the Reich, fear of losing their social status, opposition to the prohibition movement, and the defense of economic ties to Germany—they sought new means of protecting German-American communities from dissolution.\textsuperscript{10} They were encouraged by the German state, which actively promoted cultural preservation in German enclaves around the world.\textsuperscript{11} German-American leaders, like many other turn-of-the-century groups in the United States, believed that organizing on a national scale would strengthen their position. The most prominent result of their efforts was the National German-American Alliance, an umbrella group formed in 1901, comprising thousands of ethnic organizations throughout

the United States. At its peak in 1916, the Alliance represented—albeit indirectly—over 2.5 million German-Americans. This strength gave it a basis for touting the German heritage, preserving the German language, and maintaining ethnic nationalism even as the bonds among its constituents loosened.12

On the surface it seems ironic that America’s largest ethnic group felt threatened by the turn of the century because of acceptance rather than hostility. Recent work on the nature of ethnicity explains the tension. Since the 1970s scholars have focused on the invented nature of ethnic identity. Immigrants who had little attachment to one another prior to migration invented a common identity as a means of social defense after arriving in the United States. Kathleen Neils Conzen has applied this formula to the Germans, noting that “festive culture” provided a common ground in the late nineteenth century for those who had shared few common traditions in Europe. Stephanie Grauman Wolf underscores the invented nature of German heritage by showing that even Germantown, Pennsylvania—which acts as the German-American Plymouth Rock in ethnic lore—was never solidly German. The creation of cultural myths and traditions is a key component of “ethnicization,” or the construction of an ethnic identity. Whereas common adversity drove this process for most immigrant groups, easy acceptance in the United States threatened the bonds among German-Americans.13

The First World War complicates the argument but reinforces its central idea. German-Americans’ sympathy for Imperial Germany, their anxiety about assimilation, and their perception of demographic strength made them strident in their defense of the German war effort. The National German-American Alliance shed all pretense of being apolitical in favor of defending the Central Powers and combating pro-Allied sentiment in the United States. In his classic study of nativism, historian John Higham asserts that this outspokenness helped to create the infamous anti-German hysteria after America’s entry into the war. In the name of “100% Americanism” and “anti-hyphenism,” other Americans persecuted ethnic Germans and attempted to banish symbols of German culture from the country. Naturally, the Alliance itself became a target. After enduring attacks throughout the war, it disbanded in April 1918, just before the U.S. Congress revoked its charter of incorporation. The adversity of the First World War, then, triggered a conscious effort to assimilate the nation’s Germans, ushering in what Russell Kazal calls an era of “conformist nationalism.” He argues that a stronger state co-opted ethnic identities, restricting them to the celebration of Americanism, not true pluralism.\(^\text{14}\)

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Historians have agreed that wartime hysteria accelerated the erosion of German culture. To cite one indicator, of 800 German-language newspapers in the United States in 1893, only 552 remained in 1910, and half of those disappeared by 1920. To be sure, Germans were still the largest non-Anglo group. Approximately 6.8 million immigrants and first-generation German-Americans lived in the United States in 1930, the majority of them settling into historically German-heavy states such as New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Membership in German associations, however, had steeply declined. Kazal argues that Germans had in fact entered the ethnic mainstream by 1930, thereafter identifying themselves in terms of “whiteness.” Other studies generally concur with this finding, and works that extend beyond 1930 tend to focus on localities where family and personal ties prolonged German ethnic life.

An unfortunate consequence of this trend is that the historiography overlooks national German institutions that survived the 1920s. Victor Ridder’s New Yorker Staats-


Zeitung, for example, continued to reach over 50,000 readers in the following decade, and he and other ethnic leaders still had the ears of American policymakers. Given the assumption that German-Americans were in the late stages of assimilation in the interwar period, how and why did some groups not only survive, but actually augment their importance, in the 1930s and 1940s?

Those that have studied German-Americans beyond 1930 have painted them in broad strokes. Among diplomatic historians, Alexander DeConde’s Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy says little about the 1930s, simply stating that Hitler alienated German-Americans after a brief period of enthusiasm. Similarly, Tony Smith’s Foreign Attachments summarizes the German role in 1930s policymaking as a “drag” on interventionism. Even among those who study German-Americans, the focus has been on the wartime internment of 10,905 ethnic Germans, rather than on organizational perspectives. There is no German-American counterpart to the work of John Diggins

on Italian-Americans, Eiichiro Azuma on the Japanese, or Penny von Eschen and Brenda Gayle Plummer on African-Americans and foreign policy. These scholars have provided valuable insights into the ways that transnational identities intersected with domestic politics and how ethnic organizations balanced these factors to retain their leadership.\textsuperscript{20}

The study that best relates National Socialism to German-American institutions is Cornelia Wilhelm’s \textit{Bewegung oder Verein?}, published in 1998. Wilhelm looks at the Nazi state’s failed attempts to gain supremacy in German organizations in the United States. She shows that active Nazi efforts to propagandize only provoked hostility among Americans, while bids to control established societies yielded limited results.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Bewegung oder Verein?} focuses on the German government’s perspective, however, dealing with the problems of ethnic identity and assimilation only peripherally. No investigation has linked international relations and domestic concerns in the longer-term evolution of German-American organizations.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{21} See Wilhelm.

\textsuperscript{22} Robert Herzstein discusses “Hitler’s Americans” in a chapter of his study of U.S.-German relations, but it, too, largely focuses on openly pro-Nazi elements. Herzstein, \textit{Roosevelt and Hitler: Prelude to War} (New York: Paragon House, 1989).
The purpose of this study is to fill the historiographical gap. This study will complement existing work on German culture by tracing the development of the institutions that connected culture to politics in the interwar period. In particular, it will examine a representative range of organizations and individuals that committed themselves to organizing self-identifying German-Americans on a national scale. The subjects in this study were the largest and most outspoken groups engaging in such work. They tried to reflect the sentiments of America’s German stock, revitalize that population’s cultural self-awareness, and reach out to recent immigrants. Examination reveals that the rise of Nazi Germany complicated, but did not end, their efforts.

This analysis will include three related themes. First, it will show that, while their views of Hitler varied, organizations across the political spectrum seized on the controversy generated by Nazism to reassert themselves in the American public sphere. They incorporated the debates of the 1930s into their longstanding agendas based on ethnic nationalism. Domestically, this meant the assertion of German culture, usually as a counterweight to a perceived Anglo mainstream. In foreign relations, ethnic nationalism meant sympathy for Germany itself, though sympathies could take dramatically different forms.\textsuperscript{23} Ironically, while all of the groups in this study desired unification, as spelled out in the National Congresses, divisions among them deepened as they jockeyed for position and employed conflicting strategies in pursuit of these goals.

\textsuperscript{23} In essence, this study will begin with a sense of German ethnic nationalism reminiscent of that used in Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), and his “Malevolent Assimilation,” in Wendy Katkin, Ned Landsman, and Andrea Tyree, eds., \textit{Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 154-181.
At the same time, this study will show that the battle for ethnic survival shifted over time. It will demonstrate that the 1930s and 1940s were part of a transitional phase in which ethnic nationalism evolved to fit a new, racially defined idea of pluralism. Matthew Frye Jacobson has argued that European Americans’ identities melded into one based on “whiteness” in the twentieth century. In the 1960s, he says, Euro-Americans abandoned the “melting pot” metaphor altogether, instead celebrating their heritage inside the bounds of what scholars have termed the “white ethnic.” This study confirms Kazal’s contention that German-Americans had begun this process decades earlier. Indeed, Nazism and the Second World War pressed German-American organizations to revise their notions of ethnic nationalism. Only those organizations that adapted, placing German-ness within a new notion of American-ness, survived into the 1940s.

Finally, this study will examine the relationships between German-Americans and government officials during the Nazi period. Wilhelm has noted that national, state, and local officials all faced the problem of combating foreign propaganda—especially that conducted by U.S. citizens—within a democratic society. As authorities explored a wide range of options in dealing with ethnic groups that they suspected of disloyalty in the 1930s and 1940s, they faced a number of constraints. This study will show that, during a second war with Germany, a government committed to pluralism and postwar reconciliation actually needed a German America. Some ethnic leaders took advantage


of this fact to enhance their positions. This study, then, proposes to amend the notion of “conformist nationalism” by revealing a greater element of negotiation in its evolution.

The cases that make up this study are thus not intended to provide a comprehensive view of Americans of German ethnicity. The focus is on organizations and individuals who self-identified as German-Americans and actively worked for ethnic revitalization as set forth at the National Congresses. Generally speaking, their members were immigrants or first-generation Americans who had spent the First World War within the United States. As such, they had domestic goals that predated Nazism and that required adaptation in response to it. The following chapters will use the terms “German-Americans” and “ethnic Germans” interchangeably to describe these groups and their members, while “German America” will describe the culture and the communities that they sought to revitalize.

This dissertation, therefore, does not examine three important groups of German-Americans. Refugees from Nazi Germany, the subjects of numerous existing works, are not central because, by definition, they did not have longstanding domestic agendas in the

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26 Luebke has noted the inability of these older organizations to attract newcomers after 1919. As Wilhelm explains, later immigrants were much more willing to join pro-Nazi organizations, and they rejected the older societies’ lack of spiritual connection to Germany. Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies,” 69-70; Wilhelm, 23-4.

27 This is to relate the terms to their connotations among observers within the Third Reich, as described by Cornelia Wilhelm. Her study has summarized the contemporary categories. The Deutschamerikaner (German-Americans) were the millions of first- and second-generation immigrants who, having generally arrived before the First World War, had lost their identification with the Reich. In contrast, the pool of more recent immigrants who retained their affinity for German were the “Germans in America,” or Amerikadeutscher. “German America” was a mythical, united, self-assured body of Germans whom the Nazis vainly hoped to mobilize for their benefit. Wilhelm, 38-40.
United States. Similary, overtly pro-Nazi groups, especially the German-American Bund, were new entities whose central purpose was to generate enthusiasm toward the Nazis. Individuals and organizations in both groups took unequivocal stances toward Nazi Germany, in contrast to older ethnic societies that generally sought nuanced positions. Refugees and pro-Nazi figures do appear throughout the narrative, as the former collaborated with a number of subjects and the latter served as a foil for ethnic German organizations seeking to demonstrate their Americanism.

With one key exception, this study also does not examine German-American groups who defined themselves on religious grounds. While they warrant further study, German religious groups tended not to engage in national organizing as secular societies did. The most important exception is German Jewish leadership, which is the focus of the first chapter. Among German Christian groups, other priorities prevailed. The Catholic Central Verein, headquartered in St. Louis, offered initial praise for the Nazis’ anti-communism but soon protested the treatment of Catholics in Germany. By the mid-1930s it generally avoided comment, speaking vaguely against all “state socialism.”


29 See the aforementioned studies by Bell, Canedy, and Diamond.

30 Central-Blatt and Social Justice, June 1934, 79; “Faschistische Umorientierung,” January 1933, 325-326; Philip Gleason, The Conservative Reformers: German-American Catholics and the Social Order (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 198-9; Gleason’s study of the Central Verein says little about the Nazi period, however, and the topic certainly deserves more attention.
Similarly, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod’s records reveal scattered flashes of ethnic nationalism, but reticence was the norm.\textsuperscript{31} Generally speaking, such groups adhered to German traditions to reinforce religious orthodoxy, not to preserve German America.\textsuperscript{32} The task of ethnic revival generally fell to the secular \textit{Vereinsdeutscher}. The body of this study deals with those groups, their divisions, and their fates.

The first chapter deals with examples of German Jewish leaders in the United States. It will follow the careers of two philanthropists, Samuel Untermyer and Felix Warburg, as they confronted the Nazi threat to world Jewry. Both men had long tried to defend German culture; after 1933 they redefined their work as an effort to protect Germany from the German state itself. Their stories reflect the special constraints on German-American Jews—such as fear for relatives in the Reich—as well as the impact of Nazism on traditional German leadership in Jewish communities. In addition, a summary of their actions—especially the anti-Nazi boycott and refugee relief—will provide useful backdrops for subsequent chapters in which these topics reappear.

Chapter two focuses on George Sylvester Viereck, a paid propagandist for Germany prior to American entry in both World Wars. A longtime critic of Anglo “puritanism” and of the idea of assimilation, Viereck argued that the “New Germany” could stoke ethnic pride and strengthen German America. In his advocacy he rigidly

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adhered to older, chauvinistic notions of ethnic nationalism. As a result, he alienated Germans and non-Germans alike, becoming a popular symbol of ethnic disloyalty.

The Steuben Society, the political wing of the German-American Congresses, is the subject of the third chapter. Like Viereck, it initially dedicated itself to defending Germans against Anglo dominance. Seeking credibility in a bid for national leadership, it sought ties to the Hitler regime in the mid-1930s. When questions of loyalty arose, the Society took advantage of its anti-communist—and anti-Franklin Roosevelt—record, blending into the Republican right. As it adapted its ethnic nationalism to fit this political stance, it came to exemplify the transition to the “white ethnic.”

Chapter four examines Victor Ridder and his brothers as representatives of German-American print culture. They operated the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung and were ubiquitous among German organizations, including the First German-American Congress. Seeking a broad readership, the Ridders played to both ethnic nationalists and anti-Nazis. They subsequently faced attacks from both sides, although their prominence in journalism provided protection from the federal government. They illustrate the fate of the German press, for whom ethnicity and business interests went hand in hand.

The fifth chapter presents the story of the German-American left, which centered its ethnic nationalism on anti-Nazism. Escaping accusations of sympathy for the Nazis, these groups were well positioned to lobby on behalf of a “soft peace” after the war. Most successful were socialists who allied with the exiled German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Taking advantage of their consistent opposition to Hitler, socialist leaders earned a greater degree of credibility in differentiating the German people from the
German state. This position made them useful to German America, to the wartime U.S. government, and to postwar Germany itself.

The final chapter looks at the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, based in Philadelphia. As an aspirant to ethnic leadership it took a unique tack, disavowing politics while pledging to protect ethnic German culture. It framed its cultural work as a patriotic endeavor and cultivated allies in that effort within the U.S. government. It folded refugee aid into the mission of saving “pre-Hitler,” German culture, and after the war it even worked to export that heritage back to West Germany. By fusing its ethnic nationalism with Americanism—and American interests—the Foundation was able to emerge from the Second World War stronger than before.

The challenges, divisions, and transformations of these groups were, of course, unknown to the optimists at the First German-American Congress in 1932 when one professor spoke on the “national obligations” of his fellow Germans. “The immigration is as good as ended,” he remarked, “and we cannot count on new growth and new recruits. We must mobilize the old troops and the old reserves in the fight to maintain the great German culture in the United States.” He either did not know or did not acknowledge that this fight would be, by and large, a civil war.33

CHAPTER 1:
“SUFFICIENTLY ENRAGED”: GERMAN-AMERICAN JEWS AND THE REICH

The story of German-American Jewry, neglected in the historiography of German America, is an appropriate starting place for studying responses to National Socialism.34 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, German-American Jews shared the ethnic nationalism of German Gentiles. The advent of Nazism necessarily created a divergence, as the German state disowned the Jews while including all Volksdeutschen abroad in its definition of the nation.35 This development did not necessarily force Jews to abandon German culture or the German nation, however. Prominent German Jews in America set out to defend non-Nazi Germany while facing divisions over the best means for containing, mitigating, or even destroying the Hitler regime.

In a recent essay, Tobias Brinkmann has noted the various connotations of the term “German Jews” in American history. He explains that the label might refer to Jews from German-speaking Europe, to Jewish members of German-American organizations, or to those who adhered to German religious and cultural traditions. He also notes its twentieth-century use as a derogatory term to describe affluent, established “uptown”

34 Indeed, Mark Bauman has recently called on scholars to bridge the gap between German-American and Jewish-American historiography. Mark Bauman, “On German American and American Jewish History,” Journal of American Ethnic History 29:1 (Fall 2009), 67-71.
Jews—the proverbial “old immigrants”—who viewed themselves as superior to newcomers.  

By focusing on German-American Jews who reassessed their identities in response to Nazism, this chapter will engage all of these connotations. First, the subjects of this chapter cited their German origins to justify their strategies for opposing Nazism. In addition, saving German culture—including the institutions of Reform Judaism—from Nazism became a major goal. Finally, while affluent “German Jews” stepped forward to head these efforts, the rise of Nazism ultimately empowered broader elements in American Jewry, undermining the supremacy of elite leadership in shaping American Jewish social life.

While scholars have questioned the simplistic labeling of pre- and post-1880 waves of Jewish immigrants as “German” and “Eastern European,” there is no denying that German culture predominated in late nineteenth century American Jewry. A large number of the two hundred and fifty thousand pre-1880 arrivals came from German-speaking lands, and many of them felt at home within German-American organizations.

Although social distinctions remained between Jewish and Gentile German-Americans, many Jewish organizations operated in the German language through the First World War. Reform Judaism, which originated in Germany, found broad support in the

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38 See examples in Brinkmann, 114; 119; Cornelia Wilhelm, “The Independent Order of True Sisters: Friendship, Fraternity, and a Model of Modernity for Nineteenth Century American
United States. Many religious leaders urged Jews to Americanize themselves socially while remaining connected to German “Liberal Judaism.” Operating within this German-centered atmosphere in the Progressive Era, Jewish societies and philanthropists hoped to Americanize newcomers, in part to prevent an anti-Semitic backlash that would threaten their social positions. Over time, however, a growing number of Eastern European newcomers—who made up a majority of the two and a half million post-1880 arrivals—challenged the older leadership and its “assimilationist” aspirations. This tension, combined with the rise of Nazism, placed a great deal of strain on the German foundations of Jewish organizational life.

The 1930s brought new divisions between German-American Jews and Gentiles. In many organizations, continuing ethnic nationalism—and in some cases, pro-Nazism—made it impossible for Jewish members to retain their affiliations. By the end of 1933, for example, Jewish groups led a series of walkouts at meetings of the United German Societies (UGS) of New York. The first came in September, when the leadership refused to pass a resolution condemning anti-Semitism in Germany. When the UGS decided to fly the Nazi flag during German Day, Jewish-German organizations and their sympathizers permanently withdrew from the umbrella organization. Following their

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departure, pro-Nazi elements solidified their control of the UGS. The German-Jewish Club of New York, meanwhile, became a major center for anti-Nazi protest.\footnote{\textit{German Societies Meeting Is Disrupted by Row over the Flying of a Nazi Flag,} \textit{New York Times}, September 19, 1933; \textit{Jewish Units Quit German Societies,} September 22, 1933; \textit{Jews Again Quit German Societies,} October 3, 1933; \textit{Ein Jahr Aufbau,} \textit{Aufbau}, December 1, 1935; \textit{Effectiveness of the Boycott of German Goods,} October 1, 1935.}

Elsewhere, avowedly apolitical organizations like the Philadelphia-based Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation faced a rapid decline in Jewish membership and donations after 1933.\footnote{CSMF Sixth Annual Report, April 30, 1935, Box 44, Folder 2; Wilbur Thomas to Dietrich Gristede, December 2, 1935, Box 2, Folder 11, NCSA.} In the wake of these divisions came strategic differences, as organizations scrambled to find appropriate responses to the Nazi movement.

This chapter will survey the responses of German-American Jewish leaders to National Socialism by focusing on two cases. The first, Samuel Untermyer, was an American-born attorney who spearheaded the effort to force change within Nazi Germany through an international boycott. The second, the elite Warburg family, pursued a cautious strategy in response to the Third Reich. The value of these cases stems from the fact that Untermyer and the Warburgs, who led efforts to save non-Nazi Germany after 1933, had previously professed German ethnic nationalism. In addition, their centrality in the world of Jewish philanthropy placed them in the middle of debates over the range of available options in combating Nazism. Finally, their stories demonstrate the increasingly difficult position of elite German Jews within the larger Jewish community in the mid-twentieth century.
Samuel Untermyer as a German-American

Attorney Samuel Untermyer was perhaps the most prominent Jewish German-American in the interwar period. Born to German immigrant parents in Virginia in 1858, Untermyer started a law firm in New York City with his half-brother, Randolph Guggenheimer. Together they built a highly successful practice focusing on corporate law. Untermyer became an avid Democrat, supporting various anti-trust and regulatory campaigns. He strongly backed Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt and played a role in creating both the Federal Reserve and the regulatory measures of the New Deal. At the same time, however, he sometimes felt spurned by the Democratic Party, which never rewarded his outspoken support with a national political appointment.43

Historian Richard Hawkins cites Untermyer’s frustration with the Democratic Party as one reason why he increasingly shifted his attention and self-identification toward Jewish organizations around the First World War. In the early 1920s Untermyer established himself as a philanthropist and a key member of several important Jewish groups. He actively supported the relief efforts of international organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, as well as a number of Jewish charitable

organizations within the United States. In the early 1920s he served as the president of
the Keren Hayesod, or Palestine Foundation Fund, a major American organization
devoted to supporting the Zionist movement. Because Untermyer was American-born,
not a political Zionist, and arguably an assimilated German Jew, he helped the Keren
Hayesod to collect donations from a larger spectrum of the American Jewish community.
Beyond this work, a vast array of Jewish societies valued Untermyer’s support, both
financially and in terms of publicity, as demonstrated by the collection of personal
appeals that survive among his papers.\footnote{44}

It is equally important to note that Samuel Untermyer identified himself as a
German-American. Both he and his wife, Minnie Carl of St. Louis, had been raised in
immigrant households.\footnote{45} Untermyer supported the German Theater in New York and
was a member of Freundschaft, an ethnic fraternity in the city. He joined other
prominent German-Americans at social events, and in 1916 served on the memorial
committee for the late publisher Herman Ridder, whose sons he would regard with
hostility after 1933. These activities, combined with his patronage of German ocean
liners and vacations in Imperial Germany, make it clear that German-ness was no small
part of Untermyer’s self-identification.\footnote{46}

\footnote{44} Hawkins, “Zionist Project,” 114; 116; 119; Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 22; “The Purim
Association Ball,” \textit{New York Times}, February 23, 1902; Untermyer to Paul Baerwald, May 7,
1920, Box 1, Folder 1, Untermyer Papers, AJA. See, for example, the letters in Box 3, Folder 4,
Samuel Untermyer Papers, AJA.


\footnote{46} Minnie Carl boasted that her family had emigrated with the “forty-eighters” alongside Carl
Schurz. Circular from the Executive Komitee für Subvention des deutschen Theaters,” May
1914, Box 165, Folder 3, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; “Freundschaft Is in New $500,000 Home,”
\textit{New York Times}, June 18, 1914; “German Squadron in Hudson To-Day,” June 9, 1912; “To
Honor Ridder’s Memory,” February 17, 1916.}
Untermyer’s connections to Germany frequently blended into his business concerns. By the turn of the century his law firm represented a number of German-American brewing companies and he and his family actively promoted foreign—especially British—investment in these firms. Similarly, after August 1914 the Untermyer family joined other German-Americans in viewing British and French war propaganda with suspicion. While his wife, Minnie, coordinated an effort to provide milk for German babies, Samuel consulted with German investors in the United States, and even attempted to broker a deal to put the *New York Sun* into the hands of German propagandists. Although the *Sun* deal fell apart, it created suspicions about Untermyer’s loyalty once the United States entered the war. A lack of hard evidence ultimately enabled him to dodge the accusations, in contrast to German-Americans who acted more brazenly. Earlier leanings notwithstanding, Untermyer worked openly to support the American war effort after April 1917, a move that helped him to counter questions about his loyalties.  

Untermyer’s advocacy for Germany and German-Americans continued after the war. While he considered himself a Wilsonian and had supported the formation of a League of Nations, Untermyer told a friend that “a dozen Leagues of Nations” would not preserve peace in the face of the “spirit of conquest and robbery” that had guided the Allies in crafting the Versailles Treaty. The virulently pro-German writer George  

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Sylvester Viereck approached Untermyer to finance his *Fatherland* magazine, dedicated to countering Allied propaganda. While it is unclear whether Untermyer provided monetary assistance, he did periodically contribute articles decrying anti-German attitudes after 1919. Untermyer also joined Viereck in a futile effort to investigate the Alien Property Custodian, whom they accused of improperly liquidating German wealth during and after the war. Finally, Untermyer maintained business interests within Germany. He owned shares in a German utility company and real estate holdings outside Berlin. The freezing of these assets by the Nazi government after 1933 later served as a concrete representation of the severing of Samuel Untermyer’s connections to Germany.  

**The Warburgs as German-Americans**

Like the Untermyers, several members of the elite Warburg family attempted to balance their Jewishness, their Germanness, and their Americanness in the early twentieth century. Ron Chernow has described in detail how the Moritz Warburg family established itself at the head of the M.M. Warburg banking firm in Hamburg in the late nineteenth century. By the time of Mortiz’s death in 1910, three of his sons had gained

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48 See, for example, Hawkins, “‘Hitler’s Bitterest Foe’” Hawkins, “American Boomers,” 804; Untermyer to Nathan Snyder, September 12, 1927, Box 3, Folder 3; Untermyer to Frank Cobb, September 9, 1919, Box , Folder 4, Untermyer Papers, AJA; George Sylvester Viereck to Felix Warburg, August 1, 1914, Box 166, Folder 1, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; Untermyer, “Justice for German-Americans,” *American Weekly*, April 24, 1918; “Samuel Untermyer Shows How Germany Was Wronged at Versailles,” *American Monthly*, January 1925; “Untermyer Calls for Palmer Inquiry,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1921; “Untermyer Replies to Palmer ‘Rehash,’” January 27, 1921; Statement on Untermyer by Jim Larkin, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 4729, Folder 3, NARA; Edward Russell, Randolph Guggenheimer, and Samuel Untermyer to Cordell Hull, June 11, 1938, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 1671, File 362.115, NARA; Guggenheimer and Untermyer to State Department, July 2, 1940, and Paul Culbertson to Guggenheimer and Untermyer, July 16, 1940, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 1246, File 362.1143/783, NARA.
prominence in transatlantic banking and trade. Max headed M.M. Warburg, gained a position on the board of directors of the Hamburg-America Steamship Line in 1906, and became an intimate financial adviser to Kaiser Wilhelm. Paul, a year younger, married Nina Loeb, connecting him to the Kuhn, Loeb banking firm in New York. Pressured by the Loeb family, he moved to the United States in 1902, although he still spent considerable time in Hamburg. Felix, originally trained in the diamond and pearl business, married the daughter of Jacob Schiff, the Manhattan banker. Through his father-in-law Felix received a Kuhn, Loeb partnership in 1897. He quickly became a New York socialite and an active philanthropist. Geography now divided the brothers, but they forged links between Kuhn, Loeb and M.M. Warburg, empowering both companies. Meanwhile, in Chernow’s words, they “straddled” the Jewish and Gentile worlds in a turbulent era.49

Their dual identities brought both opportunities and problems for the Warburg brothers in America. Paul, who had an intimate knowledge of European banking, became highly critical of the American monetary system. Within a year of his arrival in New York he sketched a proposal for a central banking system that eventually evolved into the Federal Reserve. He allied himself with Senator Nelson Aldrich (R-RI), who had family ties to the Rockefellers and who shared Warburg’s interest in currency reform. When the Democrats regained control of the White House in 1912, Paul Warburg—a Republican—advised the Wilson administration through back channels. In the end, the 1913 Federal Reserve Act echoed Warburg’s initial proposal, although he resented the Democrats’ refusal to recognize his contributions. He reluctantly agreed to serve on the Federal

49 Ron Chernow, The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family (New York: Random House, 1993), 32; 46-8; 53; 69; 85-6; 89-90; 105; 108; 123; xvi.
Reserve Board in 1914, where his knowledge of both European and American banking was a valuable asset. Paul’s active role in currency reform had fueled furious populist criticisms, however. One congressman opposed Paul’s nomination to the Federal Reserve on the grounds that he was “a Jew, a German, a banker and an alien.” Such attacks, which had begun years earlier, had helped convince Paul to become a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1911, nine years after his arrival in the United States. The transatlantic connection, however, was never far from view: Chernow notes that Paul helped to direct the American war economy while his older brother Max filled the same role for the German Reich.\(^{50}\)

Felix, three years Paul’s junior, was more outgoing, more outspoken, and more active in cultural circles. He took U.S. citizenship in 1900, quickly becoming comfortable in American society. He joined his father-in-law, Jacob Schiff, in reform work that emphasized assimilation and Americanization. In turn-of-the-century New York they sponsored the Henry Street Settlement and joined the Educational Alliance, an organization that catered to poor Jews. Felix also lobbied for greater accommodation in the school system for blind, mentally disabled, and delinquent students. His charitable work became “so diverse as to defy easy summary,” as Chernow asserts, but in 1914 two causes received special attention. First, he became active in international Jewish relief groups. In 1906 he joined Jacob Schiff in co-founding the American Jewish Committee, an organization dominated by affluent German-American Jews. He also became the chairman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), created in 1914 to

\(^{50}\) “Mr. Warburg Urges Government Bank,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1907; Chernow, 86-90; 130-40.
provide support for victims of the European war. His reputation as a German Jewish
“democratic aristocrat” helped the JDC to bridge class divides and animosities between
established and recently-arrived Jews. He increasingly devoted his time to the JDC, and
his stature as a philanthropist increased accordingly.51

Before 1917, Felix also established himself within the German-American
community. He became a member of the Chamber of German-American Commerce, the
German Society of New York, and the Germanistic Society, and maintained a
correspondence with George Sylvester Viereck. In 1915 he donated funds anonymously
to the Hilfsverein Deutscher Frauen (German Women’s Aid Organization) and other
groups that supported the “war sufferers” in Germany. As a partner at Kuhn, Loeb he
helped prevent the company from issuing a loan to the Allies in 1915, a decision that
brought scorn from pro-Allied elements of the American press and public. The
Warburgs’ position was likely motivated in part by a history of pogroms in Russia, but
their close connections to Germany seem to have been the main factor.52

Following American entry into the war in April 1917, Felix and Paul Warburg
joined many other German-Americans in fully supporting the U.S. war effort. Felix
devoted time and money to the USO, donated his own resources to the war effort, and
ostentatiously reduced his level of consumption. As a member of the Federal Reserve

51 Chernow, 86; 99-101; JDC Statement on Felix Warburg, January 1917, Box 168, Folder 16;
Viereck to Felix Warburg, December 23, 1916, Box 171, Folder 17, Felix Warburg papers, AJA.
52 Heinrich Charles to Felix Warburg, June 10, 1914, Box 165, Folder 1; Viereck to Warburg,
August 1, 1914, Box 166, Folder 1; Viereck to Warburg, December 6, 1916, Box 168, Folder 11;
Warburg to Mrs. Carl Schurz, October 21, 1915, and Mrs. Schurz to Warburg, October 23, 1915,
Box 166, Folder 22; J.P. Meyer to Warburg, January 28, 1916, Box 168, Folder 15; Franz Boas to
Members of Germanistic Society, November 15, 1920, Box 188, Folder 4; Viereck to Warburg,
September 8, 1932, and Warburg to Viereck, September 9, 1932, Box 278, Folder 5, Felix
Warburg Papers, AJA; Chernow, 168-9.
Board, Paul actively promoted Liberty Bonds. In 1918, however, both his opponents in Congress and populist newspapers tried to block his re-nomination by playing up his German ethnicity. To defuse the controversy, Paul reluctantly resigned from the Federal Reserve Board, while Viereck showcased him as the latest victim of anti-German hysteria. After the war he worked to restart American investment in Germany and tried in vain to broker a more friendly reparations settlement. Embittered by the treatment of ethnic Germans in the United States, he co-founded the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, dedicated to preserving German-American heritage. Felix, meanwhile, threw himself into the work of the Joint Distribution Committee. At the urging of British Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann in 1923 he added investment in Palestine to his already massive record of philanthropy. His contacts with the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation in the early 1930s show that he, like Paul, still valued American-German cultural relations. Paul died in January 1932, leaving Felix and other German-American Jews to combat National Socialism.³³

**Untermyer and the Boycott**

Immediately following Hitler’s accession to power in January 1933, Jewish organizations in America sought a proper response to a regime suffused with anti-Semitism. By March, a movement was underway to mount an economic boycott of Nazi Germany. In an overflowing New York meeting of the American Jewish Congress, the

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³³ Chernow, 181-2; 186-9; 220; 223-4; 246; 249-52; “Warburg a Victim of War Prejudice,” *American Weekly*, September 18, 1918. On the Warburgs’ connections to the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, see Guest List, May 8, 1933, Box 1, Folder 3; CSMF By-Laws, Box 1, Folder 10, NCSA; M. Habrich to Helene Wittmann, February 11, 1932, and Joseph Marks to Wilbur Thomas, July 27, 1932, Box 285, Folder 3, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
commander of the Jewish War Veterans formally proposed a boycott resolution. The divided Congress hesitated for several months, but the boycott movement gained momentum under the Jewish War Veterans. Leadership soon passed to organizations founded specifically to promote it, foremost among them the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights (ALJDR).  

The ALJDR made Untermyer its president in May 1933, and a month later he became honorary president of its National Boycott Committee. The organization believed that an American-born, affluent “German Jew” such as Untermyer would broaden its appeal. While Untermyer saw refugee aid as the Jewish community’s first priority, he considered the boycott movement a close second, and he now became its most visible advocate. His prominence extended beyond the United States when a federation of pro-boycott groups chose him to appeal their case before the League of Nations in the summer of 1933. He then served as president of the abortive World Jewish Economic Federation, an attempt to create a global umbrella organization to promote the boycott of German exports.  

Throughout 1933, the Jewish community remained divided on the issue of the boycott. Critics believed that economic action would only cause greater hardship for Jews within the Reich, a position that Untermyer rejected:  

[W]hen our persecuted, defenseless people are knocked over the head with a club, … these self-constituted leaders retaliate with a cry of pain and strike back by shaking a feather-duster in the faces of their tormentors, and pass eloquent

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resolutions of protest and appeal, but refuse to use the only effective weapon at hand, by way of defense.\textsuperscript{56}

Untermyer thus asserted that the boycott was not simply the most effective means of protest, but was in fact the \textit{only} means of protest. “There is no longer a free press or freedom of speech in Germany,” he explained. “If world opinion does not reach [the Germans], there is just one way, and only one.” Economic pressure would “reach the masses” and force a repudiation of Nazism.\textsuperscript{57}

Untermyer used his German background and perspective to lend credibility to the anti-Nazi movement in the United States. In a May 1933 speech, for example, Untermyer shared his thoughts on an “old friend,” Herman Metz, who represented the I.G. Farben corporation in the United States and who worked to improve the Nazis’ image abroad. Having talked privately with Metz, Untermyer assured the crowd that “Mr. Metz knows what he has seen with his own eyes in Germany.” Sadly, he said, Metz’s economic interest compelled him to defend the Nazi regime, rather than speak the truth. Citing his personal relationship with Metz thus provided Untermyer with a unique means of refuting pro-German propaganda in the United States. In addition, this view of Metz reinforced Untermyer’s assertions about the importance of economic pressure.\textsuperscript{58}

Untermyer’s position also reflected the changing self-definition among those Jews who had considered themselves Germans. He compared Nazi propaganda to “British-French war fables” in 1914, perhaps in an effort to reconcile his older pro-German

\textsuperscript{56} Untermyer, “The Boycott Is Our Only Weapon,” 21.
\textsuperscript{57} Untermyer Statement on the Boycott, September 18, 1933, Box 1, Folder 2, Untermyer Papers, AJA.
sentiments with the circumstances of the 1930s. “We … have learned our lesson in the ways of counteracting that kind of poison,” he declared. More importantly, Untermyer’s speeches reflected the deep sense of betrayal that he and other Jewish Germans felt in the face of National Socialism. He cited a long record of Jewish Germans’ military service, as well as the “everlasting glory and honor” that they had given Germany in culture, science, and business, only to be targeted by “the blind bigotry and fanaticism of the Hitler platform.”

Undoubtedly, many German-American Jews shared the sentiments of Untermyer, who continued to harbor “the strongest feeling of sympathy toward the German people” alongside a “corresponding feeling of revulsion” against the Nazis.

As an ethnic German, Untermyer was the ideal spokesperson for the ALDJR’s position that the German people were unhappy under Hitler and could be persuaded, through economic pressure, to remove him.

It is significant that Untermyer insisted on the boycott becoming more than a “Jewish” movement. He denied that the boycott was merely a product of Jewish anger, instead depicting it as “the spontaneous uprising of outraged civilization against [the] ‘Mad Dog of Europe.’” Indeed, the need for broad—especially Gentile—support convinced Untermyer to change the group’s name to the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights (NSANL) in November 1933.

The boycott followed a standard procedure. First, letters of inquiry and reports from individuals determined which firms continued to deal with Reich businesses.

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59 Untermyer, “The Boycott Is Our Only Weapon,” 13; 3-4; 5.
60 Quoted in Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 23.
61 Untermyer to George Gordon Battle, April 10, 1935, Box 1, Folder 2, Untermyer Papers, AJA; Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 38.
Second, Untermyer or another NSANL leader contacted offending businesses, asking them to participate in the non-importation of goods from Germany. Non-compliant businesses became subject to a boycott, and the NSANL’s *Economic Bulletin* publicized their names.\(^6^2\) The largest targets were department stores in New York. Jewish-owned firms like Sears, Roebuck and R.H. Macy continued to trade with German companies, as did the Christian-owned Woolworth’s. Although subject to blacklisting and picketing, Sears refused to adhere to boycotters’ demands until 1937. When it finally agreed in principle to reduce German imports in that year, the NSANL removed it from the boycott list. Similarly, Woolworth’s openly disregarded the boycott movement until February 1939, when it showed that it had virtually eliminated German imports.\(^6^3\) The difficulty in gaining compliance from these firms, especially those owned by Jews, was the greatest disappointment of the boycott effort.

While centered in New York, the movement spread to other municipalities as well. One of the most effective engines of expansion was the Jewish War Veterans, the earliest supporter of the boycott. Chapters of the JWV and their women’s auxiliaries provided existing networks through which to pressure department stores and other businesses. Similarly, although the American Jewish Congress had initially eschewed the boycott, it joined the effort in 1934, co-founding the Joint Boycott Council. Its women’s division played a central role in day-to-day operations, including the gathering and dissemination of information. Meanwhile, the NSANL was building an organizational


structure of its own. By 1937, its Inter-State Conference received delegates from Detroit, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other localities.64

The boycott movement constantly adapted to changing business and geopolitical realities. From the outset, the NSANL protested to department stores whose employees removed “Made in Germany” labels from sale items. It also worked to counteract deception by exporters within the Reich. When a German coal firm changed its name to the Colonial Fuel Corporation to obscure its nationality, the NSANL spread the word to avoid the brand. Similarly, some exporters began labeling products by their state of origin, assuming that American consumers would not expect Saxony, for example, to be a German state. In response, the boycotters began including lists of German states and regions in their mailings. Still other German businesses sent semi-finished products to neighboring countries for completion. The American consul general in Prague noted that German gloves moving through Czechoslovakia had doubled that country’s glove exports to the United States by 1935. Boycott organizations strove to identify and counter such moves, and they later disseminated warnings about Austrian and Czech labels after Germany annexed those countries in 1938 and 1939.65

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64 Minutes of Inter-State Conference of NSANL, March 7, 1937, Box 1, Folder 2, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA. On JWV auxiliaries, see Jewish War Veterans Message to Ladies’ Auxiliaries, September 10, 1937, Box 1, Folder 2; List of Auxiliaries That Did Not Respond to Boycott Questionnaire, Box 1, Folder 5, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA; Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 27-9; Rona Sheramy, “‘There Are Times When Silence Is a Sin’: The Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement,” American Jewish History, 89:1 (March 2001), 105-121.

65 Leon Alpert to Untermyer, December 28, 1933, Box 1, Folder 2; Untermyer to Vice President, Woolworth’s, September 20, 1933, Box 1, Folder 3; NSANL Memo, April 12, 1935, Box 1, Folder 1, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA; Leo Dominian to Cordell Hull, November 1, 1933, and ALDJR Pamphlet, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 3274, Folder 1, NARA; Correspondence between the Undersecretary of the Treasury and President Roosevelt, File 21t, Box 17, Papers as President, Official File, FDR; Orne Wilson to Hull, May 18, 1935, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box
Just as the boycott network conveyed information about violators, it was quick to spread the word about businesses that brought themselves into compliance. In response to Untermyer’s letter of inquiry in June 1934, the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company refuted the claim that it offered financial support to pro-Nazi organizations. Untermyer wrote to the company acknowledging its innocence, adding, “You may use this letter to any extent that you see fit.” A year later, the Research Department of the NSANL found that the Famous Red Ash Coal Company was not importing from Germany, as originally stated in the NSANL bulletin. It promptly circulated the correction to its members.\(^\text{66}\)

The anti-German boycott had its share of critics, among them American diplomats. William Dodd, the American ambassador to Germany until 1938, was strongly critical of the Nazis, yet he opposed the boycott. In August 1933 he claimed that persecutions would soon end. In the meantime, he said, the best course of action was to exert pressure through private conversations between diplomats and prominent figures on both sides of the Atlantic. The boycott would “defeat all the helps we apply quietly and unofficially,” while damaging “innocent American investors” who had funds in the Reich. Around the same time, Secretary of State Cordell Hull advised President Roosevelt to keep his distance from Untermyer so as to avoid any suggestion that the White House supported the boycott. Meanwhile, Hull took a neutral stance with the German ambassador, explaining that the State Department had no authority to stop the

\(^{3274}\) Folder 2, NARA. An example of concerns about German annexations is in the Jewish War Veterans Report, October 1938, Box 1, Folder 4, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA. Even after 1939, the NSANL did notify consumers that goods made in Czechoslovakia prior to the German occupation would not be subject to a boycott. “Czech Groups Act to Bar a Boycott,” \textit{New York Times}, March 22, 1939.

\(^{66}\) Correspondence between Untermyer and Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company, June 1934, Box 2, Folder 1, Untermyer Papers, AJA; Feller Report from Research Department, April 5, 1935, Box 1, Folder 1, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA.
boycott. He suggested that the German government could counter it more effectively by presenting evidence to refute allegations of mistreatment.67

This cautious diplomatic position pitted Untermyer against the Roosevelt administration in 1933. When Untermyer said that Hans Luther, the German Ambassador, was a propagandist disguised as a diplomat, Secretary Hull repudiated his statement. Untermyer fired back, accusing Hull of ignoring mounting evidence of German meddling within the United States. Evoking the memory of German propaganda in the 1910s—and omitting mention of his role therein—he called for a congressional investigation to expose similar actions by the Nazis.68

Other Americans also voiced their opposition to the boycott. Not surprisingly, German-American organizations like the Steuben Society and the German-American Citizens’ League passed resolutions condemning economic action against Nazi Germany. In addition, the president and the State Department received a flood of letters speaking out against the boycott. Their various arguments included anti-Semitic rants, defenses of business interests, invocations of antitrust laws, and fears that the boycott would harm the New Deal’s recovery effort. Still others joined the State Department in calling for moderation by private citizens. Pro-Nazi groups took the most aggressive tack, organizing counter-boycotts of NSANL members and their allies. The most famous effort was the Deutsch-Amerikanischer Wirtschafts-Ausschuss (DAWA), initiated by the

67 William Dodd to Stephen Wise, August 1, 1933, Box 43, Folder 7; Dodd to Leo Wormser, September 26, 1933, Box 43, Folder 6, Dodd Papers, LOC; Ezekiel Rabinowitz to President Roosevelt, September 2, 1933, and Hull to Louis Howe, September 6, 1933, File 198-a, Box 2, Papers as President, Official File, FDR; Memo of Conversation between Cordell Hull and Rudolf Leitner, September 14, 1933, and Memo of Conversation between Cordell Hull and Hans Luther, September 21, 1933, Box 58, Microfilm Reel 29, Cordell Hull Papers, LOC.
Nazi-dominated United German Societies in New York, but counter-boycott groups arose throughout the country.69

There were also divisions among Jewish organizations and within the NSANL itself. Untermyer seems to have taken personally the initial reluctance of the American Jewish Congress to join the NSANL, and as a result he refused to coordinate boycott efforts with it in 1934. For their part, the Congress and other groups refused to surrender their autonomy, as Untermyer seemed to require in exchange for collaboration. Consequently, the Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee formed the Joint Boycott Council independently of the NSANL, and the two never united. Conflicts of personality and strategy fueled the rivalry, as when the Joint Boycott Council lambasted Untermyer for removing Sears from the NSANL blacklist without evidence. Even within his own organization, Untermyer alienated colleagues through his autocratic style. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, vice president of the NSANL, resented Untermyer’s making major decisions without including other officers. While he remained in the organization, he steadily reduced his participation in the mid-1930s.70

Criticism also came from Jewish groups that opposed the boycott movement. The American Jewish Committee, which had a reputation for being elitist—or “German,” in the derogatory sense described by Brinkmann—resented that Untermyer and his allies created the boycott without consulting them. It subsequently joined B’nai B’rith in rejecting the boycott strategy, favoring a more subtle response to National Socialism. It feared that open protest abroad, including the boycott, would result in further persecution

69 See the letters and resolutions in RG 59, Series 1930-1939, File 611.6212, Box 3274, NARA; Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 42.
of German Jews and stoke anti-Semitism throughout the world. Like the State Department, the Committee called for private conversations between prominent Americans and their contacts in the Reich, hoping that such pressure would mitigate German policies. Untermyer berated the Committee and B’nai B’rith for their lack of courage and called on their individual members to join the boycott. In turn, the Committee publicly attacked Untermyer when he criticized Secretary of State Hull.\textsuperscript{71}

Untermyer abandoned his efforts in 1937, as his health began to fail. In his last major public address in December, he wondered why “Americans generally have been so indolent, callous and short-sighted as to have failed … when they have within easy reach the means of self-protection for themselves and their brethren in Germany.” He officially resigned as president of the NSANL in April 1938, and subsequently became critical of its inefficiency and poor leadership. The fact that he fought to remove his name from NSANL letterhead is a testament to both his prestige within the boycott movement and his alienation from it. Ironically, increasing evidence of oppression in the Reich gave the boycott new public support and generated momentum that reduced the need for boycott organizations. In December 1938, in the wake of \textit{Kristallnacht}, Gallup polls found that ninety-four percent of Americans disapproved of Germany’s treatment of the Jews, and sixty-one percent supported a boycott in principle.\textsuperscript{72} But even then not all Jewish-

\textsuperscript{71} Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 25-6; Memo, “Counter Boycott Propaganda,” Box 286, Folder 8; Statement, “Shall the Jews Engage in an Official Boycott against Germany?”, Box 287, Folder 1, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; Untermyer to Samuel Dickstein, May 3, 1934, Box 5, Folder 6, Samuel Dickstein Papers, AJA.

\textsuperscript{72} Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 49-50; B. Dubovsky to E.W. Russell, April 27, 1938, Box 1, Folder 2; E.W. Russell to NSANL, April 28, 1938, Box 1, Folder 2; Boris Erich Nelson to Untermyer, May 14, 1938, Box 1, Folder 2; Untermyer to Abba Hillel Silver, May 15, 1938, Box 1, Folder 3; Dubovsky to Untermyer, May 13, 1939, and Untermyer to Dubovsky, May 11, 1939, Box 1, Folder 3, Untermyer Papers, AJA. In fact, the unauthorized use of his name continued
Americans supported the effort. In Philadelphia, a boycott leader lamented the absence of German-American Jews from rallies and noted that Christian shopkeepers were more likely to support the boycott than were Jewish owners. Similarly, the Jewish War Veterans noted the problem of German-Jewish refugee doctors who continued to import drugs from the Reich.\(^73\) The boycott campaign also failed to win over some of the most important members of the German Jewish elite, as the case of the Warburgs makes clear.

### The Warburgs and Saving German Jews

As Chernow explains, Felix Warburg and his associates were pivotal members of the traditional “German Jewish” philanthropic elite. The organization that best represented people like Warburg was the American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906 to aid victims of Russian pogroms. For the affluent leaders of the Committee and other organizations, philanthropy had long provided a means of controlling Jewish communities and Americanizing newcomers. The Committee was so intent—and so effective—in steering Jewish community life that Naomi Cohen has described it as a “self-perpetuating oligarchy.”\(^74\) Rejecting what it saw as the brazen activism of the

\(^{73}\) Hawkins, “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe,” 27; Edgar Burman and Bertha Corets to Members, April 22, 1938, Box 1, Folder 3, Bertha Corets Papers, AJA.

boycott leaders, Warburg and his fellow Committee members favored subtler responses to National Socialism. They rejected open confrontation and did not hesitate to criticize Untermyer’s public statements. At the same time, however, avoiding direct action brought criticism of the Committee and jeopardized Warburg’s reputation as a “democratic aristocrat.”

Felix Warburg had long favored assimilation but still retained an affinity for his country of origin. As a result of Nazism, he became ambivalent about German-American cultural life. An illustration is his relationship to the German Society of New York, a charitable organization founded in 1784. In addition to Warburg, its membership rolls included Theodore Hoffmann, president of the nationalistic Steuben Society, and the Ridder brothers, owners of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*. When the Society invited Warburg to serve on its 150th Anniversary Committee in 1934, he declined, saying that he could not “join a committee on which I may meet some people whose attitude toward the present German Government may be more favorable than mine.” He did, however, maintain his membership.75

Warburg’s ambivalence arose, in part, from his desire not to draw attention to himself or his relatives in Europe. His brother Max, after all, was trying to maintain both his banking firm and his physical well being within the Reich. As a result, Felix personally refused to comment on reports of anti-Jewish violence in the spring of 1933. In April, when Reichsbank president Hjalmar Schacht came to the U.S., the Committee

75 Annual Reports of the German Society of New York, Horner Library, German Society of Pennsylvania; J.P. Meyer to Felix Warburg, October 5, 1934; Warburg to Meyer, October 8, 1934; German Society of New York to Warburg, January 25, 1934, Box 295, Folder 8, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
asked Felix whether they should meet with him. Felix’s secretary replied that the Committee should do so, but that Felix could not be involved and could make neither “friendly overtures” nor “show an unfriendly attitude.” Furthermore, his name was to be kept out of any communication. A few years later Felix sponsored refugee professors through the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Scholars, but only with the understanding that his name never appear in its records.\footnote{Julius Meier to Warburg, March 25, 1933, Box 286, Folder 3; James Rosenberg to Meier, March 26, 1933, Box 286, Folder 3; American Jewish Committee Memo, April 28, 1933, Box 286, Folder 6; Memo of Conversation between Miss Emanuel and William Rosenwald, May 21, 1936, Box 321, Folder 7; John Whyte to Miss Emanuel, December 5, 1936, Box 321, Folder 7, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.}

Almost as soon as the boycott movement began, Warburg and the American Jewish Committee decided to oppose it. There is evidence that Felix initially considered lending his support. He did not believe that actions in the United States would in any way change the rhetoric or deeds of the Nazis, who had consistently spelled out their intentions. He also mused that the German people might change their tone if “their pocketbooks [were] attacked by their own foolishness.” Observing the situation from Germany, where any Nazi retaliation over the boycott would actually occur, Max disagreed. His impassioned pleas against confrontation helped to convince Felix and the other officers of the American Jewish Committee to withhold support for a boycott. Not surprisingly, the Joint Distribution Committee, of which Felix was president, also decided against the boycott. Comparing itself to the Red Cross, it cited a need to remain apolitical in its mission of providing humanitarian aid. In effect, the American Jewish
Committee, the JDC, and B’nai B’rith became the leading organizations that provided relief while opposing, or at least avoiding, the boycott movement.\footnote{Warburg to Hans Meyer, April 3, 1933, Box 285, Folder 14, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; Chernow 372-3; Warburg to Louis Rittenberg, August 8, 1933, Box 288, Folder 8; Joseph Proskauer to Committee on Policy, May 22, 1933, and Warburg to Proskauer, May 24, 1933, Box 287, Folder 2, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; “$2,000,000 Sought to Aid Reich Jews,” \textit{New York Times}, May 20, 1933; B’nai B’rith reversed course in 1937, however, and thereafter supported the boycott. Gottlieb, 341.}

The American Jewish Committee enumerated its arguments against the boycott in August 1933. The committee feared that economic action would provide a pretext for intensified persecution. In addition to questioning a boycott’s legality, it also feared alienating Christians, antagonizing German-Americans, inviting a counter-boycott, and fueling global anti-Semitism. Instead, the Committee favored using personal contacts to exert pressure on prominent officials and citizens within Nazi Germany. One memo even suggested that, in private conversations, Committee members cite the boycott as evidence that the Nazis should mitigate their policies. In this way, it noted, even the reckless boycott movement “may be utilized for a good purpose.”\footnote{Statement, “Shall The Jews Engage in an Official Boycott Against Germany?”, August 17, 1933, Box 287, Folder 1; Memo, “Counter Boycott Propaganda,” Box 286, Folder 8, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.}

Felix Warburg’s position on the boycott created new tensions in his hot-and-cold relationship with Samuel Untermyer. Years earlier, Untermyer had antagonized the Warburg family by targeting Kuhn, Loeb as part of an investigation of an alleged “Money Trust.” Subsequently, he and Felix had found common ground as non-Zionists working for the cultural support of Jews in Palestine. Warburg joined the Keren Hayesod, for example, and Untermyer supported the Joint Distribution Committee. In the 1930s, however, they split once again. Untermyer undoubtedly would have listed
Warburg among those “self-constituted leaders” whom he accused of inaction. He responded negatively to the Joint Distribution Committee’s fundraising appeal in November 1933, citing the JDC’s refusal to support his boycott efforts.\(^7\)

Differences over the boycott also aggravated an ongoing feud between the American Jewish Committee and the larger, more outspoken American Jewish Congress. Founded in 1918, the Congress offered a more democratic alternative to what it saw as the “aristocratic” leadership and structure of the Committee.\(^8\) The Committee argued that the rapidly growing Congress, originally convened to make an appeal to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, was never intended to be a permanent organization. The Committee resented being left out of a decision to convene a World Jewish Congress in 1932, a move that it said “responsible Jewish organizations” opposed. As Warburg wrote to the Congress, a world meeting would only “give [anti-Semites] more of what they call ‘proof of the nefarious international machinery of the Jews.’” The Congress accused opponents like Warburg of being “governed by a great fear.”\(^9\)

Rabbi Stephen Wise, the honorary president of the Congress, lashed out at the Committee, often targeting Warburg in particular. He lambasted “assimilationists” and “philanthropoids” \(^[sic]\) for their timidity and their “autocratic” views of Jewish organizational life. The attacks reflected the class tensions that accompanied the growing

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\(^7\) Hawkins, “Zionist Project,” 121; 132; 134-6; 141; Untermyer to Jonah Wise, November 24, 1933, Box 291, Folder 11, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.


\(^9\) Morris Waldman to American Jewish Committee, July 8, 1932, Box 278, Folder 9; Cyrus Adler Statement, June 14, 1932, Box 278, Folder 9; Warburg to Abraham Cohn, July 28, 1932, and Cohn to Warburg, Box 279, Folder 1, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
rejection of elite “German Jewish” leadership. “It has made a terrible impression upon America,” Wise wrote, “the seeming willingness of Jews to make every sacrifice of honor and decency in order to save the well-to-do Jews of Germany, whose exodus would leave the poor Jews poorer still.” In making this charge, Wise suggested that Warburg’s balancing act was a betrayal of the larger Jewish community. Although Wise’s American Jewish Congress was initially hesitant to join the boycott, it did so after May 1933, giving Wise further grounds for attacking the rival Committee.82

Paradoxically, at the same time that the Warburgs were becoming scapegoats of Nazi propagandists, they also came under fire in the United States for being appeasers of Hitler.83 One rumor stemmed from the fact that James Warburg, the son of the late Paul, became an advisor on monetary policy to the Roosevelt administration. His position, combined with his and Felix’s public reticence, spurred a belief that the Warburgs kept Roosevelt from criticizing Nazi Germany in 1933. Rabbi Wise actively spread the rumor, which confirmed his longstanding views on the family. After mainstream sources like the New Republic and columnist Walter Winchell picked up the story, The Day, a Jewish newspaper, demanded an explanation from Felix Warburg. He issued a press release in August 1933 calling the story “a lie from beginning to end.” While no evidence definitively proves or refutes the allegation, Chernow points out that James Warburg was taking cues from his German relatives in 1933. At that time, they downplayed persecution stories and held out hope for a softening of the German

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83 For examples of Nazi propaganda regarding the Warburgs, see Chernow, 181; 391; 407.
government’s views. In the end, it is less important to know whether Felix and James Warburg actually counseled Roosevelt than to acknowledge their aversion to confrontation and the criticism that they received as a result.  

Warburg’s rejection of public protest did not mean that he opposed any action on behalf of German Jews or that he acted only in his family’s economic interest. After hearing one account of persecution in April 1933, he declared:

I am sufficiently enraged, and so are all German Americans, even the Christian ones, … to take some drastic steps, unfriendly to Germany and seemingly unfriendly to M.M. [Warburg], in order to get [the Jews] out of the undignified position in which they find themselves.

Felix proposed that his relatives leave Germany, even if it meant liquidating the Hamburg banking house. But Max rejected his brother’s advice. Throughout the mid-1930s he continued to underestimate the Nazis’ intentions. Moreover, he had taken on a number of leadership positions in groups aimed at protecting Jewish institutions in Germany. He chaired the Hilfsverein für deutsche Juden (Aid Society for German Jews) and co-founded the Zentralausschuss (Central Committee for Help and Reconstruction) and Reichsvertretung (Reich Representation of German Jews). These groups organized mutual aid and sponsored resettlement in Palestine and elsewhere. The Reichsvertretung even tried—with minimal success—to lobby German officials on behalf of Jewish communities.

By remaining in the Reich, Max drew further attacks from American critics who spoke of a special relationship between M.M. Warburg and the German government.

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84 Chernow, 387-8; Statement by Felix Warburg, August 9, 1933, Box 285, Folder 14, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
85 Warburg to Hans Meyer, April 3, 1933 and April 11, 1933, Box 285, Folder 14, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; Chernow, 402-3.
Protected by Reichsbank president Hjalmar Schacht, who valued their expertise, Max Warburg and his associates continued to operate for a few years after 1933. Max assured Felix that everything was under control, even as he began to lose his positions on other companies’ boards. In America, Felix had to refute charges that his relatives were “honorary Aryans” in the Reich, and even that they had bankrolled the early Nazi movement. In response to those accusations he asserted that the “sword of Damocles” hung just above the heads of the German Warburgs and that Max was acting selflessly by continuing to work in Hamburg: “he feels that so long as he has some sort of contact with such people as [Hjalmar] Schacht, he owes it to his co-religionists … to get some relief for the people who cannot leave and cannot get their funds out.” Even Samuel Untermyer acknowledged the precarious position of the Warburgs. “I suppose we shall continue to differ as to the policy of the boycott,” he wrote Felix in 1935, “but your position and that of your people in Germany is quite understandable.”

Felix actively supported his brother’s efforts to preserve Reich Jews’ communities and institutions. The Joint Distribution Committee, which Felix headed, raised money to that end. The JDC’s fundraising chairman described its goals as “maintaining [Reich Jews’] institutions, keeping up their morale and preventing them from falling into panic.” In practice, this meant subsidizing Jewish welfare organizations and, increasingly, sponsoring emigration. The fundraising chairman’s philosophy could only have irritated boycott activists like Stephen Wise and Untermyer: “The situation involves such injustice that one would expect the whole world to rise and protest. Until that time comes, it is the

86 Chernow, 374-9; 471; 474; Joseph Karp to Warburg, February 26, 1934, and Warburg to Karp, February 27, 1934, Box 295, Folder 3, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA; Correspondence between Untermyer and Warburg, June 1935, Box 307, Folder 10, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
duty of every Jew to protect, if he cannot protest.” With Felix as one of its fundraisers, the JDC raised over a million dollars in 1933 alone, and the annual total more than doubled within a few years.\textsuperscript{87} At the same time, the brothers worked to keep organizational resources out of the Nazis’ reach. For example, in 1933 Felix guaranteed a loan that enabled the Keren Hayesod—the Palestine settlement organization once headed by Untermyer—to move all of its assets from Germany. Protecting their family’s own cultural treasures, the Warburg brothers also worked to have the Warburg Library shipped from Hamburg to London for safekeeping.\textsuperscript{88}

As persecution increased in Germany, Felix made it a priority to get Jews out of the Reich. In March 1934 he chaired the new United Jewish Appeal, which merged the refugee aid efforts of the Joint Distribution Committee and the American Palestine Campaign, led by Zionists. Over the next two years the organization raised over four million dollars for refugee aid, an impressive total despite the fact that its goal had exceeded six million. In July 1935 Felix founded the Refugee Economic Corporation to work alongside the League of Nations High Commission for German Refugees. Six months later he and Max convened an Anglo-American group, the Council for German Jewry, which pledged to relocate 100,000 German Jewish youth and provide them with vocational training. They supported a controversial plan to rescue well-to-do Jews by

\textsuperscript{87} Program of Westchester Concert, September 28, 1933, Box 291, Folder 10; Jonah Wise Fundraising Letter and Summary of Central Relief Committee Work, November 23, 1933, and Form Letter, July 28, 1933, Box 291, Folder 11, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.

\textsuperscript{88} Felix Warburg to Keren Hayesod, September 29, 1932, Box 283, Folder 5; Warburg to Kuhn, Loeb, March 4, 1933, Box 286, Folder 1; Joseph Marks to James Rosenberg, November 11, 1933, Box 286, Folder 1; J.C. Hyman to Miss A.R. Emanuel, July 20, 1933, Box 286, Folder 1, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA. The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation aided with the relocation of the Warburg Library. M. Habrich to Helene Wittmann, February 11, 1932, Box 285, Folder 3; Joseph Marks to Wilbur Thomas, July 27, 1932, Box 285, Folder 3, Felix Warburg Papers, AJA.
giving economic incentives to the Reich. It never got off the ground, as its many critics saw it as a way to rob Jewish refugees and enrich Nazi Germany. The Council did, however, help other organizations to sponsor exiles.⁹⁹

The Warburgs’ activities fit within a broader campaign to save German Jews and their culture from the Nazis. This effort transcended the many divisions among American Jewish societies. Despite his earlier refusals to help the Joint Distribution Committee, Samuel Untermyer donated generously to it in 1938, although he stipulated that his money be spent on refugee aid, not within the Reich. The JDC, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress all collaborated in bringing children to the United States and providing them with vocational training. The Women’s Division of the Congress, which dedicated itself largely to sustaining the boycott, also became active in aiding exiles in the United States. By 1939 it operated three buildings in New York City dedicated to housing newcomers. In New York, the German-Jewish Club printed the Aufbau, a bilingual magazine aimed at welcoming and Americanizing the new wave of immigrants.⁹⁰

The refugee aid effort also committed itself to saving Reform Judaism, whose founding institutions lay inside the Reich. American congregations that had received leadership and inspiration from German “Liberal Judaism” now came to the aid of their coreligionists. Both the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of


⁹⁰ Untermyer to Paul Baerwald, November 18, 1938, Box 2, Folder 1, Untermyer Papers, AJA; “250 Reich Children To Be Brought Here,” New York Times, September 7, 1934; Sheramy, 109; “Unser Club als Gastgeber,” Aufbau, March 1, 1935. See also the Aufbau’s masthead.
American Hebrew Congregations lobbied the U.S. government to loosen immigration restrictions to aid German exiles. While this effort failed, the organizations also gave funds to congregations willing to hire European rabbis, a move that eased the immigration process in individual cases. Hebrew Union College, a Reform institution in Cincinnati, took in seminarians from Berlin and employed eleven refugee scholars. Such efforts enabled Reform Judaism to find a new home in the United States.91

Because the United States could not—or would not—absorb all of the German refugees, the central question became where to send them. For Felix and the Joint Distribution Committee, the answer was simple: anywhere. The JDC looked in part to its decade-old program to settle Jews on a large plot in the Soviet Union, although that effort ended in failure—and violent expropriation—in the late 1930s. Working with the League of Nations High Commission for German Refugees, the JDC lobbied countries throughout the Western Hemisphere to open their borders and loosen immigration quotas, with little success. In the end, the most obvious answer, Palestine, was a divisive one. In America, the prospect of a Jewish home in Palestine had generally appealed to poorer and recently arrived Jews. For wealthy “German Jews” who had established themselves in American society, a home in Palestine was unnecessary, and endorsing Zionism would only bring questions of loyalty. Furthermore, Zionist groups were rivals to the leadership of philanthropists like the Warburgs and the American Jewish Committee.92

In the early 1920s, World Zionist Organization leader Chaim Weizmann had recognized that winning over American philanthropists would bring unprecedented levels of support to Palestinian settlements. He had targeted Felix Warburg, eventually persuading the latter to join him on a trip to Palestine in 1923. The tactic worked. Warburg became a passionate supporter of cultural efforts in Palestine, but he eschewed political Zionism, which he considered antithetical to his own assimilationist views. Ever a believer in the power of philanthropy, Warburg thought that generous investment might smooth Arab-Jewish relations and pave the way for peaceful coexistence. One of his favorite projects was Hebrew University, to which he and his wife, Frieda, donated approximately a million dollars between 1925 and 1935. Meanwhile, within the United States his support made it possible to include both Zionists and non-Zionists in umbrella organizations like the United Jewish Appeal.\(^{93}\)

Over time, however, ideological differences destroyed the tenuous alliance. Indeed, Felix Warburg spent the last months of his life embroiled in debates about the political future of Palestine. For one thing, he resented the steady increase in the number of Zionists on the board of his beloved Hebrew University. In addition, the Jewish Agency for Palestine had been founded with the understanding that Zionists and non-Zionists would receive equal representation, but over time the former gained in influence. Finally, by 1935 Felix was alarmed at the increasing Jewish-Arab tensions as a result of rapid Jewish immigration. As the unofficial leader of the non-Zionists, he continued to

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plead for a solution equitable to Jews and Arabs alike, at the same time that Hitler’s actions bolstered demand for a Jewish state. In 1937 Felix backed a British proposal for a joint Arab-Jewish legislative council, while Weizmann and the Zionists increasingly favored a partition. Felix traveled to Zurich in August to plead his case to the Jewish Agency Council, but the Zionist momentum was too great. The meeting left the Zionists in control and the plans for compromise in tatters. As Chernow says, Felix’s defeat—and his death in October 1937—symbolized the transfer of Jewish philanthropy from the hands of the “German Jewish” elite to broad-based bureaucratic organizations. The shift impacted not only Palestine but also leadership of American Jewish communities. Still, even Warburg’s critics acknowledged the role he had played. Samuel Untermyer reflected that he “could always be counted on” in charitable causes.94

In Felix’s absence, the American Jewish Committee carried on much as he would have, openly opposing the partitioning of Palestine, for instance. As for the Joint Distribution Committee, it was not without Warburg leadership for long. A few months after Kristallnacht, Max Warburg finally admitted defeat and emigrated to the United States, where he received a position on the JDC’s executive committee. He also worked closely with the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation to identify refugee scholars in need of aid, and he stressed the need to show the world “how many Germans … worked for honest democracy.” Felix’s son, Eddie, co-chaired the JDC in 1939 and served intermittently as its chairman from 1941 to 1965. As with many other American Jews,

the brutality of Nazism ultimately convinced him of need for a Jewish state. Two years after his father’s death, he reunited the JDC with the Zionists through the United Jewish Appeal, which continued to provide Palestinian aid after the creation of Israel in 1948.⁹⁵

The Second World War gave the next generation of Warburgs new opportunities to combat Nazism. James, Paul’s son, joined the staff of the Office of War Information in 1942. He spent time in London and North Africa, where he helped set propaganda policies until 1944.⁹⁶ Felix’s son Eddie took time away from chairmanship of the Joint Distribution Committee, enlisting in the Army and arriving in Normandy shortly after the Allied invasion. In 1944, he restarted the JDC’s European operations from its old headquarters in liberated Paris.⁹⁷ The most ironic wartime story was that of Eric Warburg, Max’s son, who had fled Hamburg in 1938. Having volunteered for the Prussian Field Artillery Regiment in 1918, Eric enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force in 1942, making his way into intelligence work. He interrogated captured German officers, including Reichsmarshall Hermann Göring, who had Aryanized the M.M. Warburg banking firm in the late 1930s. While in Europe, Eric also acquired a permanent home for the family library in London; he helped to collect German scientists rather than allow their capture by the Soviets; and he ultimately decided to return to Hamburg and regain

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⁹⁵ “Jews See Crisis for All Mankind,” New York Times, January 17, 1938; “Jewish Committee to Shun Plebiscite,” June 2, 1938; Chernow, 512; 602; Max Warburg to Wilbur Thomas, September 14, 1944, Box 41, Folder 11, NCSA.

⁹⁶ James had become estranged from Franklin Roosevelt over monetary policy but the two reconciled as foreign policy moved to the fore in the late 1930s. Before working for the OWI, James spent several months as an assistant to William J. Donovan on the staff of the Coordinator of Information, the precursor to the Office of Strategic Services. “James Warburg, A Financier and Writer on U.S. Policy, Dies,” New York Times, June 4, 1969; Chernow, 391-2; 394-7; 520-1.

his partnership at M.M. Warburg. Their fathers’ desire to save non-Nazi Germany survived among the three cousins, all of whom lobbied against a harsh peace settlement.

Conclusion

A vast literature exists—both apologetic and condemnatory—on the failure of American Jews to oppose Nazism effectively. A study by Gulie Ne’Eman Arad has specifically noted the ambivalence of Jewish German-Americans, who misunderstood the threat of Nazism. According to Arad, their position was a mixture of ongoing affinity for the German nation and people, with whom they had long identified, and a view of the Jewish people as “eternal,” able to withstand yet another anti-Semitic regime. There is much in the stories of Untermyer and the Warburgs to support this assertion. Their affinity for Germany, as demonstrated by their actions during and after the First World War, informed their reactions to Nazism. The American-born Untermyer based his advocacy of a boycott on the belief that economic pressure would spur the German nation to topple the Hitler regime. The Warburgs, born in Germany and observing conditions

98 Chernow, 192; 522; 539; 525-8; 589.
101 Arad, 109-111; 122-3.
first- and secondhand, pursued pragmatic goals of protecting German Jews by defusing tensions and, later, by trying to move them out of harm’s way until the threat passed. That Max Warburg refused to leave Germany until 1939 is evidence of his belief that he could offset, and possibly even outlast, Nazism. Over time, events proved both Samuel Untermyer and Max Warburg horribly wrong.

One can argue that, in the 1930s and 1940s, an inverse relationship existed between Jewish Americans’ view of Nazism as survivable and their desires for a place to resettle persecuted Jews. In other words, Nazi persecution provided a considerable boost to the Zionist movement in American Jewish communities. Membership in the Zionist Organization of America rose from 18,000 in 1929 to 136,000 in 1945. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations shifted to support a Jewish state over the course of the 1930s, as did Julian Morgenstern, the president of Hebrew Union College. As chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, Eddie Warburg went against the long-held non-Zionism of his father, Felix. Even the American Jewish Committee, a stronghold of non-Zionism, found its position progressively less tenable. When the state of Israel came into being in 1948, the Committee swung to a position of enthusiastic support.102

Just as Nazism forced a reassessment of ethnic nationalism and boosted Zionism, so too did it discredit traditional “German” leadership styles within American Jewish organizations. Felix Warburg failed to acknowledge the limits of elite power in protecting Reich Jews, effecting peace in Palestine, and unifying a diverse Jewish

community. Furthermore, quiet negotiations made little headway against inaction and
anti-Semitism within the U.S. government, which remained unresponsive to the plight of
German refugees. By the end of the Second World War, broad-based organizing by
Zionist groups established a louder and more credible voice, supplanting the “German
Jewish” style of philanthropic leadership. ¹⁰³

One cannot, however, dismiss elite American Jews’ efforts as total failures simply
because they misjudged the strength of Nazism. Studies of the boycott, such as that by
Moshe Gottlieb, cite Nazi leaders’ own statements to show that the boycott did hurt
Germany’s international trade and arguably curbed some aspects of anti-Jewish
persecution. He adds that damaging the Reich economy was but one goal of the boycott,
noting that it severed symbolic ties, made a unified stand in the name of democracy, and
helped to wrest Jewish-American leadership away from cautious elites in the American
Jewish Committee. Furthermore, as Richard Hawkins argues, Untermeyer failed to secure
better treatment of Reich Jews, but his publicizing of violence in Germany damaged
U.S.-German relations and exacerbated a diplomatic problem for the Nazis. ¹⁰⁴ Finally,
as will be seen in later chapters, participation in the boycott movement gave credibility to
anti-Nazi German-American organizations in the United States.

Nor can one entirely dismiss the less confrontational activities undertaken by
figures like Felix Warburg. As the New York Times said upon his death, he provided “a
bridge between divergent views.” As a non-Zionist he broadened the ideological range of

¹⁰³ Rafael Medoff, “‘Our Leaders Cannot Be Moved’: A Zionist Emissary’s Reports on American
Jewish Responses to the Holocaust in the Summer of 1943,” American Jewish History 88:1
(March 2000), 15-127.
support for refugee relief efforts and Palestine aid, just as Samuel Untermyer did for the boycott. In addition, his leadership of the Joint Distribution Committee yielded quantifiable results. In 1934 the United Appeal funded the repatriation of 17,000 Germans. In 1935 it gave nearly $1 million to relief efforts within the Reich and spent approximately the same amount on resettlement. That same year it boasted of providing direct aid to 20,000 Jewish children in the Reich and vocational training to another 13,000. Donations for refugee relief increased every year under Felix’s leadership, reaching $2,374,062 in 1936. Felix’s own timidity and naïveté have rightly brought criticism, but none could deny the impact of a man who, along with his wife, personally donated over $13 million to charity. This record stands among wider efforts to save German Jewish culture—and people—from destruction.

The subjects of this chapter are only a small representation of German-American Jews, who are only a small representation of German-Americans. Subsequent chapters will reveal commonalities between ethnic German Jews and Gentiles in the United States. As with Untermyer and the Warburgs, other prominent German-Americans sought new leadership roles and forms of activism in response to Nazism. Similar rivalries and divisions ran through Gentile German America, as did crises of identity, and the controversies of the 1930s and 1940s were equally problematic. Depending on their predicaments, their “German-ness” blended into identifications of “whiteness,” ostentatious American-ness, and, in some cases, just business.

CHAPTER 2:
“HITLER OR CHAOS”: GEORGE SYLVESTER VIERECK
AND ETHNIC CHAUVINISM

In the early twentieth century, many German-American Gentiles expressed an ethnic nationalism parallel to that of Jewish leaders like Samuel Untermyer and Felix Warburg. But when Untermyer and Warburg reevaluated their stances toward Germany in 1933, some ethnic Germans persisted in the older form of nationalism, believing that Nazism could positively impact Germans outside the Reich. Perhaps the most notorious example was George Sylvester Viereck. Born in 1884 to a German father and an American-born mother, he emigrated to New York at age thirteen. As a young man he attracted some notoriety as a poet, and his dabbling in journalism put him in contact with a number of prominent figures in the United States. Highly self-absorbed, the young immigrant considered himself a cultural bridge between America and Germany. “Let two continents wrestle for me,” he wrote in 1910. His advocacy for his country of origin led to infamy when he acted as a paid propagandist for Germany in both world wars. By the 1940s this work left him not only friendless but in federal prison. He became the foremost symbol of German-American disloyalty.106

106 There have been a few detailed biographies on George Sylvester Viereck. See Elmer Gertz, Odyssey of a Barbarian: The Biography of George Sylvester Viereck (New York: Prometheus Books, 1978); Niel Johnson, George Sylvester Viereck: German-American Propagandist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); Phyllis Keller, “George Sylvester Viereck: The Psychology of a German-American Militant,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2:1 (Summer
One can best understand Viereck’s propaganda work within the context of his larger effort to advance German America. A man who eventually defended even some of the most authoritarian policies of Nazi Germany had begun his career advocating what historian Roger Smith has termed a “left-progressivism” based on ethnic pluralism. What unified these starkly different positions was a desire to protect German culture from a perceived Anglo mainstream. So aggressive was Viereck in this cause that Frederick Luebke has characterized his stance as not simply ethnic nationalism, but ethnic chauvinism. Having previously hailed diversity as crucial to democratic traditions, in the 1930s Viereck spoke derisively of democracy and alienated liberal associates in his stubborn defenses of Nazism. This chapter will follow Viereck’s intellectual trajectory, connecting his domestic and foreign policy agendas. To the young Viereck, left-progressivism was an attractive way to defend German America in the early twentieth century, while the “New Germany” became a more attractive means for revitalization after 1930. Ironically, his strategies—especially his identification with the “New Germany” under Hitler—alienated him from the very groups he sought to revive.

108 Frederick Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies Between the World Wars,” in Luebke, ed., Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 53. Luebke’s division of German America into chauvinists like Viereck and ethnic publishers who preferred “covert” strategies is oversimplified. It fails, for example, to account for the Steuben Society, which fell somewhere between the two. Luebke, 60.
**The fight against British “Reconquest”**

The young George Sylvester Viereck’s writings revealed a desire to protect German America from Anglo culture. In *Confessions of a Barbarian*, published in 1910, he even asserted that Americans were actually “a Germanic, not an Anglo-Saxon people.” He cited America’s history: the Norsemen arrived before Columbus, the Pennsylvania Dutch played a key role in the war for independence, and the end of slavery “must also, at least in part, be credited to the Germans.” This level of achievement continued to the present, he wrote, when Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft signified the continuing strength of the “liberal Teutonic spirit.” Viereck dismissed the relative decline of German immigration because “the German influence by far surpasses the German influx.” America was so Germanic, in fact, that it re-Germanized the Anglo-Saxon: “The Englishman is … only a German with a Norman veneer. In America the veneer drops off.”

How, then, could he explain the seeming decline of German culture in the United States? According to Viereck, pro-British elements corrupted American history. His subsequent writings elucidated the point. He described the Anglo-American position as “one of contempt for the Germans as human beings and of disparagement of German achievement in the arts and sciences.” Since long before the First World War, “the Anglo-American … has been overwhelmed with so persistent and so brilliant a

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109 In many ways, Viereck’s views reflected Anglophobic currents in Germany itself, such as contrasting German Romanticism and personal liberty with English materialism. Viereck added several distinctly American components, however. See Matthew Stibbe, *German Anglophobia and the Great War, 1914-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72-79.
propaganda that his misinformation is perfectly natural." More disturbing was the fact that such a bias had been instilled in schoolchildren through Anglophobic textbooks. Viereck cited the American Revolution as an example:

British propaganda, injected into American histories, depicts George III as a “German” tyrant and strives to create the impression that the majority of the English people were in sympathy with the American colonists. Devastating silence is the lot of De Kalb and von Steuben in pro-British histories. They make such ado about the Hessians sold by their princeling to the British, while ignoring both the Germans who fought on the American side and the gallantry of the Irish.

Similar examples of undervalued German contributions filled the pages of Viereck’s publications.

The young writer blamed Anglo influences for a cultural traditionalism that he saw as backward. “In Germany I am regarded as somewhat conventional,” he once mused, but “in this country I am regarded as a radical.” At the very least, the latter point was true. He raised eyebrows with his erotic poetry and fiction, which often challenged contemporary gender norms. The most notable example is his trilogy on the Wandering Jew, co-written with Paul Eldridge. The first volume, My First Two Thousand Years, was banned in the Irish Free State for being pornographic, and his poetry received unflattering reviews in the United States. Viereck blamed such poor reception, especially in the United States, on sexual repression. He complained in 1910 that Americans “fail to discriminate between passion and vice. So distorted is our vision, that sex in itself seems debasing.” The answer was to follow the example of continental Europe and seek

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111 “From the Editor’s Note Book,” American Monthly; September 1922.
112 Viereck, Spreading Germs of Hate (New York: H. Liveright, 1930), 287. The references are to Baron Johann de Kalb and Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben of the Continental Army.
the “emancipation of passion.” Similarly, he pointed to the German example regarding alcohol. Germany was “the land of moderate drinking,” while the prohibition movement demonstrated America’s “deplorable tendency to vulgarize things.” Germans stood against prohibition not just for their love of alcohol, but in the name of personal liberty. Americans of all races had “freed our country from external shackles, but it is the Teutonic spirit that preserves its freedom within.”

In his rejection of Anglo-Saxonism, Viereck fit within a growing group of “left-progressive” intellectuals who encouraged pluralism in contrast to conformity. These scholars, most notably Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, rejected the notion of the “melting pot” and argued that English-Americans were just as much “hyphenates” as the groups they sought to Americanize. Bourne and Kallen celebrated America as a “democracy of nationalities,” something the Anglo element resisted. This group generally coincided with modernist impulses against traditional morality, as illustrated in the prohibition and evolution debates. In that he derived many of his views from these intellectual strands, Viereck became an advocate of ethnic pluralism. At the same time, claiming modernist and left-progressive ideas as distinctly German revealed his underlying ethnic nationalism.

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113 Viereck, *My Flesh and Blood*, 28. Other examples of his provocative work include *The House of the Vampire* (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1907), which contained homoerotic scenes, or erotic poetry in collections like *My Flesh and Blood*. Viereck to William Cosgrave, November 17, 1930, Box 1, Folder 10, GSV; Viereck, *Confessions*, 75; 87-8; 166; 171; 176; Viereck, “Why German-Americans Oppose Prohibition,” speech delivered in Columbus Ohio, August 2, 1908, PA Box 804 13, Ohio Historical Society, 1.

A number of scholars have highlighted the role of German-Americans in the development of turn-of-the-century pluralism. Indeed, a diverse array of German groups believed that the German element held American morality in balance, although they differed as to how. At one end of the spectrum was the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, which used German ethnicity to prop up conservative religious views. Frederick Luebke has argued that the LCMS preserved the German language in its schools and liturgies to isolate its members from corrupting modern influences in American culture.

In the middle of the spectrum were participants in German “festive culture,” who shocked Anglo counterparts by including women and children in beer gardens and social gatherings, but who retained traditionalist notions of “separate spheres” for husbands and wives. At the other extreme was Viereck, who found in German culture a means of liberation from Puritan tradition socially, sexually, and culturally.

While some pluralists focused on traditionalism or xenophobia as the problem, Viereck consistently viewed society’s ills through an Anglophobic lens. He argued that German culture was “an antidote to the venom of Puritanism,” one which he professed to apply generously. This anti-Puritan theme appeared in several of his causes.


affinity for Britain in the Great War stemmed from the fact that “England appealed to the stern moral sense which we inherited from our Puritan ancestors.” In a speech against prohibition, Viereck touted the Germans’ “gladhearted interpretation of life, … a heritage out of which ‘Merrie’ England has been in a degree cheated by moral fanatics.” An editorial on the 1925 Scopes trial turned into a rant about “Puritanical trammels”: “First they took free speech. Then they put prohibition over. Now they attempt to [legislate] the defiance of common sense…. Slowly, the moron is putting his mark on the constitution.” Corruption of moral freedom, like the corruption of American history, demanded opposition from more liberal Americans, particularly those of German stock.

In the First World War, Viereck translated these ideas into a foreign policy agenda. Just as he fought against the re-colonization of American culture by the puritanical English, he now warned against America becoming the “catspaw” of Great Britain in foreign relations. This was a primary goal of The Fatherland, the magazine he founded in August 1914 to advance the perspective of the Central Powers. “If we enter the war,” he wrote in early April of 1917, “we must fight for American principles solely. We refuse to be drawn into the Cecil Rhodes conspiracy for the reunion of the English-speaking world under the Union Jack.” Later editorials urged Americans to maintain a separate foreign policy, to build an American navy on par with that of the British, and to enforce freedom of the seas over British objections. When these

117 Viereck, Confessions, 187; Viereck, Spreading Germs, 17.
118 “Why German-Americans Oppose Prohibition,” 3; “Shall We Surrender the U.S. to the Morons?”, American Monthly, August 1925.
120 The Fatherland changed its name to the American Weekly after the United States entered the war. In August 1918, it reduced its frequency and became the American Monthly. For the purpose of simplicity, I will refer to it throughout the text as The Fatherland, but footnotes will give its title at the time of the cited material.
arguments triggered accusations of disloyalty, Viereck defended himself. “German Americans have no grievance against Americans of other stocks. But they protest against the impertinent assumption that the United States [is] an Anglo-Saxon country, to be exploited for the benefit of England and her immediate descendants.” The fact that the magazine counted over 65,000 subscribers in its first year suggests that Viereck was not alone in these views.121

A magazine like the Fatherland was useful not just to opponents of intervention but to the German government as well. The German Foreign Office regarded the Fatherland as one of a few American newspapers worth supporting. It subsidized both Viereck’s paper and the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung to keep them running after August 1914. Meanwhile, Viereck attended meetings with German diplomats to coordinate anti-intervention campaigns. Like Samuel Untermyer, he attempted unsuccessfully to purchase an existing newspaper for the Foreign Office. That Viereck, the Staats-Zeitung, and Untermyer thus engaged in similar pro-German activities during the First World War is noteworthy, given their different trajectories in later years.122


Naturally, the subsidies ended before the American declaration of war in April 1917, but the tone of the *Fatherland* remained the same. Wartime articles impugned the positive image of the British. Here, too, one sees a blending of foreign and domestic policies. “Twenty Proofs of British Friendship,” printed in June 1917, highlighted tensions in Anglo-American relations. The listed offenses ranged from “taxation without representation” to duplicity during the Civil War to resisting the payment of fees in the Panama Canal. The complaints came right up to the World War, condemning the seizure of American property by British vessels. Another article accused the Anglo element of monopolizing American leadership since independence. Cleverly, it concluded that dark episodes in American history like atrocities in Mexico, the “subjugation” of Cuba and the Philippines, and the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, were thus the fault of the Anglo element. The real patriots were those who would restore ethnic pluralism at home and uphold American democratic ideals in foreign policy.123

At a time when many German-Americans faced persecution as part of the movement for “100% Americanism,” Viereck’s positions made him an easy target. The Poetry Society of America and the Authors League of America voted to expel him during the war, and his name disappeared from *Who’s Who* for over a decade. His publisher returned five boxes of printing plates, refusing to handle his works. In addition, Viereck claimed that no company would sell him life insurance. He also recounted an episode in

which a mob surrounded his house, threatening to lynch him. Narrowly escaping, he thereafter visited his wife under the cover of night. All of this, he said, ignored the “constructive Americanism” which he had advanced in the *Fatherland* since the declaration of war.\textsuperscript{124}

Viereck persisted in his cause after the end of the war. He stood by his pre-1917 dealings with the Reich, arguing that German propaganda had been the “most efficient method” for countering Anglo influence. Now, however, new tactics were required. He decided to forge a German-American voting bloc that could pressure elected officials and act as a counterweight to Anglo influences. Niel Johnson details the frustrations of that effort, explaining how Viereck endorsed a contradictory series of long-shot presidential candidates like Eugene Debs and Robert La Follette because they had resisted the “100% Americanism” campaigns during the war. But Johnson argues that Viereck centered his activity around foreign policy: “[Viereck] seemed to assume that [his work] would result in American repudiation of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations, which … were his betes noires.” Johnson concludes that Viereck “contributed something appreciable” to postwar disillusionment and to warming attitudes toward Germany.\textsuperscript{125}

As with other elements of Viereck’s career, one must also understand this political organizing as an end in itself, a key element of the fight to defend German America. Admittedly, *The Fatherland* did continue to beat pro-German and anti-British


drums. Its official postwar platform specifically mentioned support for the German Republic and the “Freedom of the Seas” rallying cry against London. But the larger goal seems to have been repairing the damage wrought by war hysteria and the restoration of German-American pride. Significantly, the first item on the platform was “Defending the Good Name of Americans of German Descent.” Viereck pledged to “attack fearlessly the sinister spirit of Know-nothingism wherever, and in whatever disguise, it raises its ugly head.” The platform closed with an appropriate declaration: “The days of intimidation are over. The days of reconstruction have begun.”126

Here Viereck joined other ethnic leaders in believing that centralization and national organizing were the solution to ethnic marginalization, the same belief that ultimately gave rise to the German-American Congresses. Writing a decade before these meetings, Viereck said that the German element “has been affronted during the past four or five years beyond anything ever undertaken against a constituent part of the people, save the negroes of the South.” Indicting both parties for mistreating ethnic Germans, he called on his readers to abandon party affiliations and unite behind candidates who would “give a Square Deal to Americans of German descent.”127 Once again, the problem of Anglo domination appeared:

It is to the interest of British henchmen to divide the Germans because they, with the Irish, form the backbone of the opposition to the reconquest of the former colonies…. If [the Germans] permit themselves to be divided, if they drift rudderless and aimless into the [1920] Presidential campaign, they deserve the contempt heaped upon them by Republicans and Democrats alike in the dark days of the Terror.”128

126 Open letter by Viereck, American Monthly, December 1918.
127 “From the Editor’s Note-Book,” American Monthly, July 1920; “Men, not Parties,” June 1922.
In his view, the best protection was a politically autonomous voting bloc with national leadership.

He was not the only one thinking along such lines in the early 1920s. *The Fatherland* received a flood of letters and opinion pieces naming possible leaders. Viereck put forth the name of Charles Nagel, former member of the Taft administration and occasional contributor to *The Fatherland*. Readers suggested prominent judges, politicians, and scholars of German descent, and a few named Viereck himself. Some argued that local organizing should precede an effort to secure national political power, but Viereck insisted that the movement needed a figurehead reminiscent of nineteenth-century senator Carl Schurz, or Baron von Steuben, the revolutionary war hero. It mattered little that these figures had themselves never aspired to ethnic leadership.129

The exhortations for political unity paid few returns. Viereck had attributed the Republican landslide victory of 1920 to his own leadership, claiming that he delivered six million votes for the Republicans. Even he must have reassessed this claim, however, after a brief audience with president-elect Warren Harding in February 1921. Several German-American newspaper editors publicly disavowed the meeting, declaring that the self-proclaimed leader spoke only for himself, and the president-elect ignored all of

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Viereck’s suggestions for cabinet members.¹³⁰ Matters went further downhill throughout the rest of the decade. In 1924 Viereck rejected the two major parties and endorsed Robert La Follette, in collaboration with the Steuben Society. Following the Progressive candidate’s defeat, The Fatherland consoled itself and German-Americans with the assurance that they had waged a formidable campaign. But Viereck stepped down as editor of the magazine in October 1927, becoming an occasional contributor. The new editor, Steuben Society member David Maier, briefly tried to keep alive the vision of a German bloc, but he refrained from making endorsements in 1928 and omitted “the German vote” from his analyses of politics.¹³¹ Viereck’s resignation signified the death of the dream of the German-American voting bloc.

His political fortunes having declined, Viereck returned to writing. As a contributor for the New York American, Liberty, and other publications, he continued his lifelong pursuit of interviews with prominent figures in the United States and Europe. He compiled the fruits of this work in Glimpses of the Great, published in 1930. A perennial name-dropper, he used the book to tout his closeness to people like Kaiser Wilhelm, Hjalmar Schacht, Benito Mussolini, Sigmund Freud, Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, and Emil Ludwig. The book, which biographer Niel Johnson considers Viereck’s “tour de force,” demonstrates the diversity of the acquaintanceships that the writer cultivated. But much of German America preferred to ignore him by this time, both because his career as

¹³⁰ See the American Monthly for December 1920. For a summary of his political activities related to Harding’s election, see Johnson, 84-91. Another account is available in Frederick Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies between the World Wars,” in Germans in the New World, 59-60.
a propagandist made him a liability and because he frequently lashed out at rival leaders and groups. He was noticeably absent from the various ethnic organizing efforts of the late 1920s and from the National Congresses in the early 1930s.132

The older campaigns did live on, however, in Viereck’s amateur histories that dovetailed with the works of “revisionist” scholars. Led by Harry Elmer Barnes, Charles Beard, and Edwin Borchard, these writers questioned America’s decision to abandon neutrality in 1917.133 Unlike the professionals, Viereck came at the issue of intervention indirectly. Instead of writing on diplomacy, he conducted ostensibly detached studies of topics related to the war. By announcing that he had personally moved beyond wartime emotions, he hoped to overcome his reputation as a German propagandist. Viereck’s analyses did impress Colonel Edward House, Woodrow Wilson’s former confidante. This wartime enemy complimented Viereck on his work, befriended him, and provided him with research material.134 This unlikely praise notwithstanding, an examination of Viereck’s writings shows that he was still pushing his domestic agenda.

The best example of Viereck’s revisionism is his 1930 study, *Spreading Germs of Hate*. It is a study of wartime propaganda that focuses on the British and German perspectives. The introduction makes it clear that the purpose is to prevent war hysteria in the future: “My book is an attempt to administer an antidote…. If we become

134 Johnson, 154-5.
propaganda-conscious, we may in time develop a measurable degree of immunity.” To emphasize the detached tone of the study, the author refers to himself in the third person when describing German propaganda activities. He credits the Germans with a clever campaign but says that the British effectively turned the wartime press into “a museum of German horrors,” using atrocity stories to evoke moral outrage. The effect was to bring Americans into the Allied camp. One also finds the first signs of disillusionment with the pluralist democracy Viereck had once defended. Regaling the reader with tales of German and British manipulations of public opinion, he describes propaganda as “the penalty we pay for democracy.”

The book also picks up the old campaign against Anglo culture, this time in the context of British propaganda. “Not even our sense of humor saved us from accepting innumerable stories of German atrocities,” Viereck laments. “We swallowed them because England appealed to the stern moral sense which we inherited from our Puritan ancestors.” He adopts a populist tone, indicting the “titled foreigners” from Allied countries who “said little in public [but] whispered confidences into the charmed ears of their hosts and hostesses.” Even more reprehensible were the American elites who fell for such flattery. As if outing collaborators, Viereck provides a two-page list of Americans who received honorary titles from Allied countries. They, along with overzealous propagandists, caused a “reign of terror” against German culture in schools,

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135 Viereck, Spreading Germs, xii-xiv; 91-2; 118; 158; 181-2; 34. See John Horne and Alan Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
churches, and the press. To prevent this sort of subversion in the future, Viereck says, Americans would need proper education and “a rugged sense of Americanism.”

In a subsequent study Viereck offered the first hints of a new strategy for protecting German-Americans. *The Strangest Friendship in History*, published in 1932, is a study of the relationship between President Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House, who had lent his papers to the project. In the book, Viereck grudgingly concedes that larger forces, not conspiracy, drove the United States to war. Nevertheless, he tries to disprove the inevitability of America joining the Allies by listing British violations of neutrality up to 1917. But perhaps the most interesting element of the book is the author’s fascination with House and his methods. The fourth chapter, “House—Svengali or Statesman?”, shows how an unelected citizen advanced his own agenda and ideals through private conversations with President Wilson, his cabinet, and his foreign counterparts. If *Spreading Germs of Hate* was an exposé of the propaganda world that Viereck helped build, *The Strangest Friendship in History* was an appreciation of more subtle methods for future use. Having failed to organize a voting bloc, Viereck now tried to emulate Colonel House, frequently writing to him for advice. The German propagandist was exploring new means through which to defend Germany and German-Americans; within a few years he also found a new source of inspiration.

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136 Viereck, *Spreading Germs*, 17; 186-9; 297; 175-8.
Viereck and the “New Germany”

Even before 1933, Viereck did little to conceal his admiration for Hitler. He first met the Nazi leader during a 1923 interview for *The Fatherland*. The ensuing article, printed a month before the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, ends with a chillingly prophetic statement: “If he lives, Hitler, for better or for worse, is sure to make history.” Indeed, that interview seems to have begun a period of fascination for a man Viereck clearly regarded as Germany’s best hope. A second interview, published in *Liberty* in July 1932, discussed the possibility of a Hitler chancellorship. While it copied entire passages from the 1923 interview, the new article omitted the voluminous discussion of anti-Semitism. Instead, Viereck highlighted Hitler’s pledges to stop Bolshevism and stabilize Europe. By 1934 he was praising the Nazi regime’s early accomplishments. He described Hitler’s rise as the “most civilized revolution in history.” Sometimes he dismissed attacks on Jews as the work of “hoodlums,” and at other times he made apologies for the National Socialists: “their methods are, at times, a trifle rough. But who can make a revolution with bon-bons?” At still other points he dismissed stories of persecution as Allied propaganda, recalling the atrocity myths of the First World War. At any rate, he argued, Hitler would save Europe from Communism: “even his foes realize that there is no choice for Central Europe except Hitler or Chaos.” Viereck’s selective approval of—and apologies for—the Nazis reveal how much he had become, in the words of Niel Johnson, “a mirror of the nationalist movement in Germany.”

His admiration for the Nazis’ goals in Europe related directly to his battles in the United States. For one thing, he had placed himself on record as an ardent anti-communist. In the summer of 1933 he wrote “The Web of the Red Spider,” a serial on Bolshevik infiltration that would fit well among Red Scare literature. More importantly, Viereck’s interest in Nazism dovetailed with his commitment to the cause of ethnic Germans in the United States. As noted, he had sought a new German-American leader on par with the legendary Baron von Steuben and Carl Schurz. It is clear that he held parallel views regarding Germany itself. After a visit to the Weimar Republic in 1920 he had written that “only a Bismarck or a Frederick the Great could save the situation.” Viereck seems to have merged these views in the 1930s, speculating that the German hero and the German-American hero might be one and the same. His German Day speech at Madison Square Garden in 1934 made this point clear:

When Adolph Hitler freed the German soul, he freed not only the Germans within the Reich but one hundred million Germans throughout the world. Cowed by years of abuse, crucified by their enemies, Americans of German descent, like their co-racists across the ocean, had developed a sense of inferiority. Relieved at last from this burden, the German Americans are better able now than at any time in all their history to collaborate with the forces of reconstruction in American life.

It was the nationalistic pride of the “New Germany,” then, that was finally to rekindle the dream for a revitalized German community in America.

German-American organizations began to fracture over Nazi policies within weeks of the “revolution” of January 1933. The Jewish War Veterans began leading an

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139 Viereck, “The Web of the Red Spider,” *Liberty*, June 17; June 24; July 1; and July 8, 1933.
141 Address by George Sylvester Viereck at Madison Square Garden, May 17, 1934. Enclosed in a letter from Viereck to Undersecretary of State William Phillips, May 18, 1934. RG 59, Box 4729, Folder 3, NARA.
anti-German boycott in March, and by May Samuel Untermyer presided over the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights.\textsuperscript{142} As many Jewish and liberal groups—including some German societies—signed on to the boycott, Viereck openly opposed it.\textsuperscript{143} His arguments logically flowed from his other beliefs. His primary concern was the impact that the boycott would have on German-Americans and their businesses. It would not be long, he argued, before hostility toward Germany impacted Germans in the United States, as in 1917. In addition, he questioned the wisdom of boycotting a country that imported heavily from the United States. The boycott would end but “the loss of German business to America [would] be permanent.” Finally, he argued that the boycott would harm the Jews themselves. He said that the “extremist” boycott leaders had done more to incite anti-Semitism than Nazi propagandists ever could. He suggested that discriminatory laws in Germany were, at least in part, a response to the boycott. The same might ultimately happen in America: “[the boycott] is a calamity for the American Jews because it makes America Jew-conscious.” The fact that a known Reich propagandist was thus echoing the arguments of anti-boycott


\textsuperscript{143} “United German Societies Row over Nazi Stand,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, September 23, 1933. A large number of organizations and individuals appealed to the State Department to support or oppose the idea of a boycott and, later, the counter-boycott organized by pro-Nazi elements. See RG 59, Box 3274, NARA. Similar appeals reached William Dodd, the American ambassador in Berlin. See the correspondence in Box 40, Dodd Papers, LOC.
Germans, including Felix Warburg and his associates in the American Jewish Committee, could only have damaged these groups’ credibility.\textsuperscript{144}

In the spirit of Colonel House, Viereck offered his services as an intermediary to ease the crisis. He began in March 1933 by trying to prevent a larger boycott against Jews in Germany. He sent a telegram to Crown Prince Wilhelm, Vice Chancellor von Papen, and Reichsbank chairman Hjalmar Schacht. “If there is a battle between you and the Jews,” he wrote, “Germany cannot count upon the support of either the [American] press or the public. Even the German-Americans are unanimous in condemning the [anti-Jewish] boycott.” Not missing an opportunity to emphasize his own importance, Viereck made grandiose promises: “If you will at least postpone the boycott, I believe … that I am in position to guarantee that the anti-German agitation in all world centers will stop at once.” When the official anti-Jewish boycott in Germany lasted only a single day, Viereck took credit for its cancellation, ignoring the fact that the German government encouraged unofficial boycotts and persecutions indefinitely thereafter.\textsuperscript{145}

Viereck then made appeals to American officials. In October 1933, after consulting with Colonel House, he sent a letter to President Roosevelt to offer his advice. Having recently met with Adolf Hitler, Josef Goebbels, former Emperor Wilhelm, and others, Viereck felt that he could help to maintain good German-U.S. relations. Referred to the State Department by Roosevelt’s secretary, Viereck wrote to Cordell Hull: “I do

\textsuperscript{144} “What I Saw in Hitler’s Germany: Hitler and the Jews,” unpublished manuscript, Box 4, Folder 27, GSV, 5; 7; “Statement by George Sylvester Viereck.” Response to an inquiry from the \textit{Jewish Daily Bulletin}, November 29, 1933. Box 1, Folder 12, GSV; “Address by Viereck, May 17, 1934.”

not flatter myself that I can tell you very much that you do not already know. Nevertheless a stray bit of information or interpretation may possibly be helpful…. I shall be delighted to come to Washington any time next week.” Viereck made an appointment with Under Secretary of State William Phillips in mid-November.\textsuperscript{146}

The proceedings of that meeting are unknown, but a week later Viereck launched a plan to end the Jewish boycott of German goods in the United States. “I have an inkling,” Viereck wrote to Colonel House, “that the Jews are getting pretty sick of the boycott. I believe that the Germans are pretty sick of it too.” He said that Roosevelt, acting on his and House’s advice, should broker a German-Jewish concordat “with clearly defined minority rights” for the Jews in exchange for the end of the boycott.\textsuperscript{147} In an article at the time, Viereck even boasted that his plan was gaining traction and that “sooner or later an agreement between the Jews and the German Government … [would] be arranged.” There is evidence that House, too, sought to mediate a deal along similar lines, but no such plan came to fruition. Later in life, Viereck claimed that Franklin Roosevelt had rejected the concordat proposal.\textsuperscript{148}

Viereck also cultivated a relationship with the Reich government similar to the one he had before the First World War. He brokered a contact between the German Tourist Information Office and the Carl Byoir public relations firm to improve the German image in the United States. Ostensibly acting as a reporter for the \textit{Münchner}

\textsuperscript{146} George Sylvester Viereck to Franklin Roosevelt, October 11, 1933; Louis Howe to Viereck, November 3, 1933; Viereck to Cordell Hull, November 10, 1933; Vinton Chapin to Viereck, November 14, 1933; Viereck to Chapin, November 15, 1933, RG 59, LM 192, Reel 11, NARA.\textsuperscript{147} Viereck to House, November 22, 1933. Box 1, Folder 12, GSV.\textsuperscript{148} “What I Saw in Hitler’s Germany.” Box 4, Folder 27, GSV; Colonel House to William Dodd, September 1, 1934, Box 44, Dodd Papers; Viereck, \textit{Men into Beasts}, 152.
Neueste Nachricthen, he sent weekly reports on American public opinion to the German Foreign Office. He consulted with German diplomats in the United States, including Ambassador Hans Luther and Consul Otto Kiep, and he published bulletins for the German Library of Information in the United States. Throughout the 1930s the Foreign Office turned to him repeatedly, regarding him as its “most valuable liaison agent.” In 1940 Viereck acquired a publishing concern, Flanders Hall, which received German money for printing anti-British literature. In addition to the satisfaction of promoting the “New Germany” in the United States, he received at least $200,000 from the Reich for this propaganda work.149

While the full scope of such dealings remained unknown to the American government and public for years, Viereck again gained notoriety as a German apologist.150 Two events in 1934 solidified his reputation. Although he never joined a Nazi organization, he spoke at the German Day celebration of the Friends of the New Germany, held in Madison Square Garden on May 17. He began by distancing himself from the pro-Nazi group’s stance on the Jews, emphatically denying that he personally was an anti-Semite. From that point, however, he devoted large sections of his speech to decrying the boycott led by “certain professional Jews and their Bolshevist confederates.” He claimed to speak for the majority of Americans who “resent the dictation of a racial


150 Gertz points to 1933 articles in The Nation and Panorama that implied a connection between Viereck and the German government as evidence of Viereck’s growing notoriety. Gertz, 243-5.
minority that is in itself a minority within a minority.” Elmer Gertz, as both a friend and a biographer, described the speech as a key event in the course of Viereck’s ruin. According to Gertz, Viereck “did himself incalculable harm because of his association with those who were unquestionably anti-Semitic.” Playing to such a group was a “foolhardy act” that began to turn his Jewish associates against him.\textsuperscript{151}

The Madison Square Garden speech won him a congressional subpoena. Established in early 1934, the McCormack-Dickstein Committee sought to uncover foreign propaganda activities in the United States. Viereck drew its attention when an employee of the Carl Byoir public relations firm testified that Viereck had brokered their contract with the German Tourist Information Office. Ostensibly, the arrangement had been to promote tourism and to distribute an economic bulletin in the United States. But the materials produced were often anti-Semitic propaganda, and German consular officials helped to distribute them.\textsuperscript{152}

Before reporting to the committee, Viereck sent a statement to the \textit{New York Times} to deny both improper dealings and anti-Semitism. He said that German industries had the right to defend themselves against slander in the United States. “Other foreign interests solve their difficulties in a similar fashion,” he wrote, “including Congressman Dickstein’s Russian compatriots.” He also emphatically denied producing anti-Semitic propaganda. Referring to the boycott, he wrote that he had “protested vigorously against the attempts to fight out the German-Jewish problem on American soil…. No one labored harder than I to discover the way out of the German-Jewish dilemma.” He stuck

to this story in front of the Dickstein Committee. He admitted to receiving a monthly retainer for giving advice to Otto Kiep, the German Consul-General in New York. He said that he helped Carl Byoir to “build up good will” and improve German-American commercial relations but denied that any of the material was anti-Semitic. The legal gray areas of Viereck’s involvement with German interests, along with similar actions by others, led the Committee to recommend clearer guidelines for international business arrangements. The result, the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, would cause additional trouble for Viereck, but in 1934 the investigation simply exacerbated the effects of his speech at Madison Square Garden.153

Viereck was now on the defensive. He referred constantly to an excerpt from his German Day speech:

I am not, and will never be, an anti-Semite. I am an admirer of Franklin D. Roosevelt. This does not imply that I agree with every one of his policies. Similarly, my admiration for Hitler does not compel me to subscribe to every article of his creed…. It is possible to sympathize with National Socialism without embracing anti-Semitism.154

In his congressional testimony he alluded to his interview with Hitler, in which he urged the Führer to distinguish between “good Jews” and “Internationalists.” He boasted of having innumerable Jewish friends. He pointed to the Wandering Jew Trilogy, which he produced with a Jewish co-author, Paul Eldridge, and which had been banned by the Nazis. Perhaps the most succinct and telling statement of his views, however, was in a 1936 letter to photographer Peter Pollack. “I do not wish to decide between the Jews and

153 “Statement by Viereck,” New York Times, June 7, 1934; “Examination of Congressman Samuel Dickstein of George Sylvester Viereck,” Box 5, Folder 8, GSV. It would not be until after the Second World War that the government learned the extent of Viereck’s propaganda work. Rogge, 130-136.
154 “Address by George Sylvester Viereck at Madison Square Garden, May 17, 1934.” RG 59, Box 4729, Folder 3, NARA.
the Germans,” the letter says. “If I am forced to do so by the Jews, I shall side with my own people.” Then came a weak attempt at aloofness: “but no such choice is forced upon me, since I am not a German citizen and do not live in Germany.”

Such attitudes did little to improve his position. Some friends added scornful comments to their regular correspondence with him, while others avoided him. Fritz Wittels, a Freudian psychoanalyst, sent Viereck several terse letters in 1938, attacking him for supporting the Nazis. Paul Eldridge, with whom he had co-written the Wandering Jew series, disowned him completely. Eldridge subsequently referred to his friend George Sylvester Viereck as dead, replaced by an impostor. The Harvard Liberal Club invited Viereck to debate Franz Boas in October 1935, incorrectly assuming that he would defend Nazi racial theories against the renowned anthropologist. Prominent German-Americans who had previously worked with him now kept their distance. Charles Nagel, whom Viereck had once proposed as the new national German-American leader, asked him in 1938 not to tell anyone of their correspondence. So great was the stigma that Elmer Gertz alienated his own friends by continuing to work on Viereck’s biography.

155 “Examination by Congressman Samuel Dickstein,” 5. The trilogy comprised *My First Two Thousand Years* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1928), *Salome: The Wandering Jewess* (New York: Sheridan House, 1930), and *The Invincible Adam* (New York: H. Liveright, 1932); Viereck to Elmer Gertz, March 16, 1935, Box 442, Gertz Papers, LOC; Viereck to Pierre Loving, July 26, 1935, Box 442, Gertz Papers, LOC; Viereck to Arthur Garfield Hays, October 29, 1946, Box 2, Folder 4, GSV; Meyrink to Viereck, October 1, 1930, Box 1, Folder 10, GSV; Viereck to Peter Pollack, October 29, 1936, Box 442, Gertz Papers, LOC.

156 Paul Eldridge to Miss Gillar, December 1, 1941, Box 3, Folder 6, GSV; Fritz Wittels to Viereck, February 5, 1938 and February 24, 1938, Box 2, Folder 1, GSV; Correspondence between Bruce Bliven and Viereck, September through October 1935, box 1, Folder 12, GSV; Charles Nagel to Viereck, June 10, 1938, Folder 1, Charles Nagel Papers, Missouri Historical Society; Isaac Goldberg to Elmer Gertz, January 25, 1935, Box 436, Gertz Papers, LOC. See also the introduction to *Odyssey of a Barbarian*, 1-6.
As for Viereck, he struggled to save his career. He tried to protect his apolitical pursuits by using pseudonyms. Writing as George F. Corners, Donald Furthman Wickets, or James Burr Hamilton, he contributed articles to *Physical Culture* and *Liberty* on popular science, travel, and sex. He also used a pseudonym for a second exposé on Communism, believing that his attacks on “reds” had caused the animus against him. At the same time, he wrote under his own name to prove his Americanism. In December 1937 he published “The Temptation of Jonathan,” a heavy-handed celebration of New Deal capitalism. In the story, a mysterious stranger—who turns out to be Satan—presents Jonathan with a telescope that shows him both a fascist and a communist society. Undaunted by the stranger’s ruses, Jonathan shuns him, turning instead to Lady Liberty and opting for the imperfect, but free, American system. Jonathan then makes a ruggedly democratic—and baldly isolationist—statement: “I don’t mind their dictating, as long as they don’t dictate to me.”

**Anti-Interventionism: The Last Stand**

As war clouds once again drew over Europe, Viereck blended his propaganda work into the isolationist movement. Just as his pluralism had shaded into ethnic nationalism, now the latter informed his campaign against intervention. Another war against Germany, after all, potentially meant another round of anti-German hysteria,

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something he could not allow. He began writing on foreign policy matters, frequently invoking the memory of the First World War. An article about Kaiser Wilhelm II warned that “the same elements [as in 1914] are conspiring to plunge civilization into the hell of a general war.” In 1938, he wrote a response to an article by Colonel House, in which the latter urged President Roosevelt to follow in the footsteps of Woodrow Wilson and broker a European peace. In his response, Viereck’s old resentments burned brightly.

> What reason have we for believing that Mr. Roosevelt would be more successful than Wilson in dodging the snares of Old World diplomacy and delays? And who, even if Mr. Roosevelt should prove the most skilful negotiator, gave him the mandate to follow in the footsteps of Woodrow Wilson? When the American people piled up an enormous majority for Franklin D. Roosevelt, they had no intention of electing a second Wilson.159

He even published a new book, *The Kaiser on Trial*, which placed the former German ruler in a fictional courtroom with real-life figures as witnesses and attorneys. While feigning objectivity, the book is an exoneration of the Kaiser. According to the preface, the purpose is “to save America … from … yielding to the insidious wiles of foreign influence, and of disregarding for the second time the last will of [George] Washington.” Reflecting the author’s disillusionment with American politics, the book takes jabs at the fickleness of the masses and the “Pied Piper” who created war hysteria to “the tune of democracy.”160 Reprising his anti-interventionist campaign in 1914 and remembering the results of its failure, Viereck sought to head off any future interventionism.

Again emulating Colonel House, Viereck turned to elected officials to advance his efforts. Because the executive branch had ignored him in 1933, he now turned to his

natural allies in Congress. Many of them were isolationist progressives who had supported Roosevelt on domestic issues but increasingly opposed him as foreign policy moved to the forefront. Others had opposed Roosevelt from the beginning. Among the most prominent of his friends in the Senate were Gerald Nye (D-ND), William Langer (D-WV), Rush Holt (D-WV), Ernest Lundeen (R-MN), and Robert Wagner (D-NY). In the House, Viereck maintained contacts with Stephen Day (R-IL) and Hamilton Fish (R-NY), two of Roosevelt’s arch opponents. The contact with Fish would prove especially useful when the congressman’s intercession saved Viereck from having to testify before the new House Un-American Activities Committee in August 1938.  

Through these contacts Viereck gained access to a new mouthpiece: the congressional record. In *Spreading Germs of Hate* he had recounted the story of Irish-American leaders who spoke before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He recounted with wonder that all of their statements were printed in the Congressional Record and “circulated widely at the expense of the Government.” In other words, members of the Senate had used their “franking privilege” to mail the speeches to their constituents for free. “The man who invented the franking privilege,” mused Viereck, “was the friend of the propagandist!”

He now employed the franking scheme himself. Working with the America First Committee and Prescott Dennett of the Make Europe Pay War Debts Committee, he helped to compose and distribute anti-interventionist literature, some of which originated

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162 Viereck, *Spreading Germs*, 266.
in Germany. These organizations used the franking privileges of Senators Ernest Lundeen and Rush Holt, as well as Representatives Hamilton Fish and Stephen Day, to distribute the literature to as many as 125,000 people per mailing. This system increased in efficiency by late summer of 1941, when the congressmen began sending unaddressed franked envelopes straight to the committees’ headquarters for stuffing and mailing.163

Viereck’s direct influence grew even more when he began ghostwriting speeches, articles, and books for Day and Lundeen in 1940. In cases such as Day’s book, We Must Save the Republic, Viereck edited and printed materials through his Flanders Hall firm and with Reich money. He also wrote and, in his words, “lightened up” speeches by Lundeen before delivery and distribution under the franking privilege.164 If the President and State Department had failed to appreciate his potential as an opinion maker, it is clear that some members of Congress were more willing to enlist him. They paid a price, however, for allying with a German ethnic nationalist on the eve of war.

The abuse of congressional franking privileges by a notorious German propagandist was a scandal waiting to happen. When it broke, it did so in waves of increasing intensity. First, the press reported in July 1941 that Army officers had received anti-intervention postcards bearing the congressional frank. In September, a witness told a grand jury investigating Nazi subversion that he saw Hamilton Fish’s aide destroying thousands of franked envelopes. Next, Prescott Dennett testified that George Sylvester Viereck had provided much of the material. Finally, by early October it was

164 Johnson, 217; Rogge, 166-7; Viereck, written testimony of his working relationship with Ernest Lundeen, Box 3, Folder 7, GSV; Rogge, 266-72.
apparent that Viereck was receiving both funds and literature from the German government.\textsuperscript{165} Ernest Lundeen had died in a plane crash in August 1940, leaving his widow to defend him after the scandal broke. Hamilton Fish and Stephen Day defended their records, but both men lost their House seats in 1944 when opponents played up their connections to German propaganda and the franking scandal.\textsuperscript{166}

The grand jury came at Viereck in October. It indicted him on five charges relating to his status as a foreign agent. He had registered as an employee of the \textit{Münchner Neueste Nachrichten} and of the German Library of Information in accordance with the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938.\textsuperscript{167} Using a common tactic—and one that applied easily to this case—the government argued that Viereck had registered improperly. It said that his registration should have included the publication of German books through Flanders Hall, his insertions in the congressional record, and his advice to German officials. After his arrest by federal agents in October, he immediately issued a statement: “My real crime … is twofold: I am an American of German blood and I oppose the desperate and despicable attempt to catapult our country into Europe’s war.”

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Echoing his language in *The Fatherland* years earlier, he said that his arrest was further proof of “forces cunningly at work to destroy the America we know and love.”

In preparation for his trial Viereck asked prominent acquaintances to testify on his behalf. Their replies show the damage done to his personal and professional life by his praise of Nazism. The best example is Fulton Oursler, a personal friend and the editor of *Liberty*. Frustrated by Viereck’s “impertinence and lack of tact,” Oursler had begun to distance himself in the late 1930s. By the spring of 1939 he refused to print any more of Viereck’s articles unless he disavowed the Hitler regime. Viereck replied that he would not “promote a campaign which … will fling the United States into the Hell of war with its aftermath of revolution, crime, poverty, intolerance and hate.” Their working relationship dwindled, but Viereck asked Oursler to serve as a defense witness. The reply was a one-sentence letter: “I do not think it would do any good for you to summon me as a character witness because any testimony I gave would be damaging to you.”

Other replies varied only in their degree of diplomacy. Henry Morgenthau could not appear, “even if [he] wanted to,” for health reasons. Diplomat Joseph Davies doubted that his testimony would hold up under cross-examination. John Walz cited “family opposition.” Channing Pollock, a longtime friend, questioned the value of character witnesses in such a case. Yale Law professor Edwin Borchard declined to appear in court.

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168 Federal Indictment against Viereck, Box 5, Folder 10, GSV; Johnson, 224-5; “Viereck Indicted and Seized Here as German Agent,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1941.
169 Fulton Oursler to Elmer Gertz, April 6, 1935, Box 436, Gertz Papers, LOC; Viereck to Oursler, April 7, 1939, Box 2, Folder 2, GSV.
but agreed to submit an affidavit that simply testified to Viereck’s character. Some friends took the opportunity to remind Viereck that he had brought hardship upon himself. “I sympathize with you in your personal predicament,” wrote Arthur Garfield Hays of the American Civil Liberties Union, but “one with my views cannot at all understand how any decent man could have anything to do with the Hitler government.” James Shotwell expressed sympathy but offered a bit of advice: “you do yourself an injustice … by turning the attack upon you into an attack upon Great Britain.” Viereck thus faced the court with his call for help largely unanswered.

The trial began on February 4, 1942, less than two months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Norma Lundeen, the wife of the deceased senator, defended Viereck on the stand. Hamilton Fish appeared as a witness but mainly protected himself, denying knowledge of any misuse of the franking privilege. Prescott Dennett, already convicted, verified that he and Viereck had conducted the propaganda scheme. The prosecution produced an array of evidence, including passages from *Spreading Germs of Hate*, to show how Viereck had operated in the past. The jury found him guilty on March 6, and he received a sentence of two to six years in prison. At his sentencing Viereck declared himself a victim of Pearl Harbor and the target of another wartime hysteria.

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170 Henry Morgenthau to Viereck, January 3, 1942; Edwin Borchard to Viereck, January 5, 1942; Joseph Davies to Viereck, January 6, 1942; John Waltz to Viereck, January 8, 1942; Channing Pollock to Viereck, January 18, 1942, Box 2, Folder 3, GSV.
171 Arthur Garfield Hays to Viereck, October 14, 1941, Box 2, Folder 2, GSV; James Shotwell to Viereck, October 31, 1941, Box 2, Folder 2, GSV.
Viereck appealed his conviction, and the case made its way to the Supreme Court on March 3, 1943. The Court found his registration to be in line with a “fair reading” of the law and criticized the original judge for faulty instructions. Viereck left prison on March 5, but the government produced six new indictments that were more carefully confined within the wording of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. This time the Court of Appeals upheld the guilty verdict and the Supreme Court declined to hear the case. Viereck returned to prison in July.  

While in prison, Viereck took the final step in his personal destruction: the loss of his family. His wife, Gretchen, sent him a letter shortly after his first arrest in 1942, begging him to end his hostility toward her and the world. “I know you have the right to fight,” she wrote, “but that is all beside the point. You must repudiate the silly, ridiculous, dangerous things you have said.” She urged him to see Nazism for what it was and to “not be blind anymore.” In his cold reply, he called her request “childish” and refused to budge: “If you and your children agree with the verdict that made me a ‘felon,’ we have reached the parting of the ways.” He said that he would not dispute a

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173 Address to Court before Sentence; *George Sylvester Viereck vs. The United states of America*, Box 5, Folder 20, GSV; Johnson, 241-3.
divorce, and his marriage ended before his release from prison. Gretchen joined the Catholic Church, to which she donated almost all of their assets.\textsuperscript{175}

In May 1944 the post office returned a letter that Gretchen had written to her son, George Sylvester, Jr., who was serving in the U.S. Army in Italy. The letter bore a simple marking: “Addressee Deceased.” This was her first notification that her son had been killed on March 24, 1944. She informed her husband during a recess at his sedition trial, and he wrote her a letter of condolence on May 6. True to form, he shifted the focus back to his own predicament: “[George, Jr.] and I were good Americans, each in his own way. He paid for his loyalty with his life. I paid for my loyalty with the loss of my liberty.”\textsuperscript{176}

Viereck maintained an increasingly rocky relationship with his eldest son. A poet and a versatile writer like his father, Peter Viereck received a Ph.D. in History from Harvard in 1942 and served in the Army thereafter. The two traded poetry back and forth and commented on mutual acquaintances, but their correspondence often returned to political debates. A conservative scholar of history, Peter first alienated his father with the publication of his Harvard dissertation, \textit{Metapolitics}, in 1943. A “psychoanalysis of Nazism,” the study tied National Socialist ideology to German Romanticism. In addition to rejecting his father’s views, the young Viereck omitted the elder from his acknowledgments altogether. He continued to lambaste his father in personal letters, even as the latter sat in prison, and the two underwent several splits and reconciliations.

\textsuperscript{175} Gretchen Viereck to George Sylvester Viereck, undated; George Sylvester Viereck to Gretchen Viereck, November 27, 1942, Box 2, Folder 3, GSV; Viereck to Ferdinand Earle, August 5, 1947, Box 2, Folder 5, GSV.

\textsuperscript{176} “Mrs. Viereck Hopeful,” \textit{New York Times}, May 7, 1944; George Sylvester Viereck to Gretchen Viereck, May 6, 1944, Box 2, Folder 4, GSV.
Never again fully comfortable with his son, George wrote in 1945 that the only person he could truly trust was his nephew, Louis Viereck, in Columbus, Ohio.\footnote{See the correspondence between Viereck and his son in Box 6, Folder 5, GSV. Tom Reiss, “The First Conservative,” The New Yorker, October 24, 2005; Viereck to Ferdinand Earle, September 17, 1945, Box 2, Folder 4, GSV.}

Leaving prison in 1947, Viereck found himself nearly penniless, friendless, and tainted with the stigma of his propaganda activities. “I did not foresee that I would be forgotten as a poet, as a historian, and as a writer of popular fiction,” he lamented. “It did not dawn upon me that, even after I had paid my alleged debt to society, my name would be identified with things that were utterly alien to me.” He occasionally complained of the communists, so-called “professional Jews,” and “internationalists” who, he believed, had destroyed his career. He did acknowledge some errors, as shown in his criticism of those who remained postwar supporters of Nazism. In general, however, the fighting spirit was leaving him. After beginning a defense of his actions in a 1952 book, he caught himself: “All this is water over the dam. I shall not refer to it again.”\footnote{Viereck, Men into Beasts (Greenwich: Gold Medal, 1952), 59-60; Viereck to H. Keith Thompson, May 5, 1953, Box 2, Folder 8, GSV; Viereck to Lobbenberg, June 3, 1949, Box 2, Folder 6, GSV.}

**Conclusion**

George Sylvester Viereck had not always been so unpopular. His *Fatherland* magazine had netted over 65,000 subscribers in 1914. His progressivism and Great War revisionism, separated by the anti-German hysteria of the war years, had resonated with larger American intellectual currents. But when the same ethnic nationalism that informed these views led him to embrace National Socialism as a regenerative tool, he
moved far outside the political mainstream. Elmer Gertz, Viereck’s friend and biographer, wrote that the disgraced writer “was prepared to defend any blackness, so long as it was a Teutonic blackness.” Therein lay the explanation for the sharp turns in his thinking and the logical gymnastics with which he defended the Hitler regime.\textsuperscript{179}

What began as a campaign to rally ethnic Germans in the 1930s became a defensive battle as Viereck’s propaganda work overshadowed his activism. As a result, any German-American leaders who had not disowned him in the 1920s did so now. Even groups like the Steuben Society, which supported isolationism and criticized the British, disavowed him.\textsuperscript{180} His only remaining associates were the isolationists, whose pragmatic relationship to Viereck ultimately hurt them more than it benefited him. Ironically, his campaigns to protect German-Americans from another hysteria made him a target of the public and the government, while most ethnic Germans escaped overt hostility.

Along with personal stubbornness, what ensured Viereck’s destruction was philosophical inflexibility regarding ethnic nationalism. Facing the same pressures as other German-American organizations and leaders, he never adapted his chauvinism or his understanding of German culture as a counterweight to Anglo Puritanism. As a result, he aligned himself with the ultra-nationalism of Nazi Germany. This proved self-destructive, in that Nazi ideology was utterly incompatible with American ideals,

\textsuperscript{179} Arndt and Olson, 336; Gertz, 260.
\textsuperscript{180} See the omission of Viereck in the Steuben Society’s “Chronology of Prominent German Names and Achievements as an Integral Part of American History,” \textit{The Steuben News}, October 1985 and March 1896.
especially the pluralist strands with which he had once identified. In contrast to Viereck, most German-American leaders sought nuanced and adaptive approaches to “New Germany,” as demonstrated in subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER 3:
“SELF-DEFENSE AND SELF-EXPRESSION”: THE STEUBEN SOCIETY
AND ETHNIC POLITICS

Like George Sylvester Viereck, the Steuben Society took an aggressive ethnic nationalist position in the interwar period. Founded as a secret fraternal organization in May 1919 to undo the damage of the First World War, the Society had committed itself to publicizing German contributions to American history and protecting German-Americans’ rights. Taking its name from Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, the Prussian officer who served on General Washington’s staff, it hoped to unite and defend the German element while protecting the ideals of the nation as a whole.\footnote{A detailed account of the Society’s founding is in the Steuben Day Banquet Program, September 30, 1944, Newspaper Room, GSP.} Whereas Viereck saw Nazism as an engine for ethnic revitalization, the Steuben Society saw \textit{itself} as the new inspiration, seeking to become the successor to the National German-American Alliance.\footnote{Solidifying this claim was the fact that former NGAA officers such as Gustav Koelble and John Tjarks joined the Steuben Society. The German-American Citizens’ League of Chicago also claimed to be the NGAA’s successor, but it petered out by the 1930s. Charles Johnson, \textit{Culture at Twilight: The National German-American Alliance, 1901-1918} (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 78; 118; 155; Frederick Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies in the Interwar Period,” in Luebke, ed., \textit{Germans in the New World} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 60; 62.} But the Steuben Society was more politically minded than the Alliance, so much so that the German-American Congresses of the early 1930s designated it the
official political wing of the revitalization movement. That endorsement, of course, did nothing to overcome deep divisions and rivalries among German-Americans.\textsuperscript{183}

The Society stepped up its bid for leadership during the Nazi period, trying to act as a mediator between the United States and the Reich. It also strove to defend ethnic Germans while preserving its image as an American civic organization. Having blended pluralist and nationalist rhetoric in the 1920s, it increasingly favored the latter as it sought connections to the Hitler regime. When these flirtations with the Third Reich became a liability, the organization retreated into a growing anti-communist position that forced it to abandon some earlier views, including its devotion to pluralism.

While the organization always masked the size of its membership, Frederick Luebke has estimated that it peaked around 20,000. The zenith undoubtedly came before the rise of the Society’s rival, the pro-Nazi German-American Bund, whose membership may have reached as high as 25,000 in the mid-1930s. The Steuben Society attempted to siphon off the Bund’s rank and file. On the whole, however, it drew its strength from its geographical breadth—in 1930 it had sixty chapters in fourteen states—and from the prominence of key members. Its New York leadership included elites and professionals such as Hermann Kudlich and Louis Ewald, who served as city magistrates. It sought high profile figures in other cities as well. In St. Louis, Congressman Richard Bartholdt, a German immigrant and outspoken opponent of prohibition, co-founded the local chapter. In Chicago, William Teichmann, a former consul to Germany, presided in the

\textsuperscript{183} Indeed, divisions appeared even within the ranks of the organization itself. “Remembering Our Founders and Our Past National Chairmen,” \textit{Steuben News}, March/April 2006.
1920s. The weight of such men augmented the Society’s legitimacy despite its relatively small membership.\footnote{Luebke, 58; on Bund membership, see Susan Canedy, 

It is also important to note that the Steuben Society operated at both the national and local levels. Theodore Hoffmann, who headed the organization from 1924 to his death in 1952, engaged in New York municipal and state politics, as well as those on the national scale. At times this quasi-federal structure proved to be a burden, as when local chapters rejected political endorsements and other directives from the national office. It could also prove beneficial, however, when the authority of local leaders defused crises caused by national and international pressures.

**The 1920s**

In its first decade the Steuben Society set out to compensate for German-American passivity during and after the First World War. An address by Carl Schmidt of Detroit, who served as honorary chairman of the organization after 1924, made this commitment clear.\footnote{Schmidt, the former police commissioner of Detroit, accepted the position of national chairman after much hesitation. According to the Steuben News, Theodore Hoffmann effectively ran the organization throughout Schmidt’s tenure from 1924 to 1934, at which time Hoffmann officially became national chairman. “Fights Hill or Dresel as Envoy to Germany,” New York Tribune, August 2, 1934.} During the war, he said, German-Americans had grown timid in...
the face of persecution and been rendered “undeserving of the protection of the laws.” In
the war’s aftermath, it was a “matter of duty” to “cast about for means, not of retaliation,
but of self-defense and self-expression.” The Steuben Society would fight to regain the
“respect to which every American citizen … is entitled.” While avowedly and
goingly political, the Society also established a presence in cultural activities, both to
lift ethnic Germans’ status among other Americans and to improve its own standing
within German communities.186

Like Viereck, the Steuben Society couched much of its early rhetoric in pluralist
terms. Memories of the war hysteria and of perceived Anglo dominance clearly formed
its thinking. The national chairman in 1922, Otto Stiefel, called on postwar America to
see the nation’s progress as depending on all ethnicities, and he specifically decried any
“openly proclaimed [or] thinly disguised attempt at dominance by any racial group.” In
1928 the Steuben News reprinted a German Day speech from Rochester, New York that
attacked so-called Americanization campaigns. It hailed German Day not simply as an
occasion for pride in Germany but as an “appreciation of the cultural endeavors of people
of other races who are and should be our friends in this great community.” Such a
celebration, it said, was the basis of “true Americanism.”187

The group’s aggressiveness sometimes contradicted its rhetoric. For example, in
1923 the Society sought a New York state law giving it partial control of the home of

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186 Address of Carl Schmidt, January 19, 1925. Reprinted in Steuben Day Banquet Program,
September 30, 1944, Newspaper Room, GSP.
187 “The Purpose of the Steuben Society,” American Monthly, April 1922; “Our Race
Revolutionary War General Nicholas Herkimer. Authority over such sites was integral to the goal of celebrating German-American culture. The Society desired joint custody with the home’s guardian, the Daughters of the American Revolution, which opposed the measure. Several failed attempts to push the bill drew the attention of the *New York Times*, which accused the organization’s officers of “breeding racial division.”

The teaching of history became another battleground. The Society joined with George Sylvester Viereck in condemning the Anglo-Saxon bent of school textbooks. In addition to the national council, chapters in Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis campaigned against anti-German bias in textbooks. One pamphlet criticized the “London factory” responsible for perpetuating “Knownothingism.” It also took aim at the French legacy, criticizing General Lafayette while arguing that textbooks overlooked General von Steuben. Another civic organization, the French Society of the Cincinnati, charged that the Steuben Society was determined to “dim the names and fame of every other patriot” in the glorification of its namesake.

The Society was similarly aggressive in its effort to exert political leadership over German-Americans. In the 1920s it understood this role in traditional terms, seeking to restore a mythical German-American voting bloc, as the National Alliance had purportedly done twenty years earlier. It joined forces with George Sylvester Viereck, who gave the Society regular coverage in the *Fatherland*, and with the German-American

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Citizens’ League of Chicago. Claiming to represent the “German-American vote,” these groups coordinated their endorsements of national candidates. In 1924 the Steuben Society publicly disowned both the Democrats and Republicans and promised to deliver six million votes to Progressive candidate Robert La Follette, as Viereck had allegedly done for Harding four years earlier.\(^{190}\)

But the promise was no more credible in 1924 than it had been in 1920. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* mocked the Society’s promise, arguing that even if there were six million self-identified German voters, the Steuben Society had no control over them. Indeed, one trait that the Society had inherited from the German-American National Alliance was the rebelliousness of local chapters. The organization’s own ranks protested the La Follette endorsement, and the complaints intensified when the national leadership tried to punish dissenters. An even more devastating blow came in mid-October when Charles Nagel, Viereck’s first choice as German-American leader, announced his endorsement of Calvin Coolidge. In the end, according to Frederick Luebke, ethnic Germans did constitute a “substantial portion” of La Follette’s constituency, but they were anything but unified, and their electoral power was clearly not decisive.\(^{191}\)

\(^{190}\) Among these collaborations was the short-lived “Committee of Ninety-Six,” a federated political organization led by Viereck and Edmund von Mach, one of the Steuben Society’s founders. “News of the Committee of 96,” *American Monthly*, April 1920; “Bürgerbund and Steuben Society Cooperate,” September 1922; “German-Americans Indorse La Follette,” July 1924; “Pledge La Follette Votes of 6,000,000,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1924.

David Maier, a Steuben Society officer who took over Viereck’s magazine in 1927, also took up the cause of uniting German voters. In editorials he urged German-Americans to assume a political role that matched their demographic strength. Meanwhile, the national council attempted to sway the German vote in 1928, coming out in favor of Democratic candidate Al Smith. Remembering the divisions of 1924, however, it called its position a “suggestion” rather than an endorsement, and its declaration still provoked internal protests. After failing again to elect a president, the Steuben Society abandoned the voting bloc strategy. By 1932, one prominent member was even willing to admit that a German voting bloc had never existed.

While it could not marshal national electoral strength, the Steuben Society was more successful in cultural and social efforts. Its most effective work was geared toward German language preservation. It opened a number of “Steuben schools” in the New York area to teach both the German language and “the ideals and works of the German writers and thinkers.” In Midwestern cities it created “Saturday schools” for teaching German. The Society also secured a prominent role in major social gatherings. It organized German Day celebrations in major cities and marched alongside the American Legion in holiday parades. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s its officers hosted welcome antiwar position in 1917 than to the Steuben Society’s endorsement. Nancy Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 248-251.


The Society also met some success in municipal politics, especially in New York. Generally aligning itself with the Democratic leadership in Tammany Hall, it regularly made recommendations for municipal and state-level judges. In 1926, incoming mayor Jimmy Walker courted the organization after it helped him defeat his predecessor, John Francis Hylan.\footnote{196} A year later, Walker appointed Louis Ewald, a member of the Steuben Society, as a city magistrate. The relationship continued until 1931, when a corruption investigation found that Ewald had acted improperly in awarding city contracts to other Society members. Despite Ewald’s downfall, the visible presence in New York and other localities lent the Steuben Society greater credibility in subsequent political battles.\footnote{197}
Another way that the organization tried to establish legitimacy was to create ties with Germany itself. First and foremost, this meant weighing in on foreign policy and showing solidarity with postwar Germany. Steuben Society members frequently talked about the Versailles Treaty, the “War Guilt Lie,” and continued oppression by the British and French. In 1924, when other organizations supported the Dawes Plan’s restructuring of German debt, Society leaders opposed it because they said the debt itself was based on invalid premises. In this stubborn ethnic nationalism the Society resembled Viereck and, like him, “mirrored” the nationalists in the Weimar Republic. At the same time, it sought to create direct connections to the German people. In 1930 it organized a “pilgrimage” to Germany in cooperation with the Vereinigung Carl Schurz (VCS). This Berlin-based organization, founded by German industrialists to encourage transatlantic commerce, maintained a program of cultural interaction, including student and academic exchanges. It hosted over 350 Steuben pilgrims who toured German cities, met with President Hindenburg, and celebrated Baron von Steuben’s 200th birthday. The Steuben Society, the VCS, and the German Foreign Office all hoped that they could establish a meaningful partnership. To maintain its ties to Germany, the Society planned to repeat the pilgrimage every five years.

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198 “The Aims of the Steubenites,” *American Monthly*, October 1928; Niel Johnson, *George Sylvester Viereck: German-American Propagandist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 113. During the Second World War, the Office of Strategic Services dismissed the idea that the Society was ideologically pro-Nazi, instead describing it as “strongly nationalistic.” OSS Memo, September 25, 1942, RG 226, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-302, NARA.

These strategies paid dividends. In October 1932 the Society’s stature helped it win leadership over the political portion of the First German-American National Congress. It used the Congress to rail against the Versailles Treaty and to encourage greater self-awareness. At the same time, the Society’s speakers advanced a number of progressive proposals, including a five-day work week, unemployment insurance, and government pensions. It went further the following year, calling for the creation of public banks and the nationalization of power plants, utilities and railroads, while expressing general agreement with Franklin Roosevelt’s policies. These stances likely stemmed from the Society’s previous support for progressives like La Follette, as well as from a desire to ingratiate the Society with the new president.\textsuperscript{200} In the course of the 1930s, however, foreign relations moved to the fore, forcing a transformation of the organization’s domestic agenda.

The Steuben Society and National Socialism

Given its ethnic nationalism, it is not surprising that the Steuben Society greeted the Hitler regime with enthusiasm. Here, too, it paralleled its counterparts in Germany who responded positively to Nazi propaganda regarding Communism and the Versailles

Treaty, while at least tacitly supporting anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{201} While not mentioning Hitler or Nazism, a Society representative at the Second German-American Congress in October 1933 stressed the importance of revising the 1919 peace settlement to resolve the “chaotic situation in Europe.” When given the choice, Society members preferred to avoid mention of Nazism while concurring with the new regime’s stated goals.\textsuperscript{202}

The Jewish-led anti-German boycott in the spring of 1933 forced the Steuben Society to take a more open stand toward the Hitler government. Its position echoed many of Viereck’s economic arguments, but the Society placed a greater emphasis on the specter of communism in defining its opposition to the boycott. One statement acknowledged the expulsion of Jews from public office, but it compared the action to the American spoils system and contended that it helped to stop communist infiltration. John Tjarks, the Society’s national secretary, made this point directly in an appeal to President Roosevelt. If the Jewish-led boycott caused sufficient harm to German businesses, he said, communism would infect Germany, “sweep Europe, and possibly go beyond.”\textsuperscript{203} It was therefore in the government’s interest to put a stop to anti-German agitation in the United States.

This position provoked a strong reaction. The American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, the leading boycott organization, publicly attacked the Steuben Society.


\textsuperscript{203} “Nazi Foes Warned by Steuben Group,” \textit{New York Times}, May 4, 1933; John Tjarks to Franklin Roosevelt, October 2, 1933, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 3274, NARA.
Samuel Untermyer declared that only an organization “completely under the influence of Nazi propagandists” could take such a position. But because of its standing in municipal politics and its aloofness from the infighting of the United German Societies, the Steuben Society generally maintained an image of neutrality in the battle between New York’s pro- and anti-Nazi forces. For example, Ralph Easley of the National Civic Federation argued that a solution to the boycott crisis could only come from “moderates” like the Steuben Society and the American Jewish Committee, which also opposed the boycott.204

A new controversy in the fall of 1933 strengthened the Society’s moderate image. On October 21, New York Mayor John O’Brien banned the city’s upcoming German Day celebration, which was to be sponsored by the United German Societies. After consultation with the Jewish War Veterans, the mayor said that pro-Nazi elements would use the event for propagandizing and that violence would result. In the end, he agreed to let a redesigned German Day take place, as long as it excluded the pro-Nazi Friends of the New Germany (FNG) and other “alien agitators.”205

The Steuben Society stepped forward to plan the new celebration. While reiterating his opposition to the boycott, chairman Theodore Hoffmann declared that the event would focus solely on “American institutions and American principles.” Acknowledging the “integrity” of the Steuben Society, the Jewish War Veterans removed their objection to the event. This endorsement, combined with the Society’s political weight, was enough to lift the mayor’s ban, and the German Day festivities took place in

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204 “Attacks Steuben Group,” New York Times, October 19, 1933; Ralph Easley to Raymond Moley, May 1, 1934, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 4729, NARA.

Madison Square Garden on December 6. With the aid of the White House the Society had secured the attendance of Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper and high-ranking officers of the U.S. Army and Navy. Admittedly, the tone of the event was not always “moderate.” Hoffmann introduced a resolution condemning O’Brien’s initial ban, and disruptions plagued the event, especially during an address by German ambassador Hans Luther. The fact that German Day took place at all, however, shows that the Steuben Society’s reputation enabled it to navigate through the increasingly intense ideological battles of New York’s ethnic community.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the 1933 German Day celebration was a rivalry between the Steuben Society and the Friends of the New Germany (FNG), the overtly pro-Nazi organization. There was a marked difference between the two groups. The former consisted mostly of Germans who had migrated in the late nineteenth century and who thus experienced the First World War from within the United States. The latter’s most prominent leaders had generally emigrated from the Weimar Republic. As a result, the Society better understood the need to balance support for Germany with assurances of Americanism, and it disliked the FNG’s open affinity for National Socialism. Their hostility stemmed not from their differences, though, but from their commonalities. The smaller Steuben Society and its older officers coveted the younger

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206 “German Day Fete Planned Anew,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1933; “German Day Plans Approved by Jews,” November 10, 1933. At Hoffmann’s request, Roosevelt’s secretary had first asked Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins to attend German Day. Perkins declined and suggested that it was “unwise” to associate the administration with a German organization. President’s date book, November 14, 1933, Day by Day Database, FDR; Correspondence in November 1933, File 198-a, Box 2, Papers as President, Official File, FDR; Cornelia Wilhelm, *Bewegung oder Verein? Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik in den USA* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998) 82-3; “Germans in Rally Heavily Guarded,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1933.

generation of immigrants that the FNG attracted. Both of them were based in New York, and yet both sought to lead German America on a national scale. They established chapters in major American cities to centralize organizational life on both the local and the national levels. This competition for leadership of German America, not differing views of Nazism, placed them at odds.

After October 1933 the two organizations grew increasingly antagonistic toward one another. Within a few months both groups considered themselves to be in a state of “war,” with the FNG calling it a battle for “moral leadership of German America.” Louis Ewald of the Steuben Society worked to exclude the FNG from the German-American Conference of Greater New York, and when he failed, he resigned from that group’s political committee. Joseph Schuster, an officer of the FNG, criticized the Steuben Society for its inability to “interpret” Hitler’s Germany to the United States, as well as its ineffectiveness in battling communism. In response, Gustav Wieboldt of the Steuben Society contrasted his organization’s Americanism with the FNG’s direct identification with Nazi Germany. Steuben members, he said, “deprecate[d] and disapprove[d] of any exhibition of foreign politics on our shores.”

This is not to say that mutual hostility was always the case. In Los Angeles, for example, the FNG apparently approved of the Steuben Society’s local president, Dr. Max Socha, since it employed illegal means to make him president of the city’s German-American umbrella organization. While leaders such as Gustav Wieboldt always forbade association with the Nazis, Carl Nicolay, a former Society officer, collaborated with the Nazis to the point that he faced treason charges after the Second World War. In addition, Cornelia Wilhelm has pointed out that several prominent Steuben Society members later joined the FNG’s successor, the German-American Bund. Bayor, 65-6; “Nazi Leader Here Seized in Munich,” New York Times, July 8, 1945; Wilhelm, 88; 205-9.  

At the same time that it publicly disavowed “foreign politics,” the Steuben Society was turning to the German government to rein in its rival. Theodore Hoffmann secured an audience with Adolf Hitler during a trip to Germany in November 1934. He warned Hitler that the recklessness of the FNG would only produce “new material for agitation against Germany.” While the German Foreign Office decided not to disavow the FNG, it did acknowledge the need for subtler tactics in the United States. But German officials had no illusions as to Hoffmann’s intentions. Hans Lammers, the State Secretary in the Reich Chancellery, suggested that Hoffman’s visit had more to do with the ongoing rivalry than with the German government’s interests.²¹⁰

Indeed, one can interpret Hoffmann’s entire trip as an answer to the FNG’s challenge to “interpret” Nazi Germany to the American public. On his return to the United States, Hoffmann enthusiastically described his experiences in Germany to the Society’s national council. He stressed a sense of confidence among the German people, emphatically denying the oppression of the Jews. He urged the Society to move forward with plans for a 1935 pilgrimage to Germany, with hundred of members signing up immediately.²¹¹

The pilgrimage, which took place from July to September 1935, was supposed to legitimize the Society as a transatlantic mediator. The Vereinigung Carl Schurz, now firmly in line with Nazism, hosted the visitors as it had done in 1930. The VCS sponsored a banquet for the delegates in Berlin, at which Theodore Hoffmann assured his hosts that the Society had come to “draw at the source regarding conditions in the New

Germany.” It would cultivate a “better understanding” of Germany within the United States, would battle anti-German propaganda, and would continue to oppose the boycott. The pilgrimage had ended a few weeks before the Nuremberg Laws disfranchised Reich Jews. This development brought no comment from the Society, although it criticized the anti-Nazi demonstrations that followed in the United States.212

By the end of 1935, the Steuben Society appeared to have gained the upper hand in the rivalry, if only temporarily. The German government ordered its citizens to leave the FNG, eliminating over half of that group’s membership. But despite the Society’s sympathy for Germany, its autonomy was an insurmountable problem for the Reich. The German Foreign Office now tried to inject FNG members into the Steuben Society to gain greater influence over the older, more American organization. When the Society successfully resisted the infiltration, the Foreign Office turned back to the FNG, over which it could exert greater control. The FNG reinvented itself as the German-American Bund in March 1936, grafting an ostensibly all-American image onto the former organization’s leadership structure. Led by Fritz Kuhn, the Bund secured a place in the contested German Day celebration in Madison Square Garden after 1936.213

As the Bund gained ground, the Society discovered that its efforts to strengthen transatlantic ties had raised concerns among American officials in Germany.

212 Address of the President of the Steuben Society of America, July 23, 1935, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 5077, Folder 1, NARA. “Hoffmann German Day Madison Square Garden Address,” *Steuben News*, November 1935.

Ambassador William Dodd, who had attended the VCS banquet in July 1935, was appalled by what he saw. Dodd noted the use of the Hitler salute among some Steuben Society members and took offense at the content of Hoffmann’s speech. After observing the event and having a “disagreeable” conversation with Hoffmann, he was convinced that the entire pilgrimage had been a Nazi propaganda stunt. From his perspective, the Steuben delegates “did harm everywhere they went.”

The campaign to “interpret” the New Germany also damaged the Society’s reputation in the United States. In response to Hoffmann’s first trip to the Reich, the New York Times printed an article on December 11, 1934 entitled “Steuben Society Veers to Hitler.” Recounting what it saw as Hoffmann’s “complete endorsement” of Hitler’s Germany, the article characterized the Society as a group of “citizens of German origin who have heretofore occupied the middle ground in the pro and anti Nazi disputes in our country” (author’s emphasis). The Society’s moderate image was slipping away.

To repair the damage, the Society turned back to the rhetoric of Americanism. After sharing the German Day celebration with the Bund for two years, the Society announced in 1938 that it would no longer do so. At the New York state council meeting in that year, Gustav Wieboldt emphasized the Bund’s foreign membership, adding that its ideology was “un-American” and “something that we should not stand for as an American organization.” Meanwhile, Theodore Hoffmann called on the national Steuben Society to “show where the great bulk of Americans of German extraction stand” by

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214 Dodd to Hull, July 26, 1935, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 5077, NARA; William Dodd Jr., and Martha Dodd, eds., Ambassador Dodd’s Diary, 1933-1938 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), 261-2; Dodd to Messersmith, July 31, 1935, Box 47, William Dodd Papers, LOC.
working to destroy the Bund.\textsuperscript{215} The message brought qualified praise from some quarters. In the \textit{Washington Post}, Westbrook Pegler commended the Steuben Society for its stand against Nazi subversion, although he encouraged the organization to make similar statements against Germany itself. Carl Wittke, perhaps the foremost German-American historian of the day, wondered why it took until 1938 for the Society to take even this qualified stand against the Nazis.\textsuperscript{216}

While the Steuben Society’s Americanism afforded it some protection, the Bund’s explicit pro-Nazism eventually destroyed the organization. High-profile testimony in front of the Dies Committee, such as the allegation that Fritz Kuhn claimed to have sway over German consuls, earned the Bund leader greater notoriety. The Bund’s rally in Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939 reportedly drew 20,000 attendees, but 100,000 protesters gathered outside. A few months later police raided the Bund’s headquarters in New York and, with the data collected, charged Kuhn with embezzlement. Kuhn appointed a successor and the Bund limped on, but its ranks diminished until its dissolution in December 1941.\textsuperscript{217} The Steuben Society thus outlived its rival, damaged by dealings with Nazi Germany but spared destruction because of its more credible image as an American organization.

\textsuperscript{217} “Says Kuhn Claims Power in Berlin,” \textit{New York Times}, September 30, 1938; Canedy, 196; 198-9; Rogge, 128-9; See Bund Commands 23-50, September 8, 1939 to December 2, 1941, RG 131, Box 5, NARA. Kuhn served a four-year prison term in Sing Sing Correctional Facility, was interned as an alien enemy until 1945, and was then deported to Germany. Wilhelm, 292.
Anti-Interventionism and Wartime

By the time the rivalry with the Bund ended, the Society had shifted its focus from “interpreting” Germany to battling interventionism. While Viereck worked with German propagandists, the Steuben Society attempted to present its stance in the light of its mission to protect American ideals. It highlighted the Constitution in its criticisms of Roosevelt’s foreign policy, frequently pointing out that Steuben’s birthday and Constitution Day were both on September 17. In a 1939 statement against revising the Neutrality Acts, the national council rejected the idea that the Executive Branch could designate aggressor nations and impose sanctions. This guardianship of the Constitution was to be testament to the Society’s Americanism.

Another strategy was to play up the un-Americaness of the Allies and interventionists. Hoffmann frequently argued that American intervention would only further the goals of British imperialism and Soviet Communism. Conrad Linke of Philadelphia, who later became national secretary, drafted a 1939 pamphlet warning Americans against meddling by London. In a section titled “The Redcoats Are Coming,” he accused the “mealy-mouthed and shifty-eyed” British of dictating U.S. policy. Echoing Viereck’s 1917 campaign, Hoffmann railed against “so-called ‘Americans’” who “dare suggest that we again become a colony of Great Britain.” At the same time, the Society continued to rail against communism to demonstrate its patriotism and

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218 Ronald Bayor has drawn a distinction between the Bund’s “pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic” motives for isolationism and those of other German-Americans, based on “ancestral ties and fears of an anti-German crusade.” Indeed, the fact that isolationists such as Viereck were paid Nazi propagandists does not mean that all German-American anti-interventionists were working for the Nazis. Bayor, 116.

219 National Chairman’s Message, Steuben Day Banquet, September 17, 1940, Newspaper Room, GSP; The 1939 statement is quoted in T.H. Tetens, “From the Record of the Steuben Society, 1933-1941,” July 6, 1942, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 3858, NARA, 12.
discredit its foes. It endorsed the Dies Committee’s investigation of Soviet sympathizers, for example, and it compared President Roosevelt’s actions to those of the USSR. In a 1941 speech against intervention, Hoffmann announced that German-Americans were against Nazism, Communism, and British imperialism. “They want Americanism,” he declared.²²⁰

This rhetoric did little to maintain the Society’s moderate image. A New York Times editorial took aim at Hoffmann’s proposal to raise $10,000 to fight British propaganda. “Our anti-Nazi sentiment has been produced by what the Nazis themselves have done,” it noted, not by the British. It suggested that the Society would be better served by focusing on its original mission of safeguarding German-Americans’ rights. Meanwhile, the German-American Congress for Democracy criticized Hoffmann’s proposal and emphatically denied that his organization represented the majority of German-Americans.²²¹

The Society suffered further damage from the actions of its local branches, which often operated less subtly and tactfully than the national organization. The secretary of the New Britain, Connecticut chapter sent Franklin Roosevelt a letter in October 1934 urging the president to resist the pressure of “American Judeas.” A poorly written


enclosure called for disfranchising American Jews if they did not end the boycott of Germany. In the fall of 1939, H.L. Klute of the Society’s California State Council sent an angry letter to the Assistant Secretary of State to protest the revision of the Neutrality Acts. Boasting that he could “make or break any [California] Congressman,” Klute admonished the Democratic Party to adopt an isolationist position. While the State Department did not seem to take these declarations seriously, such brazenness likely damaged the Society’s image on the local level.222

One of the largest chapters, Philadelphia’s Pastorius Unit, took a similarly blunt line in its “Steuben Ecke” (Corner) in the Philadelphia Herold. In November 1937, the “Steuben Ecke” accused the “Jewish controlled press” of preparing the public for war. As late as November 1941, when other German press outlets were assuming a low profile, the “Steuben Ecke” reprinted an America First Committee statement on “Lies Leading Us Into War,” such as the belief that Germany was a threat to the United States. The column attempted to display patriotism after December 7, but the Pastorius Unit lost this mouthpiece when the Treasury Department seized the assets of the Philadelphia Herold in early 1942.223

In the days immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Steuben Society tried to assert its patriotism through open displays of support for the war effort.

222 William Thiede to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 8, 1934, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 5077, NARA; H.L. Klute to Henry F. Grady, October 28, 1939, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Box 3282, NARA. See also the exchange between E. Bartholomaus and the Chicago Postmaster in December 1940, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 4917, NARA.
223 Significantly, the Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat, the city’s more mainstream German newspaper, had stopped printing editorials altogether by November 1941. “Are You Awake German Americans? Parasites Are Undermining You,” Philadelphia Herold, November 27, 1937; “Lies Leading Us Into War,” November 8, 1941; FBI General Intelligence Survey, April 1942, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 3162, NARA.
“Congress now having declared war,” Theodore Hoffmann insisted, it was the duty of all Americans to aid their country. The Steuben News began carrying announcements from the Office of War Information. The Society publicized lists of its members serving in the armed forces, and it received certificates from the Red Cross, the New York War Finance Committee, and other entities expressing thanks for its wartime contributions.224

But the onset of war also brought a new level of scrutiny from the federal government, which now reviewed the Society’s record as far back as 1935. For instance, officials in the State Department noted Ambassador William Dodd’s impressions of the pilgrimage to Germany in that year. At the same time, the Department received multiple reports by T.H. Tetens, a self-appointed whistle-blower who sought to unmask what he called he “pan-German conspiracy” in the United States. According to Tetens, every semblance of German culture in the United States, from the “forty-eighters” to singing societies, was connected to a conspiracy to expand the German empire across the globe. Tetens sent hundreds of pages of material to U.S. departments and agencies to show that the Steuben Society had long been an active agent of Nazism. He argued that the Steuben pilgrims’ meeting with Adolf Hitler on August 7, 1935 was “tantamount” to the Society’s appointment as Germany’s political representative in the United States. On its face, the charge was doubtful, given the German government’s preference for the FNG and the Bund. In addition, Tetens damaged his credibility by offering to sell his

224 “Yorkville Hushed as U.S. Enters the War,” New York Times, December 12, 1941; “The Fight Against Black Markets,” Steuben News, May 1943. A May 1943 list of sixty-nine members in the military bore the disclaimer that it was “far from complete.” The list and the Red Cross certificate were reprinted in the Steuben Day Banquet Program, October 2, 1943, Newspaper Room, GSP. An updated list of eighty-two members, as well as the certificate from the War Finance Committee, is in the September 30, 1944 Steuben Day Program, Newspaper Room, GSP.
collection to various government officials. But while the State Department questioned his motives and conclusions, it could not overlook the newspaper clippings and public statements that indicated a longstanding sympathy for the Nazi regime.225

The Office of Strategic Services tried to make sense of the Steuben Society’s record as well. An official who looked into the 1935 pilgrimage concluded that the trip had been “innocent enough” but that the “strongly nationalistic” Steuben Society had made itself a pawn of German propagandists. Other informants raised concerns, however. A contact in Milwaukee noted that pro-Nazi elements, recognizing the Society’s prominence, may have infiltrated its local unit. He suspected that even the unit’s leader harbored pro-Nazi leanings. Another observer found it troubling that, even after the declaration of war, the Steuben Society had never officially condemned Nazi Germany.226

The Steuben Society also faced scrutiny over its fundraising efforts. In 1940 it had worked with the Kyffhäuser Bund, an American organization for veterans of the German military, to send money to Germany, ostensibly for war widows. It also sent provisions to German prisoners of war in Canada and Jamaica. Admittedly, aid to

225 *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, October 20, 1935, 272; R.G. H. to Adolf Berle, May 17, 1944, RG 59, Box 3844, NARA; Tetens, “From the Record of the Steuben Society,” 3; Outline, “Kultur Conquered America,” Box 87, Tetens Papers. The State Department took Tetens even less seriously after the Office of Naval Intelligence decided that he was “deluded,” and after further communication it dismissed him as “a fanatic.” State Department memos on Tetens, June 3, 1938; June 14, 1938; July 6, 1938; and February 11, 1939, RG 59, Series 1930-1939, Boxes 4730-1, NARA.

German POWs was not unique to these organizations, but the Society’s connections to Germany naturally raised suspicions.  

Still another problem was the level of secrecy under which the Steuben Society operated. One OSS report relayed Tetens’s assertion that the organization kept its numbers in the thousands to be “discreet,” while placing its members in prominent positions in other societies. A report on the Pittsburgh unit in 1942 said that the local organization forbade its members from divulging membership numbers. In light of the war and the “obscurity in which the Society exists,” the OSS concluded, it was “absolutely necessary” to investigate it further. Two years later, an operative sent to the Society’s national convention found that the press and public were only allowed to attend introductory events, after which they had to rely on terse press releases. These policies further aroused the suspicions of the OSS and other agencies. 

Despite concerns, no government agency made a concerted effort to punish the Steuben Society. While the organization had sometimes acted amiably toward Nazi Germany, it did not open itself to charges of working as a foreign agent, as Viereck had done. In addition, as a politically minded entity the Steuben Society had never qualified for tax exemption. As a result, the government could not wield revocation as a wartime

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228 A letter written by Linke and Hoffmann in 1944 confirms this policy of secrecy. They said that they kept funding and membership confidential to conceal the “strength or the weakness” of the organization. Circular letter, November 22, 1944, Steuben Society Collection, GSP; Philip C. Horton to DeWitt Poole, July 10, 1942, Microfiche File INT-13 GE 335; P.G.H. Report Number 13, October 13, 1942, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-420; F. Roetter Report, September 12, 1944, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1215, RG 226, NARA. See also Tetens’s essay, “Traitors Wrapped in Stars and Stripes,” Part 4, Box 84, Tetens Papers.
weapon. The damage of the war years, then, came not from the government but from declines in donations and membership. Contributions plummeted to $4,625 in 1941 from $12,157.59 the year before. The Society’s lack of tax exemption added to financial hardship in light of high wartime taxes. Another growing problem was the unwillingness of the general membership to participate in Society affairs. In 1942, a frustrated Hoffmann wrote that “those of us who give unstintingly and unhesitatingly of our time … would be at least a little relieved if we did not worry about finances.” Two years later, the leadership defended a dues increase while criticizing members who attended meetings only once a year to “throw some pet idea into your lap.” It is apparent that the war had exacerbated the problem of inactivity on the part of the members. As a result, the national council was forced to downsize its staff, reduce salaries by a fourth, and cut its publicity budget in half.229

Still, the Society’s officers clung to the goal of asserting leadership over German America. In his 1944 convention address, Bernhard Hofmann of Milwaukee said that no other organization was capable of “bringing back the friendship between [Germany] and our own people in the United States.” It was up to the Steuben Society to oppose a harsh settlement and, more importantly, concessions to the Soviet Union. At a June 1945 board meeting on postwar activity, Conrad Linke expressed the need for all German organizations to unite behind the Steuben Society because it was “the only group with national recognition,” an assumption voiced by nearly every attendee. As a result of this self-image, society leaders expected the U.S. government to seek their input regarding

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229 Circular Letter from Theodore Hoffmann, October 15, 1942; and Circular letter from Theodore Hoffmann and Conrad Linke, November 22, 1944, Steuben Society Collection, GSP.
postwar plans.\textsuperscript{230} Given their record of hostility to the Roosevelt administration and their
earlier dealings with Nazi Germany, they could not have been completely surprised when
no such request came.

The Postwar Steuben Society

After the Second World War, the Steuben Society turned to raising relief funds
for Germany as an ostensibly apolitical activity. In late 1945, prominent members
founded American Relief for Germany, Inc. The new organization claimed to have no
affiliation with the Steuben Society, although it used the latter’s facilities for its founding
meeting. It contributed to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker
organization with a long history of collecting aid for German children. In 1946 alone,
American Relief for Germany collected $488,699 in money and clothing, over a third of
the total delivered by the AFSC. By October 1949, the Steuben Society was willing to
acknowledge its affiliation with American Relief for Germany, taking credit for the
group’s record in sending aid and publishing letters of thanks from German
schoolchildren.\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{230} Circular letter by Linke and Hoffmann, November 22, 1944; Minutes of meeting at the home
of Conrad Linke, June 5, 1945, Steuben Society Collection, GSP; Friedrich Roetter, Report to
OSS on National Convention of Steuben Society, September 1944, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-
1215, RG 226, NARA.

\textsuperscript{231} AFSC aid, in turn, went to the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany,
a clearinghouse for all private American aid to the German people. See Haim Genizi, \textit{America’s
1945; “A Steuben Message,” October 1949; Benefit concert announcements on April 22, 1946
and November 27, 1946; Letters from children in Austria, Bavaria and Harzburg, August-
September 1947, Steuben Society Collection, GSP.
The relief effort was part of a larger plan for political activism regarding postwar Europe. In a 1949 pamphlet, the Society said that its work had prepared it to pursue goals such as “equitable boundaries” for postwar Germany and preserving German industry. It argued that aid was the best way to increase its political strength. “The stronger our program of relief,” declared an American Relief for Germany pamphlet, “the more effective our voice in Washington.” It also hoped to speak out on behalf of the ethnic German “expellees” in Eastern Europe, whose numbers may have been as high as twelve million. These refugees were ineligible to receive aid from the newly formed United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and the 1948 Displaced Persons Act only allowed 27,377 of them to enter the United States. The Steuben Society and American Relief for Germany lobbied Congress to include Germans in future aid for displaced persons.232

But the Society’s past hampered both its aid effort and its political lobbying. The Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League criticized the American Friends Service Committee for taking funds from the Steuben Society, which it considered a pro-Nazi organization. It protested the Society’s use of relief for “political agitation” and pressured the AFSC to end the collaboration. While the aid continued, the mere participation of the Steuben Society had tainted the image of a major relief organization. Regarding expellees, the 1950 revision of the Displaced Persons Act doubled the quota of Germans allowed into the United States. That outcome, however, was the result of tense negotiations between

Catholic and Jewish relief organizations and likely occurred in spite of, not because of, the Steuben Society’s lobbying.\textsuperscript{233}

In other areas the organization’s postwar domestic platform was consistent with its prewar views. As before, the Society continued to merge Steuben Day and Constitution Day on September 17, and it called for curbs on the executive branch. In the 1950s it consistently supported variations of the “Bricker Amendment” to restrict the president’s treaty-making power.\textsuperscript{234} The real issue in these activities, of course, was ideological opposition to internationalism. Isolationist impulses of the 1920s and 1930s had now evolved into the rejection of any “World Federation” or “One World” schemes, including the United Nations. Moreover, despite its advocacy for Germany and European expellees, the Society reiterated its opposition to “any exhibition of foreign politics on our shores.”\textsuperscript{235}

A noticeable shift occurred, however, regarding the Society’s domestic policy. In the 1930s it had declared its support for progressive reforms such as social insurance and nationalization of certain industries and utilities. By the postwar period, however, it had moved to the right. Political platforms throughout the 1950s and 1960s took aim at the income tax, the welfare system, and federal funding for education. The free market rhetoric of the postwar era contrasted sharply with the organization’s stances in the

\textsuperscript{235} Hoffmann’s message in September 29, 1951 banquet program, Newspaper room, GSP.
The shift was largely the result of two main factors, both of which stood at the intersection of domestic and international issues. The first was hostility to Franklin Roosevelt. The organization joined many other groups and individuals, especially progressive congressmen, who supported the New Deal but broke with Roosevelt when foreign relations moved to the foreground. What was unique about the Steuben Society was that its anti-FDR position then filtered back from foreign policy to domestic politics. Arguments about the constitutionality of neutrality revision and Roosevelt’s foreign policy spread to fears of federal encroachment in general.

A second, related, factor was the Steuben Society’s anti-communism. If in the 1930s it admired Hitler’s stand against Bolshevism, by the postwar era it feared that Germany would be “destroyed, cut up, or delivered over to Communism.” It had remained critical of the British and the Soviets throughout the war and had expressed its resentment over collaboration with the U.S.S.R., especially at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. In the late 1940s it railed against the threat of subversion within the United States, later supporting Senator Joseph McCarthy. This longstanding ideological

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238 Friediger to Poole, November 7, 1944, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1267, RG 226, NARA; “Democratic Titles: Anachronist,” Steuben News, July 1942; “Russia Holds the Trump Cards,”
position, while now significantly amplified, was consistent with the organization’s earlier views. It provided a welcome distraction from the Society’s position toward the other “un-American” ideology, Nazism.

These factors worked in concert. Alignment with conservative Republicans on foreign policy terms in the late 1930s may have catalyzed a move toward more conservative domestic views. Similarly, emphasizing the threat of communist infiltration likely necessitated abandoning a commitment to nationalization and an expanded welfare state. If ethnic nationalism was the consistent priority, it is reasonable to assume that other issues could pivot around it.

While ethnicity remained central to the Society’s self-definition, after the war it turned away from its pluralist stance. Admittedly, the Steuben News continued to fight in the name of German America. In 1957 it criticized portrayals of all Germans as Nazis, which it blamed on Communist intrigue. In 1965 the editors lamented President Johnson’s refusal to create a national Steuben Day. In 1974 a two-page article decried the ongoing political immaturity of ethnic Germans, and in 1983 the National Chairman openly rejected the idea of assimilation, defending the mission of touting German contributions to America.²³⁹

While it defended German-American nationalism, though, the Society criticized that of other ethnicities. By the 1960s the Steuben News criticized what it called an “era

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of minority group activism.” It denounced politicians who played to ethnic groups, as well as groups that were too self-assertive. “We do not have to be told what the Americans of Germanic extraction have contributed,” it said. Another editorial added that, “like the English and the Scotch-Irish,” the German influence in America was so large as to be taken for granted, and yet German-Americans were happy to call themselves simply Americans. By 1984, a group that once sponsored German-language schools in New York even supported making English the national language of the United States.240 These sentiments were far cries from those of the Society’s founders in 1919.

The seemingly radical shift in the Steuben Society’s views indicates the extent to which ethnicity itself had changed. Compensating for its earlier ethnic chauvinism, the organization had given in to “conformist nationalism” after the Second World War. It fully embraced not only the patriotism that such a stance required but the identity of whiteness that arose alongside it. Like other “white ethnics,” the Steuben society voiced criticism of more recent immigrants and minority groups, contrasting the civil disobedience of the 1960s with “the German characteristics of self-reliance, personal sacrifice, and a capacity for hard work.” Similarly, a 1985 letter to the Steuben News proudly noted the absence of Germans on the nation’s welfare rolls. To borrow a phrase from Matthew Frye Jacobson, the Society was intent to show that German-Americans had “the right kind of hyphen.”


Conclusion

George Seibel had presided over the Steuben Society’s first national convention and was an officer of its Pittsburgh unit for fifteen years. In September 1940 he resigned from the Society because of its support for Wendell Willkie as president. In his resignation letter, he offered additional criticisms of the organization’s policies. He accused it of “looking backward in American politics” and being “one-sided about international affairs.” The national leadership, he said, should have retained its “progressive attitude” and publicly rejected Nazism.242

Seibel’s views provide a useful perspective for analyzing the Society. First, the criticism of “looking backward in American politics” is more accurate than Seibel probably intended it to be. The Steuben Society, like Viereck, had committed itself in the 1920s to the creation of a German-American voting bloc. That this mindset persisted in the 1930s is clear from unit leaders threatening politicians with a nonexistent “German vote” even after the national organization abandoned the strategy. The Steuben Society looked back to the National German-American Alliance, which itself looked back to a mythical period of unity and strength for ethnic Germans in America. That such an era never existed is less important than that the Society tried to restore it.

Seibel’s point about one-sidedness in international affairs is valid as well.

Dedicated to defending German-Americans after the First World War, the organization


242 “Why George Seibel Resigned from the Steuben Society,” September 27, 1940, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-302, RG 226, NARA.
sought ethnic unity under its own leadership, which it tried to legitimize by consortig with the German government. At the same time, its cultural affinity for Germany and its anti-communist stance fostered sympathy for the Hitler regime, which it courted in an effort to outflank its rivals. This strategy bore some fruit in the early 1930s, when many German-Americans greeted the “New Germany” with optimism, but became a liability as ethnic Germans and other Americans reacted with revulsion to developments under the Nazi regime. In the late 1930s, rather than repudiate its flirtations with Germany, the Society turned to isolationist rhetoric to prevent another war and the risk of another hysteria. That rhetoric outlived the war and left the organization in an anti-communist position that, conveniently, required no accounting for its earlier stance on Nazism.

As an organization, the Steuben Society fared better than did Viereck. The reputations of its members in localities, especially New York, enabled it to play a central role in German cultural activities. Its efforts to interpret the “New Germany” and prevent intervention necessarily failed in light of events in Europe and Asia. Because it did not enter into an official relationship with Nazi Germany, however, it was not punished for its lobbying efforts. Surviving the war with diminished numbers and funds, it retained a claim to ethnic leadership, but the focus was increasingly on race, not Anglophobia. In the postwar era of conformity, in spite of itself, the Steuben Society conformed.
CHAPTER 4:
“MARCHING WITH THE STRONGEST BATTALION”: THE RIDDER FAMILY AND THE ETHNIC PRESS

The press was the centerpiece of German-American community life. As immigration and bilingualism declined, however, so did readership. By the 1920s, mergers and failures claimed nearly three-fourths of the 800 German-American newspapers that had been operating in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{243} Naturally, those that survived competed for readers, and those that remained atop the hierarchy of German print culture desperately sought to protect their status. The best example of this dynamic, both because of its prominence and its bid to retain leadership, was the \textit{New Yorker Staats-Zeitung}. Its owners in the interwar period were the Ridder brothers—Victor, Joseph, and Bernard—who had inherited the paper from their father, Hermann, in 1915. Their greatest challenge was to respond to Nazism in a way that would maintain their position in German America.

Herman Ridder, the son of Catholic immigrants from Westphalia, was born in New York in 1851. After working in a series of clerical jobs, he founded two Catholic newspapers, the German-language \textit{Katholisches Volksblatt} in 1878 and the English-language \textit{Catholic News} ten years later. In 1880 he married Mary Amend, the daughter

of a rising New York attorney. The couple had three boys: Bernard in 1883, and twin brothers Joseph and Victor in 1886. At the same time that he began raising a family, Herman acquired stock in the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*. Founded in 1834, it was the nation’s oldest and most widely read German newspaper.244

The Ridder family’s leadership of the *Staats-Zeitung* began when Herman became the business manager in 1890. He also established himself in New York politics and society, joining elite social organizations and serving a term as treasurer for the Democratic National Committee. Victor and Bernard, who joined the paper in 1905, were similarly active. When the Great War began in August 1914, Herman worked to provide the German point of view, even coordinating some of his efforts with George Sylvester Viereck. The two publishers were, in the words of historian Reinhard Doerries, the “cornerstones of German-American propaganda” in the 1910s. In fact, the Germans favored Ridder because they considered his paper, which was nearly a century old, to be more credible than Viereck’s *Fatherland*. So valuable did the German government...

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consider the *Staats-Zeitung* that, when Herman Ridder faced bankruptcy in 1914, the
Foreign Office authorized up to $200,000 to pay his debts.\(^{245}\)

When Herman died on November 1, 1915, Victor took over as head of the
newspaper, having promised his father that he would sustain it at all costs. For over
thirty years he and his brothers fulfilled that pledge, steering the *Staats-Zeitung* through
shrewd business decisions. Irascible and coldly pragmatic, Victor alienated a number of
business associates, and decisions like his cutting of wages in response to personal legal
troubles spread discontent among his employees. Wedded as much to business concerns
as to ethnic nationalism, Ridder was among those Viereck derided as “professional
German-Americans.”\(^{246}\)

This is not to say that the family was uninterested in German America. Victor’s
promise to his father had, after all, been a pledge to defend the German element. The
brothers’ cultural activities are further evidence of their genuine identification with the
German community, and their views during the interwar period reflect the ethnic
nationalism seen in many other ethnic German leaders. Their response to National


Socialism, however, differed from that of Viereck and the Steuben Society. As Frederick Luebke has explained, publishers like the Ridders generally preferred a “covert strategy,” relying on subtle action rather than issuing demands and drafting political platforms that might alienate readers. Their opportunism in the face of Nazism blended business concerns with their ethnic affinities. Their story thus complicates, but does not entirely invalidate, the assertion of immigrant historian Carl Wittke that the German-American editor’s first priority was to make money.247

**Interwar Ethnic Leadership**

By 1920, a rivalry had developed between the Ridder family and Viereck. After Hermann’s death, Victor and Bernard Ridder denied that their father had associated with Viereck during the war, and the *Fatherland* editor suspected that the brothers had reported to the government on other German-Americans. Already suspicious of their wartime behavior, Viereck became enraged at the Ridder brothers in the 1920s. Along with the Steuben Society, the German-American Citizens’ League of Chicago, and the New York Liederkranz, Viereck endorsed Bernard Heyn as Warren Harding’s American ambassador to Austria. The *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* came out against the endorsement, and Victor Ridder met privately with Harding to support a different nominee. Viereck saw the move as an effort to sabotage his own political efforts. He

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247 This study thus argues that the difference between the Ridders and Viereck was as much one of tactics as ethnic nationalism. If this does not contradict the Ridder-Viereck dichotomy proposed by Luebke, it certainly complicates it. Frederick Luebke, “German-American Leadership Strategies Between the World Wars,” in Frederick Luebke, ed., *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 60-1; Carl Wittke quoted in Robert Paul McCaffrey, *Islands of Deutschtum: German-Americans in Manchester, New Hampshire and Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1870-1942* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 185.
lashed out at the Ridders and other journalists who pursued “selfish interests” at the expense of the ethnic German “movement.” Because of such meddling, he claimed, the *Staats-Zeitung* had “lost its peculiar value” as a staple of German print culture.²⁴⁸

Viereck’s wishful thinking was incorrect. In a time of decreasing German-language readership, the Ridders were expanding their publishing empire by buying failing newspapers. In 1920 the *Staats-Zeitung* merged with its largest rival, the New York *Herold*, changing the paper’s official name to the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*. The Ridders also extended their business concerns beyond German America, purchasing smaller non-German newspapers. This diversification proved invaluable as German print culture continued to decline as a whole. As for the *Staats-Zeitung*, its circulation fell from an estimated 150,000 readers before the First World War to about 80,000 in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴⁹

At the same time that Viereck was stepping down from the *Fatherland*, Victor Ridder was gaining in prominence. A longtime member of New York City’s Publishers’ Association, he frequently served as that group’s spokesperson. He chaired a committee on the printing trade for the Associated Press and was a representative of the American Newspaper Publishers’ Association. He served as a member of the Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America and co-founded the Catholic Committee on Scouting. Ridder also gained some prominence in New York politics. In 1921, Governor Nathan L. Miller

made him a co-commissioner on the State Board of Charities. By 1929 he chaired the State Board of Social Welfare. He also found a friend in Governor—soon to be President—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Crippled at age three by tuberculosis, Ridder spent his adult life on crutches or in a wheelchair. This fact made for mutual affinity between the two men, who joked about their maladies in private correspondence. In addition, Roosevelt saw Ridder as a medium for courting the German vote. Their friendship blossomed, despite the fact that Ridder was an ardent Republican, and in 1934 the president appointed him as city administrator of the Works Progress Administration.  

Victor Ridder’s breadth of activity also expanded within German America. Like Steuben Society officers, he and his brothers often appeared at social gatherings and in welcoming committees for German visitors. They made regular contributions to local German organizations, including the Goethe Society and the Friends of Austria. They served as officers in New York’s umbrella organization, the United German Societies, and Victor Ridder founded the German-American Conference to sustain the ethnic German community in the Depression.  


His leadership in the *Staats-Zeitung* and in New York placed Victor at the center of the German-American revitalization effort in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation invited him to join its Executive Committee and Board of Directors, and he remained active in that organization until after the Second World War. As president of the German-American Conference of New York, Ridder convened the First German-American National Congress in 1932, and he was the opening speaker the following year in Philadelphia. In the mid-1930s Louis Howe, President Roosevelt’s secretary, considered Victor Ridder the “leading German in America.”

**Responses to the Rise of Nazism**

Not surprisingly, the rise of National Socialism complicated Ridder’s position. Alongside personal views—which certainly contained an element of ethnic nationalism—Ridder had to consider his claim to German-American leadership and the need to maintain a broad readership for the *Staats-Zeitung*. He had to tread carefully among the ideological camps arising within and around German America. As a result, the next several years became a balancing act.

In the early 1930s the *Staats-Zeitung*, like other ethnic German commentators, expressed enthusiasm for a regime that could restore German honor. The editors had long been critical of the Versailles treaty and any disarmament settlement that they

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*Austria Form Society Here,* April 4, 1925; “Tribute on Radio to the Bremen Fliers,” April 15, 1928; “Goethe Society Is Formed,” May 6, 1929; “Victor Ridder, 77, Is Dead,” June 15, 1963. See the annual reports of the German Society of New York, Main Collection, GSP.

252 CSMF Minutes, July 19, 1930, Box 3, NCSA; “2. Deutsch-Amerikanischer Kongress,” *Philadelphia Herold*, October 14, 1933; Louis Howe to Arthur Morgan, May 29, 1934, File 42, Tennessee Valley Authority, Box 1, Papers as President, Official File, FDR.
considered unfair to the Weimar Republic. In 1933, as the paper praised incoming President Franklin Roosevelt, it reflected German-Americans’ optimism that Adolf Hitler’s new regime would similarly revitalize Germany. An editorial said that the Reichstag elections in March, which gave the Nazis and the Nationalist Party a majority, represented a mandate to carry Germany “back to calm and order, and to new stability and prosperity.” Subsequent articles followed Hitler’s campaign against “the communist terror.”

The newspaper did express ambivalence regarding the Nazis’ violent tactics. The editors cautioned that ongoing repression against political opponents would only strengthen the appeal of the radical left. They specifically questioned Hitler’s “politics of the iron fist,” calling the use of violence a “dangerous experiment.” At the same time, the editors gave Hitler the benefit of the doubt. They suggested that no “progressive and intelligent” nation would permanently submit to rule by force, and they doubted whether the Nazis would gamble with the goodwill of the international community. A few weeks later, the paper strained to reconcile more reports of violence with its continued optimism. An editorial assured readers that violence was temporary, a manifestation of the “teething pains of the Republic and the afterpains of the shameful treaty of

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Versailles.” Like elements of the public in Germany itself, the editors of the *Staats-Zeitung* attributed the abuses to fanatics, not to Hitler or Nazi ideology.  

Victor Ridder went to Nazi Germany in the spring of 1933, accompanied by Herman Metz of the New York German-American Chamber of Commerce, to observe conditions firsthand. Upon his return he wrote a series of accounts in the *Staats-Zeitung* describing his experiences. Ridder tried to strike a neutral, analytical tone. He spoke of greater enthusiasm among the German people but suggested that they would soon “sober up,” and he advised Hitler to bring non-party members into his government. Some installments avoided discussion of Nazism altogether, speaking instead of positive meetings with figures like Reichsbank Chairman Hjalmar Schacht and Ernst Hanfstaengl, the foreign press chief. On the subject of propaganda, Ridder admired Goebbels’s “clever” shaping of German opinion, but feared the creation of a “one-sided people.”

Ridder’s trip played well among German-American organizations. He received enthusiastic applause from the United German Societies of New York when he concluded his oral report by urging “some patience, some understanding and some optimism” regarding events in Germany. He received a similar response from a full meeting of the German-American Conference of New York, in which he “criticized where he felt criticism was in order, and praised what needed to be praised” in the New Germany.


His brother Bernard, however, was unabashed in his admiration for Nazi Germany. During a brief audience with Hitler, Bernard proudly declared himself to be “ninety percent Nazi,” telling the Führer that he disagreed with the anti-Semitic ten percent of the National Socialist philosophy.257

The Ridder brothers and the Staats-Zeitung also publicly opposed the anti-German boycott. Asked to speak at a protest meeting held by the American Jewish Congress in March 1933, Bernard Ridder drafted a speech denouncing the Nazis’ “excesses” against the Jews, which he attributed to a small group of fanatics who “warped the spirit of their party into individual acts of violence.” At the same time, he warned against Jewish leaders “fighting fanaticism with fanaticism.” After the meeting’s organizers refused to let Bernard deliver the speech, the Staats-Zeitung printed it in full. While subsequent editorials generally avoided further comment, the newspaper reported regularly on the boycott, the counter-boycott by some German-American groups, and the initial anti-boycott stance of the American Jewish Committee. The Ridders also criticized anti-Nazi protesters after a “mock trial” of Hitler in New York in the spring of 1934, an event the Staats-Zeitung considered “pointless” and “against the best interests of the [United States].” Like Viereck and the Steuben Society, the editors argued that actions like the boycott and the trial constituted intrusions into German internal politics.258

In addition to qualified praise of the Reich, the Ridder brothers fought several well-publicized battles with the Friends of the New Germany (FNG). The most famous was a 1933 encounter with Heinz Spanknoebel, the head of the FNG. According to Victor Ridder, Spanknoebel had visited his office in July of that year to discuss the content of the *Staats-Zeitung*. Brandishing letters from Robert Ley of the German Labor Front and Ernst Bohle of the Nazi Party’s Foreign Division, Spanknoebel said he was assuming authority over the German-language press in the United States. He then demanded that Ridder stop printing pro-Jewish articles. Forever afterward, Ridder proudly declared that he and his brother Bernard had told Spanknoebel to “get the hell out” of the *Staats-Zeitung* office. The Ridders’ story of the meeting led authorities to issue a federal arrest warrant for Spanknoebel for acting as a foreign agent without notifying the State Department. In October, before authorities could locate him, he departed for Europe on a German ocean liner. Subsequently, the Ridder brothers cited the fight with Spanknoebel as proof of their opposition to National Socialism.259

Another clash with the FNG took place within the United German Societies (UGS) in September and October 1933, after Mayor O’Brien banned New York’s German Day. Whereas the Steuben Society negotiated with the mayor to lift the ban, the

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Ridder brothers became embroiled in the internal conflicts of the UGS. Spanknoebel’s election as a UGS officer had triggered a walkout of Jewish and anti-Nazi organizations, but the Ridders remained, hoping to broker a reconciliation. But Victor Ridder refused to help plan German Day under these circumstances, instead advising Mayor O’Brien to uphold the ban. Surprisingly, the brothers still attended a UGS meeting on October 23 that protested the mayor’s action. The session devolved into chaos when Bernard Ridder decried the growing influence of pro-Nazi delegates, calling them “racketeers and gangsters.” The acting president of the UGS, an associate of Spanknoebel, accused the brothers of attending only to sabotage the meeting and had them escorted from the hall. Mayor O’Brien ignored the UGS’s protest, turning German Day over to the Steuben Society, and the Ridders were expelled from the UGS. In subsequent weeks Bernard Ridder met with the Commissioner General of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to report on Nazi activities in New York, explicitly connecting the FNG to the German government. At the same time, Victor Ridder was quick to dispel a rumor that he opposed the holding of any German Day celebration, printing a clarification of his position on the front page of the Staats-Zeitung.

The Ridders were employing a strategy similar to that of the Steuben Society vis-à-vis the FNG. Indeed, those who later accused Ridder of being a Nazi propagandist maintained that the Ridders’ fight with Heinz Spanknoebel was simply a matter of competition for ethnic leadership, not a clash over ideology. There is undoubtedly some

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260 See Chapter 3.
truth to that charge. The publisher of a well-established German newspaper with a large but aging readership likely felt threatened by the younger, more dynamic FNG, which was more successful in recruiting from among recent immigrants. In the long term, however, there are two distinct differences between the Ridder-Spanknoebel fight and the Steuben Society-FNG rivalry. First, the Ridders were much more successful in portraying themselves as anti-Nazis, thanks in part to Victor Ridder’s prominence in the journalistic world. Second, when the Ridders looked for government allies, they turned to the American government, whereas the Steuben Society sought aid in Germany. This decision left the former in a far better position as U.S.-German relations deteriorated.

Another contrast to the Steuben Society was the Staats-Zeitung’s separation of its international views from its position in domestic politics. When Fiorello La Guardia publicly denounced Adolf Hitler, the Steuben News attacked him, and the Society worked against his reelection in 1937. It also turned against Franklin Roosevelt when the president revealed his support for Great Britain and France rather than Germany. The Staats-Zeitung, in contrast, ignored La Guardia’s statements, endorsing his reform.

platform in 1937 and 1941. Victor Ridder, though a Republican, supported the president in 1936 and maintained a personal friendship with him.\(^{263}\)

Throughout the mid-1930s the *Staats-Zeitung* continued to report on violent episodes in Germany and on pro- and anti-Nazi demonstrations in the United States, events that drew the interest of readers across the ideological spectrum. On the editorial page, however, it eschewed such topics. In some cases the paper offered vague praise for Hitler’s successes, such as his renewal of unity or his revitalizing the economy. Although the editors criticized Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels for tactlessness and questioned the alleged class harmony in the Reich, the Nazis’ ongoing repression was a taboo subject. The only real statement on the matter was the occasional admonition to Americans to stay out of other countries’ domestic affairs.\(^{264}\)

The *Staats-Zeitung*’s reticence regarding Germany finally ended with *Kristallnacht* on November 9-10, 1938. “We protest the defamation of the German name,” the editors said, “by … those elements in the ranks of the party in power … who want to drag a great people into the mud of their sadistic meanness.” The editors now decried violence that, they finally admitted, was not the exception but the rule of Nazi behavior. The most immediate impact of this new editorial line was that the Reich banned the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*. Having staked a position, the newspaper tried

\(^{263}\) See the *Steuben News* editorial from August 1935. “German Voters Launch Move to ‘Beat La Guardia,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 7, 1937. Victor Ridder and his representative, Alfred Stedman, both met personally with Roosevelt in 1936. As late as 1940, the president invited Ridder to visit him at Hyde Park. Roosevelt also assisted Ridder in getting his son-in-law out of Germany in the spring of 1940. See the correspondence in File 3685, Papers as President, Personal File, FDR; and May 26, 1936 and October 8, 1936, Day by Day Database, FDR.

harder to cater to German refugees, triggering a rivalry with the Aufbau, a publication that had worked to acclimate refugees since 1934.265

Victor Ridder now saw the cost of remaining silent on Germany’s domestic affairs. He recognized the prospect of the American public “[turning] on the German-American element in the mistaken opinion that we agree with the harassment which is now being promulgated in Germany.” Now that the Staats-Zeitung had placed itself on record, Ridder made a series of public statements against racial strife in the United States, including a speech at an anti-Nazi rally in Madison Square Garden. Alluding to the anti-German hysteria of the Great War, he told a Jewish audience that German-Americans were again in crisis over the atrocities in their country of origin. He asked the audience to treat German-Americans as they themselves wished to be treated, including the end of “economic discrimination.” On November 22, 1938, Ridder joined Gustav Wieboldt of the Steuben Society and Congressman Hamilton Fish in a radio program entitled “German-Americans Answer Hitler.” In addition to decrying the Nazi regime, the program devoted considerable attention to criticizing the anti-German boycott. It also made the case for a distinction between Germans and Nazis, a precursor to the “soft peace” campaign during the Second World War266

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These belated, qualified disavowals of Nazism, along with the stories of the Spanknoebel incident and the Ridders’ expulsion from the United German Societies, helped Victor Ridder to cast himself as an anti-Nazi when the Second World War began in Europe. Drawing confidence from this secure position, Ridder and the Staats-Zeitung courted isolationists by criticizing the Lend-Lease Act and other moves toward U.S. involvement in Europe. In 1940, citing the third term issue and alleged German-baiting by the Democratic Party, the Ridder brothers supported Wendell Willkie for president. The Staats-Zeitung continued to reprint official stories from Transocean, the Reich’s news wire, and the editors even celebrated the demise of the Versailles settlement when Germany defeated France. Notwithstanding some criticism from anti-Nazi newspapers, however, the paper escaped suspicion.267

The imminence of American involvement in 1941 seems to have convinced the editors of the Staats-Zeitung once again to assume a low profile. As early as January of that year the paper toned down its criticisms of American foreign policy. The editors advised readers on December 7, 1941 to avoid discussing anything that might spark “misunderstanding.” Five days later, the paper issued an implicit denial of its long record of equivocation. An English-language message on the front page claimed that “the German-American element has always rejected Hitler.”268

After 1940 Victor Ridder and the Staats-Zeitung continued to act as advocates for German-Americans and German nationals, but did so in a non-confrontational way.

267 Victor Ridder even served as a Republican elector in 1940. Bayor, 115; 147; “Die Maske fällt,” Neue Volkszeitung, December 2, 1939; “Ist die ‘Staatszeitung’ Nazistisch?”, Aufbau, February 9, 1940.
268 Memo, January 27, 1941, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-21, RG 226, NARA; See the editorial in the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, December 7, 1941.
Ridder asked the State Department for an “official statement” on regulations regarding the sending of money to relatives in Germany, fearing that such gifts might be exploited as evidence of disloyalty. After the outbreak of war the *Staats-Zeitung* appointed an Alien Editor to answer readers’ questions and concerns. A new feature, “‘Enemy Aliens’ and Their Problems,” provided information on travel and employment restrictions and other issues facing German citizens in the United States. Catering to new arrivals, both the newspaper and its yearly almanac regularly provided information on registration and naturalization procedures. Within a month of the outbreak of war, Ridder helped to coordinate civilian defense volunteers and donations for the war effort from New York’s ethnic organizations.²⁶⁹

This activity placed the *Staats-Zeitung* in good standing with the U.S. government. The Office of Strategic Services consistently approved of the newspaper’s wartime content. One report said that it was “the outstanding and in a sense the only example” of a loyal German-American newspaper.²⁷⁰ In January 1942 Victor Ridder sent Paul Schwartz, the pre-Nazi German consul in New York, and Karl Spiecker, a former press official for the German government, to meet with members of the State Department. His representatives offered to help create propaganda to send to Europe, both in their editorials and in radio broadcasts. In exchange, they requested a government


²⁷⁰ Lithgow Osborne to COI, April 21, 1942, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-137, RG 226, NARA.
subsidy of up to $300 a week to aid the newspaper, as the war had cut deeply into its readership.\footnote{271}

Like their German counterparts in the First World War, American officials acknowledged the value and credibility of the Staats-Zeitung. Writing to the Office of War Information (OWI), John Cooper Wiley of the OSS Foreign Nationalities Branch said that the newspaper would be a “valuable instrument” for propaganda efforts both in Germany and among German-Americans. He had reservations, however, about the government subsidizing a private newspaper. The government also expressed concern about Victor Ridder, whose stances before the war had not always been favorable. While the government did not subsidize the Staats-Zeitung, the OWI did welcome Ridder’s participation in various publicity campaigns. The State Department also expressed satisfaction in August 1942 when Leo Bass, a longtime staffer of the newspaper and a “proven democrat,” secured editorial control. Government officials continued to speak approvingly of the newspaper’s content throughout the war, while Ridder continued to aid Red Cross and war bond drives. The balancing act was working.\footnote{272}

\textbf{Victor Ridder and F.W. Foerster}

Almost as soon as the United States entered the war, Americans both inside and outside government circles began looking toward the postwar world. “Hard peace” advocates tended to favor a punitive settlement with Germany; some officials, such as

\footnote{271 Harold Hoskins Memo, January 16, 1942, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-5, RG 226, NARA.  
Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, even favored a permanent division and de-
deindustrializing of German territory. German-Americans, meanwhile, generally joined the
“soft peace” camp that favored a more moderate treatment. Central to their argument
was a distinction between “Nazis” and “Germans.” Ethnic Germans from across the
ideological spectrum attempted to form new organizations to advance this “soft peace”
perspective. By entering into that debate, Ridder drew the attention of new critics, who
reexamined his careful positioning in the 1930s.273

While the Staats-Zeitung was acting cautiously, Victor Ridder threw himself into
the effort to create a new wartime German-American organization. This work advanced
several goals. First, associating with a government-sponsored organization would help to
secure his ethnic leadership. Second, a broad profession of German-American loyalty
would prevent hysteria and help to mask the earlier ambivalence of ethnic nationalists
like the Ridders. Third, such a group could begin advocating a “soft peace” for Germany
following the war.274

The first organization that appealed to the Ridder family was the Loyal Americans
of German Descent. Founded in July 1941, its officers included former Senator Robert

273 On the debate over Germany, see Michaela Hoenicke, “Know Your Enemy: American
Interpretations of National Socialism,” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill,
1998); Michael Beschloss, The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman, and the Destruction of Hitler’s
Germany, 1941-1945 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002). Scholars have essentially continued
this discussion in the so-called “Sonderweg debate,” which is in part an effort to place Nazism in
the larger context of German history. See Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht (Düsseldorf:
Droste, 1961), translated as James Joll, ed., Germany’s Aims in the First World War (London:
Chatto & Windus, 1967); and David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German
History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Jurgen Kocka, “German History before
Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg,” Journal of Contemporary History 23:1
(January 1988), 3-16.
274 Frank Bohn to John Cooper Wiley, December 2, 1941, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-48, RG
226, NARA.
Wagner of New York; George Shuster, a friend of Ridder’s and president of Hunter College; and Gotthilf P. Bronisch, a recent refugee. The Loyal Americans pledged to unite all German-Americans against Nazism and even to bring the “misled” back from their sympathy for Hitler. Following the outbreak of war, the organization was even more explicit in its anti-Nazism: “Whoever is not openly against Nazism is by implication for it. Americans of German descent must let their fellow citizens know … that they actively oppose Nazism.” In addition to making several pledges of loyalty to President Roosevelt, the group actively supported the Civil Defense program and worked with the Office of War Information to transmit anti-Nazi messages to Europe.\textsuperscript{275}

Victor, Joseph, and Bernard Ridder all added their signatures to the Loyal Americans’ “Christmas Declaration” in December 1942, which urged the German people to overthrow the Nazis. Rejecting Nazi ideology as a threat to German culture, the declaration also urged Germans in the United States to speak out against it. Broadcast by the OWI to the U.S. military and to occupied Europe, the statement also included the signatures of figures such as Babe Ruth, composer Walter Damrosch, scholar Reinhold Niebuhr, journalist William Shirer, and George Seibel of the American Turners, a German-American gymnastic organization.\textsuperscript{276}

The statement immediately brought attacks from “hard peace” advocates, including T.H. Tetens, the perpetual pursuer of a “pan-German conspiracy.” Working with F.W. Foerster, another refugee scholar from Nazi Germany, Tetens condemned all

\textsuperscript{275} G.P. Bronisch to Stephen Early, July 25, 1941, File 198a, Papers as President, Official File, FDR.

German-Americans as complicit with the Nazis. They even declared that German-American cultural organizations posed “the gravest danger to the very foundation of the United States of America.” In their view, the Christmas Declaration and the “soft peace” cause were nothing more than an attempt to advance “pan-Germanism.”

In March 1943 Tetens and Foerster wrote a pamphlet dedicated to exposing the pan-German conspiracy. They took direct aim at the signatories to the Christmas Declaration, charging that many of them had been “pan-German” and pro-Hitler until Pearl Harbor, and had waited to issue the Declaration until Germany’s defeat seemed likely. Rejecting the distinction between “German” and “Nazi,” Tetens and Foerster alleged that German-Americans from Baron von Steuben to the present had placed Germany’s interests first. The Steuben Society was now the “backbone” of the conspiracy, they said, supported by Victor Ridder and the 

*New Yorker Staats-Zeitung.* Furthermore, Ridder had relayed news stories from the Transocean News Service, which operated from within the Reich. Thus, the pamphlet concluded, Ridder himself acted as a Nazi propagandist “as long as he believed he could do so without danger.” The only way to be a truly loyal German-American, they argued, would be to assume a “hard peace” stance.

Victor Ridder did not take the accusation lightly. In a lengthy defense of his actions and of the *Staats-Zeitung,* he refuted several of the specific charges leveled by  

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277 Tetens and Foerster would have found vindication in an OSS informant’s statement that, since the Christmas Declaration, Germans in New York were more willing to talk openly about saving the “old country.” Stolper to Haskell, January 28, 1943, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-592; Carl Butts to DeWitt Poole, July 12, 1943, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-698; “P” Memo on Yorkville, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-484, RG 226, NARA; Outline of manuscript project, “Kultur Conquered America,” January 1944, Box 87, Tetens Papers; Tetens and Foerster, “Would You Sign This Letter?”, March 1943, Box 1, Tetens Papers, 25.  

278 Tetens and F.W. Foerster, “Would You Sign This Letter?”, 3; 10; 11; 12; 29-30.
Tetens and Foerster’s pamphlet. Trying to distance himself from the Steuben Society, Ridder erroneously claimed that he did not join the organization until 1938. He insisted that he dealt only with “responsible elements” in his local chapter and not with the Society’s national leadership. He also addressed the charge of being a Nazi propagandist, arguing that his paper was not unique in using Transocean releases. It simply cited them in the bylines of articles, whereas the New York Times, the World Telegram, and other New York newspapers used the German wire service without outward citations. Ridder also asserted—accurately—that Foerster and Tetens selectively cited the Staats-Zeitung, using quotations and printed speeches as evidence of Ridder’s own opinions. Their pamphlet, he said, was “‘Yellow Journalism’ in concentrated capsule size.”

Ridder tried using his connections at Columbia University, the Brookings Institution, and the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation to undercut any academic support for Foerster.

Ridder also filed a libel suit against Foerster and Tetens. Strengthening his case was the fact that Quentin Reynolds, credited as a co-author of the introduction to the anti-Ridder pamphlet, stated that he had never seen it. Ridder was confident of victory, writing openly of the case in the Staats-Zeitung and publicly declaring his willingness for a “large-scale fight,” while the co-defendants proceeded with similar aplomb. The pending trial polarized much of German America as various editors and public figures aligned behind the litigants. At the same time, however, friends on both sides pressed for

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279 In truth, Ridder joined the John Jacob Astor Unit of the Steuben Society, based in Long Island, in the fall of 1936. While this did not disprove his larger point about his involvement, it did hurt his defense in court. “Astor Unit, S.S.A., nimmt zehn neue Mitglieder auf,” New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, October 6, 1936; “Victor Ridder and Nine Other Candidates Become Steuben Members of John Jacob Astor Unit,” Steuben News, November 1936. For examples of quoting a speech as evidence of Ridder’s views, see Tetens and Foerster, “Would You Sign This Letter?”

280 Nizer, 290; Friediger to Braatoj, June 19, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1597, RG 226, NARA.
an out-of-court settlement, fearing that a high-profile case would exacerbate ethnic and political divisions within the United States.\textsuperscript{281}

American government officials likewise saw the case as a cause for concern. It represented an escalation of the “hard peace” versus “soft peace” debate that was playing out in American society and within the Roosevelt administration. A high-profile court battle might further inflame an already heated controversy. Of greater concern was the fact that Victor Ridder represented himself as the target of another anti-German hysteria that was at least tacitly supported by the government. Unlike George Sylvester Viereck, who took this tack after being shunned by other ethnic leaders, Ridder benefited from his stature in the German-American press. His stance would likely garner support among both ethnic Germans and partisan Republicans, something that the Roosevelt administration wanted to avoid. There was also evidence that Ridder’s plight resonated with other ethnic groups’ newspapers, whose editors feared that they, too, might become targets. Officials in the Office of War Information thus worked to effect an out-of-court settlement, and the Office of Strategic Services kept close tabs on the trial.\textsuperscript{282}

For all his bravado, Victor Ridder ultimately acceded to the pressure to withdraw his suit. The move was not a gesture of goodwill. As the plaintiff, Ridder had to


\textsuperscript{282} FNB Reports, August 27, 1943 and September 7, 1943, Microfiche Files INT-13 GE-780 and 781, RG 226, NARA. One OSS report noted that Rex Stout, author of the introduction to the anti-Ridder pamphlet, was a leading member of the War Writers Board, and friends of Tetens and Foerster frequently boasted of government backing. There were also reports that copies of their pamphlet had been mailed in franked envelopes. In addition, the OSS memo cited the great interest in the case among Hungarian and Polish nationalist newspapers. Report on Ridder’s libel suit, August 2, 1943, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-723, RG 226, NARA.
disprove the existence of a vague pan-German conspiracy, which one would be hard-pressed even to define. In attempting to disprove it he would undoubtedly have to draw attention to his connections to Germany, which would upset his carefully balanced prewar position. Furthermore, Ridder feared that if the defendants invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to take the stand, he could not technically prove which individual had made the libelous statements. To buy time, he had secured a postponement of the trial from June 14, 1943 to the following September, citing his deteriorating health. In October, claiming a “moral victory,” Ridder dropped the suit, to the relief of friends and at least a few government officials.283

The court battle had lent Ridder new prestige among German organizations that advocated a “soft peace.” In particular, he cultivated alliances with the German-American left, with whom he had always had a cool relationship. A conference of German-American labor organizations “loudly acclaimed” Ridder in November 1943, a sign of newfound solidarity in defending ethnic Germans against further attacks. Ridder subsequently worked with these groups and the Office of War Information to promote the United Americans of German Descent, dedicated to promoting democracy in—and reconciliation with—Germany. He even publicly refuted the arguments of Emil Ludwig, a strong “hard peace” advocate who called the UAGD a new “Germanophile front.” The

socialist *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, a longtime Ridder critic, called his response to Ludwig “the most gratifying thing that has appeared in the *Staats-Zeitung* in a long while.”

Foerster and Tetens, however, were not finished with Ridder. They interpreted his withdrawal of the suit as a sign of weakness and were undoubtedly well aware of the difficulty of disproving the pan-German conspiracy theory. In addition, they saw Ridder’s alignment with German left-labor organizations in a “soft peace” campaign as additional proof that such a conspiracy did exist. In the spring of 1945 Foerster sued Ridder on the grounds that his accusations of dishonesty and “yellow journalism” had been libelous. Louis Nizer, an accomplished lawyer and great admirer of Foerster, was so aghast at Ridder’s attempts to blacklist Foerster that he agreed to represent the plaintiff. A “hard peace” advocate, Nizer also saw the lawsuit as “a cause, not a case,” and hoped that a victory would enable further strikes against “soft peace” advocates and German ethnic nationalism. Ridder attempted a counter-suit, but eventually withdrew it in the vain hope that Foerster would do the same. An OSS memo noted that, while he had confidently publicized his own lawsuit in 1943, Ridder was now loath to draw attention to the case against him. He successfully minimized coverage of the trial, thanks to his position as an officer of the Associated Press. Tetens pointed to the “press blackout” as still further evidence of the conspiracy.

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285 Nizer, an advocate of removing German industry and exacting reparations, referred to “soft peace” in 1944 as the “sob-sister” plan. Nizer, *What To Do with Germany* (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1944), 190. Wheeler to Poole, October 7, 1943, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-815; Friediger to Poole, November 20, 1943, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-916; Friediger to Braatoy, June 21, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1600; Friediger to Poole, March 10, 1945,
In his opening statement to the court, Louis Nizer reminded the jury that the central question was whether Ridder committed libel when calling Foerster a liar. If Victor Ridder was in fact “the head of pan-Germanic propaganda,” then Foerster had told the truth, and Ridder was guilty. The burden of proof was thus once again upon Ridder to disprove the existence of a pan-German conspiracy. Nizer, who later acknowledged that the libel was “exceedingly thin,” developed a strategy for winning over the jury. Combing through fifteen years of the Staats-Zeitung and memorizing incriminating quotations, he would ask Ridder to state former positions and then present news articles that contradicted the defendant’s account. The effect of hundreds of such quotes would be to paint Ridder as both a pro-German partisan and a liar.

Before placing Ridder on the stand, the plaintiff’s attorney reminded the jurors that the Staats-Zeitung had collaborated with the German Foreign Office from 1914 to 1917. It argued that the Ridder brothers shared responsibility for the Staats-Zeitung’s editorial policies in the early 1930s, when the paper’s views followed the same line as German Foreign Office propaganda. It dismissed the Ridder-Spanknoebel fight as nothing more than a clash of personalities, noting that Ridder still worked alongside the Steuben Society and the Bund to celebrate German Day in New York in the mid-1930s. It argued that the Staats-Zeitung’s editors cheered Hitler’s actions, including his forceful annexations, as corrections of the unjust Treaty of Versailles. It established that Ridder


communicated with prominent Germans and German-Americans and that he had traveled to Nazi Germany in May 1933, where he met Hitler and Goebbels.287

The most damaging elements of the plaintiff’s case were those that linked Ridder to Nazi propaganda channels in the United States. Unbeknownst to the defense, the FBI had identified certain “black spots” in Ridder’s record and, while unable to provide documentation, had advised Nizer on how to cross-examine him. On the stand, Ridder admitted associating with Manfred Zapp, the U.S. manager of the Transocean News Service. In early 1941 the federal government had arrested Zapp for improperly registering as a foreign agent and had raided Transocean’s New York office. Nizer produced documentary evidence of payments from the _Staats-Zeitung_ to Transocean and revealed that some of the transactions had passed through the German embassy. Worse still, Nizer connected the defendant to Carl Guenther Orgell, a naturalized citizen who had distributed Nazi propaganda from the Reich’s Volksbund für das Deutschtum in Ausland (League for Germandom Abroad). Orgell, who also faced conviction for improperly registering, had shared Ridder’s office at the _Staats-Zeitung_.288

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287 Transcript of Ridder’s Testimony, Box 2, Tetens Papers; T.H. Tetens, “Pan-Germanism on Trial,” Box 1, Tetens Papers; Friediger to Braatoy, June 19, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1597, RG 226, NARA.

In other areas the plaintiff’s arguments were shaky. The fact that Ridder had traveled unmolested in Nazi Germany became proof that he was a Nazi. The fact that he traveled widely in German circles and among German-American organizations became evidence of pan-Germanism. Nizer interpreted Ridder’s goal of improving German-U.S. relations as pro-German sympathy because it would aid German foreign policy. The plaintiff made no attempt to define or describe the pan-German conspiracy mentioned in Foerster’s 1943 pamphlet. Nevertheless, presenting a decade-long record of ethnic nationalist statements and equivocations, including instances of praise for Nazism, gave the lie to Ridder’s carefully crafted reputation as an anti-Nazi.289

While the plaintiff’s case had its flaws, accounts of the trial suggest that E.L. Steckler, Victor Ridder’s attorney, handed the case incompetently. An OSS informant at the proceedings noted that Steckler “left much to be desired” and was “completely inferior” to Louis Nizer. Ridder, confined to a wheelchair and in visible pain, seemed “highly irritated throughout” and “did not give the impression … that he had much confidence in his case.” Indeed, one of the reasons that Ridder withdrew his counterclaim was his attorney’s lack of preparedness. When Nizer surprised Steckler by resting his case on the third day of the trial, Steckler informed the judge that he was not ready to proceed with his counterclaim. After being denied a postponement he withdrew

289 Opening Statement in Ridder Trial, Box 1, Tetens Papers; T.H. Tetens, “The Ridder Case and the News Blackout”; Nizer’s Closing Statement, Box 2, Tetens Papers.
the claim, and with no witnesses on hand he placed Victor Ridder on the stand for the defense.\footnote{Friediger to Braatoy, June 19, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1597, RG 266, NARA; Tetens, “The Ridder Case and the News Blackout in the American Press.” Nizer, My Life in Court, 307.}

Ridder’s hostility and evasiveness during cross-examination played directly into Nizer’s hands. Ridder declined to describe his duties as publisher of the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung. He refused to name any social organizations of which he was a member. He claimed only to have been a member of the Steuben Society in 1938 and 1939, but the plaintiff showed that he had been a member from 1936 to 1941. When asked about Bernard Ridder’s “ninety percent Nazi” statement in the spring of 1933, Victor denied that his brother had visited Germany, rather than trying to explain or disavow his actions. The plaintiff responded by presenting the Staats-Zeitung’s own coverage of Bernard’s trip and statements. While the plaintiff’s attorneys also dissembled in their account of the event, its exposure of Ridder’s obvious lie was highly damaging. Apparently recognizing the effect of his testimony, Ridder failed to appear in court for the second day of cross-examination, citing poor health. His lawyer, seeking a mistrial as a result, succeeded only in delaying the trial by a week.\footnote{Nizer’s Closing Statement. A minor example of this dissembling is that Nizer repeatedly claimed that Bernard Ridder had declared himself to be “100% Nazi,” where in fact he had called himself “90% Nazi,” explaining that the other ten percent opposed Hitler’s anti-Semitism. “Ridder gibt Erklärung für Reiches Stellung,” New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, June 25, 1933; Tetens, “The Ridder Case and the News Blackout in the American Press.”}

Louis Nizer’s closing statement, hailed by T.H. Tetens as a “forensic masterpiece,” walked the jury back through all the examples of Ridder’s pro-Nazi sympathy. In several places Nizer took considerable liberties. He attacked George Shuster, the president of Hunter College and former editor of Commonweal, who had
taken the stand as a character witness for Ridder. Shuster, a “soft peace” advocate, had
long criticized Hitler, but he had also made positive statements about the German nation.
Nizer seized on the latter statements as proof that Shuster, too, was part of the pan-
German conspiracy.\textsuperscript{292} Nizer also played on Carl Orgell, the convicted Nazi
propagandist. The truth—that Orgell was on the German payroll and had shared an
office with Ridder—would likely have been damaging enough. In Nizer’s depiction,
however, the sharing of an office became definitive proof that Orgell was merely the
titular head of the pan-German machine controlled by Ridder. Despite such logical leaps,
the plaintiff’s case was sufficiently persuasive. The jury, which deliberated as General
Dwight Eisenhower’s victory parade moved through the streets outside, made its decision
in under an hour. It awarded the maximum amount of $100,000 to Foerster, although
Ridder later managed to reduce the amount to $15,000.\textsuperscript{293}

When asked for their reactions, some prominent German-Americans were
unimpressed by the trial’s revelations about Ridder, which they saw as indications of
opportunism, not Nazism. Alfred Kierschner of the American Turners told an OSS
informant that readers of German-American newspapers shared the \textit{Staats-Zeitung’s}
ethnic nationalism in the early years of the Hitler regime. A “good businessman and
shrewd politician,” Ridder reflected his readers’ sentiments, changing his tone

\textsuperscript{292} To expose Shuster as a pan-Germanist, Nizer took quotes from his avowedly anti-Nazi book,
cite one example, he noted Shuster’s statement that “if Hitler … had not appeared, it would have
been necessary to invent him.” Shuster’s point, that Hitler played on building frustrations of the
lower-middle class, became, through Nizer’s lens, a declaration of the necessity for Hitler.

\textsuperscript{293} Friediger to Braatoy, June 21, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1600, RG 226, NARA;
Nizer’s Closing Statement; Tetens, “Pan-Germanism on Trial,” Box 1, Tetens Papers; Nizer, 344;
“$100,000 for Libel Won in Ridder Case,” \textit{New York Times}, June 20, 1945; “Takes 50,000 for
Libel,” July 7, 1945; “Award for Libel Reduced,” March 1, 1949.
accordingly when refugees presented a growing readership, and again when the United States entered the war. Ridder, he noted, was “always marching with the strongest battalion.” Gustav Faber of the *German-American* was equally unsurprised at his rival publisher’s actions. Pleased with the outcome, he told an OSS informant that “Ridder had to [learn] that he is not the only one that has a German-language newspaper.”

The Ridder brothers faced financial challenges as a result of the trial and declining readership. The *Staats-Zeitung’s* management had slashed wages to balance the budget, and within a week of the verdict Ridder made preliminary moves toward selling the newspaper. He informed Dr. Paul Schwarz, his representative in any sale negotiations, that he would not sell the paper to a Nazi, a Communist, or a friend of F.W. Foerster, and would be reluctant to sell to “Jewish circles.” Schwarz entered negotiations with a representative of Franz Bondy, an Austrian publisher who sought a media outlet to “Americanize” refugees in the United States. The deal collapsed after a great deal of haggling, possibly impacted by Bondy’s fears of a postwar pan-German movement.

In truth, the loss of the *Staats-Zeitung* would not ruin the Ridders. Through various publishing companies the family held substantial interests in the New York *Journal of Commerce*, the St. Paul *Dispatch* and the *Pioneer Press*, and a number of other journals and radio stations. Paul Schwarz estimated that Victor Ridder alone made about $500,000 a year through his other holdings. In the immediate postwar era,

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294 Memo of conversation with Gustav Faber and Alfred Kierschner, June 21, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1601; Memo on Faber, July 9, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1631, RG 226, NARA.

295 Bondy’s representative was an OSS informant, providing the government with a detailed account of the negotiations. Friediger to Braatoy, June 20, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1600; Memo, June 29, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1620; Friediger to Braatoy, July 18, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1646, RG 226, NARA.
however, Ridder began to relinquish his claim for ethnic leadership, focusing instead on his work for Catholic organizations and the Boy Scouts of America. Unlike other “professional German-Americans,” the Ridders, at least, had the luxury of diverse financial interests. If being leaders of German America had once been good for business, it had become a liability and was thus abandoned. The family liquidated its interests in the Staats-Zeitung in 1953, ending its ninety-three-year control of the newspaper.²⁹⁶

Conclusion

In addition to his attorney’s bungling, Ridder lost the suit because of his equivocation regarding Nazi Germany, not his alleged participation in a pan-German conspiracy. His initial statement against Tetens and Foerster actually had pointed to several factual errors. Ridder was never a leader of the Steuben Society, nor was that organization the pan-German “backbone.” In addition, Foerster had not shown that the Staats-Zeitung was, as his pamphlet claimed, “the organ of pan-Germanism.” In court, however, Nizer was able to turn Ridder’s long strategy of playing to ethnic nationalism against him. Persuaded by the evidence, one OSS informant left the courtroom with the firm belief that the Ridders had “demonstrated by their acts and publications a split of loyalty between the United States and Germany.” Although Ridder had not been shown

to be involved in a pan-German conspiracy, his pro-German activities, undoubtedly combined with wartime emotions, led the jury to decide against him.297

It is important to note that Victor Ridder’s “split of loyalty” had been a conscious business strategy. In an era of declining readership, Ridder stretched the Staats-Zeitung to accommodate as broad an audience as possible. “Marching with the strongest battalion,” in Alfred Kierschner’s phrase, meant playing to Germany’s sympathizers in the 1930s while offering mild criticism of Nazi “excesses.” After December 7, 1941, it meant hushed political commentary and active support for the war. By the summer of 1945, Ridder even struggled to appeal to German refugees, advocating a “non-German point of view” that alienated some of the newspaper’s staff and invited criticism from the Steuben Society. The legal defeat precipitated yet another departure by the “shrewd businessman”: withdrawal from German-American leadership altogether.298

This analysis leaves an obvious question unanswered. Given a demonstrable record of pro-German sympathy, how did Victor Ridder escape criminal prosecution in a time when the federal government actively employed the Foreign Agent Registration Act against those suspected of being Nazi propagandists? George Sylvester Viereck had connected the German Foreign Office to the isolationist movement, resulting in his imprisonment and the political destruction of his friends in Congress. Ridder, meanwhile, had maintained a relationship with the Transocean News Service, which the

297 “100,000 for Libel Won in Ridder Case,” New York Times, June 20, 1945; Friediger to Braatoy, June 20, 1945, and June 21, 1945, Microfiche Files INT-13 GE-145 and 146, RG 226, NARA.
U.S. government considered a Nazi propaganda arm, as late as 1940. Moreover, the FBI’s aid to the Foerster’s attorneys in the libel trial suggests that at least one government entity had serious concerns about him.

The irony of Ridder’s story is that his prominence in German America likely protected him in a period of heightened suspicion. Franklin Roosevelt had courted Ridder as a means of appealing to New York’s Germans. During the war the government, whose propaganda touted American pluralism, repeatedly attested to the loyalty of the German element, and Ridder had quickly shed his earlier ambiguity, working with the Office of War Information and aiding bond drives. Taking action against this publisher, whom Roosevelt’s secretary had considered the “leading German in America,” might incense the *Staats-Zeitung’s* 50,000 readers, alienate members of other German organizations, and kindle fears of potential repression among other ethnic groups. The realities of ethnic politics thus constrained the wartime Roosevelt administration, just as the realities of war constrained ethnic Germans. For the FBI, at least, supporting Foerster’s lawsuit against Ridder was the safest way to take action against a man who, if not for his prominence, might have faced criminal charges alongside Viereck in 1942.299

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299 See the correspondence with Ridder in File 3685, President’s Personal File, FDR Papers. The *Staats-Zeitung’s* readership remained above 50,000 as late as 1954. “Park Row Area Losing Last Newspaper,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1954.
CHAPTER 5:
“AGAINST ALL FASCIST TENDENCIES”: THE GERMAN LEFT AND ANTI-NAZISM

In contrast to established organizations and individuals who sought accommodation with National Socialism or tried to establish nuanced stances, German-American organizations on the political left quickly and vigorously declared their hostility to the “New Germany.” They believed that the only effective way to defend German culture was to differentiate it from Nazi perversion. Older groups, such as workers’ singing societies, mutual aid organizations, and press organs joined new umbrella groups dedicated to this cause. Their strategy made for easy alliances with like-minded Jewish and non-German organizations, and those that consistently voiced anti-Nazi rhetoric avoided suspicions of disloyalty. At the same time, however, these groups joined other German-American societies in facing the hard realization that personal, regional, and ideological differences impeded broad national organizing.

German-American socialism’s roots extended back into nineteenth-century Europe. A large number of skilled German workers and socialists came to the United States in the aftermath of the 1878 Anti-Socialist Law in Germany, as part of the peak phase in German immigration. They brought with them the disagreements that subdivided the European left, especially those who claimed adherence to Marxism.

300 Portions of this chapter appeared in Gregory Kupsky, “‘We, Too, Are Still Here’: German-Americans in St. Louis, 1919-1941,” Missouri Historical Review 103:4 (July 2009), 212-225.
Perhaps the most important division was between those who sought the overthrow of the capitalist state and those, like the Lassalleans, who envisioned a “state socialism” in which the state underwent democratization rather than destruction. These newcomers swelled the ranks of American socialist organizations in the United States, such as the U.S. branch of the International Workingmen’s Association and the Socialist Labor Party. Hartmut Keil’s studies of Chicago have demonstrated that the city’s trade unions in the 1880s were led by socialists, the majority of whom were Germans.301

The generation of socialists who arrived in the 1870s and 1880s remained connected to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and other leftist groups in Germany. Keil has shown that correspondence, transatlantic travel, and a constant flow of new editors from Germany helped to sustain the German-American radical press and its intellectual connections to its land of origin. As with non-socialist immigrants, these first-generation editors resisted Americanization. The subsequent generation, however, began adapting to American ideals, including some writing and speaking in English, to broaden the appeal of their political efforts. In municipalities like Chicago and Milwaukee they tended to eschew revolutionary politics, settling into reformist coalitions with other groups, especially after the Haymarket Riot in 1886 caused a backlash against perceived foreign radicals. On the national scene, too, turn-of-the-century German socialists were far more likely to join Eugene Debs’s new Socialist Party than the more

radical Industrial Workers of the World. At the same time, their newspapers linked ideological strength to ethnic strength. Editorials dripped with nostalgia for German culture.  

The most important event shaping the contours of the interwar American left was the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The left wing of the American Socialist Party largely adopted the Bolshevist line, including its literal definition of a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The more conservative faction, led by figures such as Milwaukee’s Victor Berger, remained committed to “social democracy,” seeking economic and political equality within the existing political system. During the 1920s, individuals and organizations shifted, merged, and re-divided, but the left ultimately settled into two camps. The American Communist Party (CPUSA) fell fully into line with the Soviet Union, while socialists, including the Socialist Party, worked to prevent defections to the CPUSA on their left and liberal Democrats on their right.  

Within this context one can follow the trajectory of the German-American left by following the interplay of central groups and individuals. This chapter will focus on three entities: the socialist Neue Volks-Zeitung, which included exiled SPD member as editors but maintained an old-line socialist readership; the Deutschamerikanische Kulturverband (German-American League for Culture), which increasingly aligned with the Communist Party; and the constellation of wartime “loyalty” groups that competed

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for leadership of non-Nazi Germans. The relationships among these entities changed a great deal from the 1920s to the 1940s, largely as a result of the Communist Party’s shifting attitudes toward coalition building. For the moderate left, combating Nazism became a way of protecting not only German America but Germany itself. These cases also show the ways that the German left faced dual challenges of defending both a fading ethnic identity and, after the Second World War, a receding political left.

The *Neue Volks-Zeitung*

As a German-language socialist organ in the United States, the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* had its origin in the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*. The older paper, founded in 1877, had advanced the principles of German socialism among American workers, including setting up German-language schools and collaborating with the Brewery Workers Union. While class was ostensibly the central concern, its editors espoused ethnic nationalism, believing that German traditions were the only appropriate basis for socialist reform. The paper affiliated with Debs’s Socialist Party in 1900, but it focused its appeals on German immigrants in an effort to retain its ethnic character. One editor explained that the key to building a socialist readership was for “the German workers in and around New York [to] feel that they have no truer friend than the … Volkszeitung.” By providing German-language news alongside its political writings, the Volkszeitung hoped to draw readers away from mainstream outlets like the Ridders’ *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*. Despite resistance from larger competitors—the Staats-Zeitung forbade its newspaper carriers to
handle the socialist paper—the Volkszeitung increased its readership through the 1920s.\footnote{\textsuperscript{304}}

As was the case for the American left in general, the Bolshevik Revolution brought new divisions. Ludwig Lore, the editor of the Volkszeitung, had been the most influential German in the Communist Labor Party and, after 1921, the American Communist Party. Expelled by the Comintern in 1925, he survived at the paper until 1931, when its growing socialist faction forced his resignation. The newspaper’s readership rose above 20,000 during Lore’s tenure, although it went out of business within a year of his departure. After a brief competition with other offshoots, the Neue Volks-Zeitung inherited the goals and reputation of its predecessor. Its readership of just over 20,000 was less than half that of mainstream German-language papers such as the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, the Philadelphia Gazette-Democrat, or the Chicago Abendpost in the 1930s. It did, however, outperform counterparts in heavily German cities like Cincinnati and St. Louis, and its advertising suggests that its readership stretched as far as the Midwest.\footnote{\textsuperscript{305}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{304}} Buhle, 41; “Wie die ‘New Yorker Volkszeitung’ entstanden ist,” Neue Volks-Zeitung, December 17, 1932; December 24, 1932; and January 7, 1933; Robert Cazden, German Exile Literature in America, 1933-1950: A History of the Free German Press and Book Trade (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), 21-2; 32; 33.

“A German workers’ paper is an absolute necessity,” declared the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* in its inaugural edition on December 17, 1932. An editorial pledged to unite German workers—and all workers—in the ideas of socialism as defined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. From the depths of the Great Depression it assured its readers that social democracy was “the only way out of the afflictions of capitalism.” The editors never defined “social democracy,” however, as the newspaper sought to appeal to as broad a collection of leftist ideologies as possible. The editors called for greater welfare legislation, criticized the “backward” tactics of the American Federation of Labor, and dismissed schemes such as the “buy American” campaign as capitalistic props. Acting as an umbrella for workers’ groups, the paper provided column space for the Naturfreunde, which was a socialist sporting organization, and the Workmen’s Sick and Death Benefit Society, which had over 50,000 members in the 1930s.

The early issues were quick to emphasize the difference between socialism and Bolshevik communism. The *Volks-Zeitung* explained that, while the Bolsheviks imposed the will of a supposedly enlightened minority on unenlightened masses through force, the socialist movement worked for the enlightenment and “self-liberation” of all workers through democratic means within the existing state. At the same time, the paper assured its readers that it was not attacking communism, reflecting an ongoing desire to preserve a tenuous alliance across the ideological left. For a period it succeeded, drawing editors and contributors such as Otto Sattler, editor of the far-left *Solidarität*. Sattler’s

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307 In German, the term used to describe the AFL was “Rückständig.” “Die Convention der AFL,” *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, December 17, 1932; “Krisennot und Arbeitslosen-versammlung,” December 17, 1932; “Buy American,” February 11, 1933; Cazden, 22.
communist leanings later alienated him from the German socialists, who criticized the Communist Party as energetically as the Nazis.\footnote{308} In addition to “older” German-American socialists, the paper’s editorial board received an influx of new refugees in the 1930s, especially members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Hitler’s hatred of the SPD originated in 1919, when members of that party signed the Versailles Treaty. In turn, the SPD rejected the Nazis’ placing race before class and their rejection of conventional politics, and SPD officials had worked in vain to suppress the Nazi movement during the Weimar period. The Enabling Act of March 1933 made it possible for Hitler’s regime to suppress the SPD, forcing many of its leaders into concentration camps or exile.\footnote{309}

Upon arriving in the United States, several SPD members affiliated themselves with the \textit{Volks-Zeitung}. The most prominent was Gerhard Seger, who had escaped from the Oranienburg concentration camp and immigrated in 1934. He assumed the editorship of the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} in 1936 and directed the paper until its closing in 1949. A later arrival was Friedrich Stampfer, who had edited \textit{Vorwärts}, an SPD publication in Berlin. Forced to leave Germany in 1933, he periodically visited and spoke in the United States on the dangers of Nazism before moving to New York in 1940. He was a major contributor to the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} until 1948, when he acquired a journalistic position in

\footnote{308} “Sozialismus und Kommunismus,” January 21, 1933. For a biography of Sattler, see Cazden, 27 n. 21.
Frankfurt.\textsuperscript{310} Figures such as these allied the paper with the SPD-in-exile and, after the war, with the restored SPD in West Germany.

Some German-Americans were unhappy with the exiles’ increasing control. As Robert Cazden has noted, the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} retained much of its older German-American socialist readership. This earlier generation of immigrants resented the quick transfer of authority to newcomers. Their discontent increased as SPD politics became dominant in the pages of the \textit{Volks-Zeitung}. One reader wrote an angry letter to another publication to express his displeasure: ”With the words, ICH BIN EMIGRANT, [the refugee] sets himself above everyone else and no one contradicts him… He speaks of unity [but] means his own party and its hangers-on.” Despite such criticisms, the older readership remained alongside the new until after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{311}

Throughout the 1930s, one issue upon which the old and new clientele found common ground was unequivocal opposition to National Socialism. Even before Hitler’s accession to power, the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} warned that this “demagogue” was a tool of capitalism who intended to destroy the movement for social democracy. It frequently printed reports of corruption and other wrongdoing by Nazi officials, intensifying this effort after Hitler became chancellor in January 1933. In an editorial in April of that year, Otto Sattler explained that the new regime was not just bad for Germany: “German fascism will be seen abroad, especially in America, as a danger to the world, but it will

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\textsuperscript{311} Cazden, 32-3.
also cause all of Germandom to be mocked and reviled.” The true bearers of German
culture were to reject openly the race baiting and “barbarism” of Nazism. In addition, the editors of the Volks-Zeitung spent the 1930s reassuring themselves and others that anti-Nazi sentiment was building within Germany and that a revolution was inevitable.

Now that the democratic machinery in Germany was gone, the paper declared, the goal should be “revolutionizing the masses until the collapse of the Hitler regime.” Exiled and underground elements of the SPD were to provide leadership for a future resistance movement, while Germans in the United States were to join the boycott movement to pressure the German people to rise against the Nazis. In addition to destroying a government they saw as evil, SPD members also anticipated the strong position that this stance would give them in Germany after Hitler’s demise.

The Volks-Zeitung was also quick to criticize those German-Americans who supported National Socialism either openly or tacitly. The Ridder brothers and the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung became a frequent target. The Volks-Zeitung’s editorials accused its competitor of being a Nazi mouthpiece, citing its appeals to ethnic nationalism. They also echoed the charge that Victor Ridder was an opportunist. A political cartoon in May 1933 depicted the Staats-Zeitung as a sailboat, with the caption, “We sail with every wind: business is business.” The socialist editors attacked Bernard Ridder for his “ninety percent Nazi” statement and Victor Ridder for his continued affiliation with the United

German Societies after its cooptation by a pro-Nazi faction. Similarly, the bourgeois Steuben Society came under attack for its refusal to criticize the Third Reich.\footnote{Hitler Propaganda der NY Staatszeitung,” Neue Volks-Zeitung, April 22, 1933; “Neugierige Ridder-leser wollen gar, viel wissen,” May 13, 1933; “Wir segeln mit jedem Wind: Geschäft ist Geschäft.” May 13, 1933; “Ein 90 prozentiger Nazi,” Jul 1, 1933; “Ridder als Friedensmengel,” September 30, 1933; “Und die Deutschen in USA?”, September 9, 1939; “The American Scene,” September 21, 1940.} A 1934 column criticized the Third German-American National Congress for opposing the anti-Nazi boycott movement, which the Volks-Zeitung fully supported. For years thereafter, the Volks-Zeitung juxtaposed its own anti-Nazi consistency with the cloudy records of others.\footnote{Warum Boykott gegen Hitler-Deutschland?”, Neue Volks-Zeitung, August 26, 1933; “Boykott und Gegenboykott,” April 28, 1934; “D-A Kongress, Steubengesellschaft und den Boykott,” June 16, 1934.} Its clear record of opposition to Nazism also gave it an advantage when a division inevitably occurred with the communists. For a time in the mid-1930s, however, a new umbrella organization held the socialists and the communists in a tenuous alliance.

**The Deutschamerikanische Kulturverband**

Officially convened in New York on September 23, 1935, the Deutschamerikanische Kulturverband (German-American League for Culture) planned to represent German cultural societies that “oppose[d] fascism as a matter of principle.” It comprised mostly left-leaning groups like the Arbeiter Kranken- und Sterbekasse (Workmen’s Sick and Death Benefit Fund), workers’ singing societies, and local and national labor organizations. Heavily influenced by the Communist Party, the new organization reflected the CP’s international “Popular Front” strategy, seeking a broad, nonpartisan anti-fascist membership that included moderates, older immigrants, and recent arrivals. A co-founder, Otto Sattler, connected the new organization to the Neue
Volks-Zeitung. In addition, affiliation with the Action Committee of German Progressive Societies of Chicago gave the Kulturverband access to the pages of that group’s new publication, the Volksfront. The commitment to a united left is evident in the fact that the new organization elected Gerhard Seger, the socialist editor of the Neue Volks-Zeitung, as its president in 1934.  

In the Volksfront and in other public statements, the Kulturverband set two overarching goals, both of which were served by opposing Nazism. First, it linked the new German regime to the excesses of capitalism. A message in the inaugural issue of the Volksfront emphasized the need to fight “Nazism in America and all fascist tendencies.” In the United States, it targeted supporters of Hitler as well as “Fascist money-makers who attempt to lower our standard of living … and [limit] the right to organize and to strike.” Thus, anti-Nazism accompanied a strong pro-labor agenda. In addition, rallying German-Americans against the Nazis was a way to protect the ethnic community from accusations of disloyalty. In its German Day resolution in 1936, the organization expressed the fear that “popular resentment against Nazi usurpation [might] develop into a general anti-German sentiment.” To prevent this outcome the group committed to “anti-Nazi work” and pledged to “safeguard the cultural achievements for which pre-Hitler Germany was recognized.”

Almost immediately, the Kulturverband began to suffer from socialist-communist tensions. Gerhard Seger resigned as president when he realized that the communist members planned to mold the group into a CP front organization. Otto Sattler became president after Seger’s resignation, and the former’s presence at the socialist *Neue Volks-Zeitung* steadily diminished. Meanwhile, the Chicago-based *Volksfront* declared itself the official publication of the Kulturverband without authorization from the New York headquarters. The communist leadership in Chicago increasingly held sway. The divergence from the socialists at the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* increased in subsequent years, although for a time the socialist paper continued to advertise Kulturverband meetings and events.\(^\text{318}\)

Despite some disagreements, the Kulturverband’s programming closely resembled that of the socialists. A major goal of the *Volksfront* was to provide Americans with a more accurate picture of events in Nazi Germany. While groups like the Steuben Society perceived an anti-German bias in news reporting, the Kulturverband decried information provided by Germany’s Transocean News Service and the mainstream media that depicted a prosperous, harmonious Third Reich. It reprinted reports of the Socialist International, the Social Democratic Party in Exile, and other groups within Germany to provide firsthand accounts. Citing these reports, the *Volksfront* highlighted food shortages, arrests of dissidents, and a growing disparity of wealth. It reported on illegal strikes and evidence of resentment, arguing that most Germans distrusted their government and objected to measures such as the Nuremberg

\(^{318}\) Cazden, 44-5.
Thus, like the *Volks-Zeitung*, it distinguished the German nation from the German state, advancing the view of a non-Nazi and non-anti-Semitic German people.\(^{319}\)

While the reports from within Germany evinced what one scholar has called a “wishful optimism,” they also betrayed a frustration with German apathy. At the same time that it played up evidence of resistance, the *Volksfront* expressed its frustration that the German people had not begun a mass movement against Hitler. Like the *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, the Kulturverband tried to assure itself and others that an active resistance movement was biding its time. A speaker at a 1938 meeting told the audience that small pockets of disaffected Germans were searching for an opportunity to rise against Hitler. The meeting telegraphed President Franklin Roosevelt, suggesting that a public statement might convince the German people to act, as Wilson’s Fourteen Points had supposedly done twenty years earlier.\(^{320}\) This effort to bolster the image of a non-Nazi Germany continued into the 1940s when it became the basis of the “soft peace” campaign.

In addition to printed statements, the Kulturverband organized anti-Hitler demonstrations throughout the United States, hoping that such displays would encourage discontent in the Reich. Its first public event was in New York on December 15, 1935, a rally that drew 5,000 people. The meeting’s theme, “Hitler Is Not Germany and Germany Is Not Hitler,” had clear implications for the defense of German culture on both

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sides of the Atlantic. The Kulturverband refused to participate in New York’s German Day celebration under the auspices of the United German Societies, instead organizing its own anti-Nazi versions beginning in 1935. Unlike conservative and moderate German organizations, the Kulturverband supported the boycott movement and worked with Samuel Untermeyer and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, believing that economic pressure would encourage the German resistance. After Kristallnacht in November 1938, when moderates like the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung finally began to criticize the Nazi regime, the Kulturverband stepped up its own rhetoric, calling for an economic embargo on the Reich.  

The organization devoted an equal amount of attention to fighting Nazism in North America. The Volksfront lambasted German-Americans who refused to criticize Nazi Germany or who expressed ethnic nationalism. One of its most eloquent editorials, an assessment of the Reich on its fifth anniversary in 1938, directly attacked such people. Five years of Hitler had brought only “hunger and chains,” it said, yet ethnic Germans who abhorred Nazi beliefs and tactics still defended Hitler’s “ultimate goals,” the restoration of German strength and standing in the world. But was a country strong if it sacrificed the well-being of its citizens in the name of rearmament? Furthermore, the editors said, Germany had not restored its standing. The world now despised a political system that had “catapulted a great civilized nation … into medieval barbarism.” It

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argued that publicly expressing disapproval of Nazism would aid the resistance in Germany and demonstrate the loyalty of German-Americans.\footnote{322 See “Deutschland-Berichte,” Volksfront, December 1935; January 1936; “5 Jahre Hitler – Und wo steht Deutschland heute?”, January 15, 1938.}

One of the Kulturverband’s most important activities in the United States was active opposition to the German-American Bund. In the spring of 1936 the Volksfront reprinted articles from the pro-Nazi Deutscher Weckruf to show its readers that the Bund, ostensibly an all-American organization, was nothing more than a reconstituted version of the Friends of the New Germany. The Volksfront also compiled lists of Bund members and of businesses that advertised in Nazi publications, encouraging Germans throughout the country to avoid them. The Kulturverband even sent a personal appeal to Roosevelt to investigate the Bund and its leader, Fritz Kuhn.\footnote{323 “Die Reorganisation der Nazibewegung in Amerika,” Volksfront, April 1936; Aus der Chicagoer Nazibewegung,” April 1936; “Die ‘Bürgerzeitung’ unter Nazileitung,” April 1937; See the lists in Folder 9, German-American League for Culture Collection, Special Collections Library, University of Illinois, Chicago; Julius Hochfelder to Franklin Roosevelt, March 15, 1937, File 198a, Box 2, Papers as President, Official File, FDR.}

The leaders of the Kulturverband were not content merely to warn of the Bund’s presence, however. They undertook several direct efforts to isolate and destroy it. One officer, attorney Julius Hochfelder, filed multiple legal complaints against the Bund, asserting that it had improperly registered for incorporation in the state of New York. He also attempted to have the government cancel Fritz Kuhn’s citizenship papers. His legal measures failed, and at times his aggressiveness brought criticism. For example, the organization sued a storeowner for displaying a German Day advertisement that allegedly
misused the American flag. A city magistrate reprimanded the Kulturverband for targeting the storeowner instead of the Bund, which had printed the flyer.  

Local economic pressure proved a more effective anti-Nazi tool than did lawsuits. Perhaps the best illustration of this effort is the case of St. Louis in 1937. The Friends of the New Germany, and subsequently the Bund, had established a stronghold in the city’s large German community throughout the 1930s. The local chapter rented a meeting hall, purchased a clubhouse in the suburbs, paraded in Forest Park, and established a summer camp for German youth in nearby Stanton, Missouri. It even marched its youth organization into a meeting of the German Press Club, an umbrella organization, to intimidate other groups. So impressed was the Bund’s leadership with these developments that it planned to hold its national convention in St. Louis on November 20 and 21, 1937.

In the pages of the Volksfront, the Kulturverband warned against the proposed convention. It helped coordinate an opposition movement through its affiliated organizations in St. Louis, which included the “Vorwärts” singing society, the Workmen’s Sick and Death Benefit Fund, and the German Liberty Union. These groups demonstrated against the event and threatened to boycott local venues if they hosted the Bundists. The effort began to bear fruit in early November when the German House,
which had agreed to host the convention, canceled the Bund’s reservation and announced that it was “booked indefinitely.” The Bund postponed the convention by a week and moved it to the Oakville Farmers’ Club, but on November 24 that venue, responding to protests, also refused to house the meeting. Similar pressure convinced the Liederkranz Club to cancel a Bund luncheon. The Bund had no choice but to abandon plans for its convention. Furthermore, the bad press convinced the St. Louis office of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation to evict the Bund from its meeting hall for being an “undesirable” tenant. The Volksfront rejoiced that “the star of the Nazis, who had previously regarded St. Louis as their stronghold, is falling.” To celebrate the victory, the Kulturverband held a convention of its own in St. Louis on February 4, 1938 and thereafter continued to cultivate anti-Nazi sentiments in the city.326

The national office of the Kulturverband conducted similar campaigns in other cities, announcing in February 1937 that it would sponsor any German Day celebration that excluded pro-Nazi groups. In Los Angeles it went a step further, hiring an airplane to dump leaflets over the Bund-sponsored German Day celebration the following October. In Philadelphia, the local chapter wrested control of the “German Hour” on local radio from Hitler supporters. In October 1938 it organized a demonstration of 5,000 in Chicago to protest the German annexation of the Sudetenland, an event that dwarfed

the nearby rally of 200 Bund members. It also allied itself with the Zentralverband deutschstämmiger Vereine (Central League of German Organizations), a Wisconsin organization that engaged in similar anti-Nazi activities. The Volksfront enthusiastically reported that group’s efforts to expel Nazis from the state’s German communities.327

The Kulturverband began its decline in 1938 with the further alienation of the socialists and the domination of the communists. The final split between the two factions occurred at a national convention in Chicago in May 1938. The proceedings reveal the extent to which regionalism and ideology hampered the national organization. The overwhelmingly communist leadership of Chicago played up concerns that the national office in New York was too absorbed in local activity to act as an effective leader of the organization as a whole. As a result, they argued, the headquarters should move to Chicago, whose position in the Midwest made it a better center for coordinating German-American organizations. The New York leaders, jealous of their own authority and fearing communist dominance, strenuously objected. They proposed, as a compromise, regional centers in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. The Chicago faction held a majority of the executive committee, however, and delegates from other cities deferred to Chicago in the name of organizational unity. When Rudolf Brandl of New York declined

the position of treasurer in protest of the planned move, the Chicago leaders gained total control of the committee. 328

As a result of the shift to Chicago, the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* declared open hostility toward the Kulturverband and the communists. It decried the “dictatorial” means through which the executive committee moved the Kulturverband headquarters and eschewed democratic decision-making. Especially critical of the Communist Party’s increasing grip on the organization, one editorial reminded readers that “a Popular Front cannot be a Party front.” The *Volks-Zeitung* began to encourage non-communists to leave the Kulturverband and even publicized a few resignation letters from prominent Germans. Rudolf Brandl, who had represented the New York faction at the May convention, joined the *Volks-Zeitung* in disavowing the umbrella organization. He undertook a campaign to expose the Kulturverband’s links to Moscow, summarizing his arguments in an incendiary pamphlet in 1940. His writing, which attempted to expose communist influence in a diverse array of German societies, helped to inspire the Tetens-Foerster campaign against “pan-Germanism” after 1942. 329

The communist-aligned Kulturverband soon suffered, as did the Communist Party, for its response to the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact in August 1939. When the Kulturverband—which had supported the anti-Nazi boycott and called for embargoes against Nazi Germany—began to advocate neutrality in the fall of 1939, some members

329 “Volksfront oder Parteifront?”; “Das Lage in Kulturverband;” and “Wozu nach Chicago,” *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, May 21, 1938; “Noch ein Brief an den DAKV,” February 17, 1940; “Noch Einer,” March 9, 1940; Tetens’s enthusiastic underlining in his copy of the pamphlet, along with similar themes and targets—including Victor Ridder—indicate his approval of the pamphlet. See Brandl, 16-24.
disassociated themselves. Despite the earlier withdrawal of the socialists, some non-communists had stayed in the Kulturverband, believing that it was worth preserving as long as “a small group in the leadership … [was] willing and determined to fight for the cause of democracy.” The new pro-neutrality stance, however, was the last straw. The Neue Volks-Zeitung now launched fresh attacks, pointing out that only the socialists had consistently opposed both Nazism and Stalinism. The ideological contortions among other groups even enabled the Volks-Zeitung to group the communist Kulturverband and the anti-communist Steuben Society together in its diatribes against newly minted isolationists. The loss of both readers and credibility drove the Volksfront out of business by December. The Kulturverband hobbled on into the war years, and traces of it appeared in newspaper coverage of local anti-Nazi and “Victory” demonstrations, but as a national organization it was finished. Even the Office of Strategic Services, which had been keeping tabs on communist elements, lost interest in the Kulturverband, although it followed former members as they made their way into new umbrella organizations.330

Wartime Anti-Nazi Organizations

In addition to the ideological shift in August 1939, another reason for the Kulturverband’s decline was increasing competition. After the fall of 1938, growing numbers of German-Americans—such as the Ridder brothers—adopted openly anti-Nazi

stances, ending the virtual monopoly on anti-Nazi rhetoric by leftist and Jewish groups. Even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, rivalries in ethnic leadership spilled over into competition within and among anti-Nazi umbrella groups. From the center, the Loyal Americans of German Descent—which later issued the Christmas Declaration against Nazism—included members like the Ridders, whose stances on Nazism had been ambiguous. The Loyal Americans competed with the German-American Congress for Democracy, although the two flirted with a merger for years. Meanwhile, the left-leaning Association for a Free Germany rejected latter-day anti-Nazis, admitting only those “whose devotion to democracy dates from pre-Hitler days.”

Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 swung the communists back to an anti-Nazi position six months before the United States entered the war. Divisions between communists and socialists remained, however, as German-Americans scrambled to form wartime loyalty organizations. Former Kulturverband officers, including Erich von Schroetter and Otto Sattler, helped to establish the German-American Emergency Conference (GAEC) in the spring of 1942. Communist-dominated, the GAEC reached out to kindred groups in other countries, including the “Freies Deutschland” movement in Mexico City. It also reached out to important Jewish cultural figures like anthropologist Franz Boas and composer Walter Damrosch. In Chicago, Schroetter and others on the far left established the Anti-Axis League, which persisted in trying to wrest German Day from groups that it considered pro-Nazi.

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Socialists, especially the editors of the *Neue Volkszeitung*, lined up against the GAEC and the Anti-Axis League, refusing to collaborate with groups that, like the Kulturrevenue, were communist-led. These ideological differences, when combined with clashes of personality, guaranteed that efforts for a wartime umbrella organization faced challenges as great as those in the revitalization movement of the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{332}\)

The U.S. government was anxious to lend its support to the constellation of new organizations. After the Coordinator of Information became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in 1942, COI personnel dedicated to war propaganda moved into the new Office of War Information (OWI). The OWI set out to organize a national “loyal” German organization in the United States. Such an organization, working in conjunction with the OWI, could help to assuage fears of anti-German hysteria and help to create propaganda for use in occupied Europe. Meanwhile, the intelligence-minded OSS had its own plans for ethnic Germans. Its Research and Analysis Branch made extensive use of German émigrés, who produced analyses of the Reich and later drafted denazification policies.\(^ {333}\) Its Foreign Nationalities Branch (FNB) provided a wealth of information on left-leaning organizations, in part because its director, DeWitt Clinton Poole, was vehemently anti-communist. In 1943 Poole’s staff also began to organize German immigrants and refugees to aid postwar planning. The FNB wanted an entity that could act as a counterweight to the National Committee for a Free Germany, an organization of German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union. Poole had already begun preparing for an

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ideological competition in postwar Germany. Thus, both the OWI and the OSS closely followed developments among the new anti-Nazi organizations, trying to identify an appropriate vehicle for their own plans.

The OWI and the OSS quickly came to understand the frustrations of German-American leaders themselves. In October 1942 the OWI convened a meeting of twenty-three representatives of German societies to discuss the creation of an umbrella organization, usually referred to as the United Americans of German Descent (UAGD). In the OSS’s estimation, the meeting brought together a diverse ideological array, including six or seven communists, five socialists, and several centrists, including Victor Ridder, whose legal troubles had not yet begun. Ridder personally saw to the exclusion of the Steuben Society, whose record he saw as a liability. In the end, despite the OWI’s confidence that it was “ironing out the dissensions,” old problems resurfaced. First, social democrats, including the editors of the Neue Volks-Zeitung, withdrew their support because they argued that communists were dominating the proceedings. Next, Ridder withdrew after T.H. Tetens, F.W. Foerster, and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League began their campaign to expose him as a Nazi propagandist.

As Christoph Mauch has detailed, the Office of Strategic Services faced similar problems in its efforts to convene a meeting of German refugees. The German Labor Delegation, which represented the more conservative faction of the German Social Democratic Party,

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334 Mauch, 61; 73-89. On the National Committee for a Free Germany, see Heike Bungert, Das Nationalkomitee und der Westen: Die Reaktion der Westalliierten auf das NKFD und die Freien Deutschen Bewegungen 1943-1948 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997).
had approached the State Department to discuss forming a “Council of Free Democratic Germans.” Such a group could help to establish a democratic Germany after the war. While Adolf Berle was loath to offer official backing to any exile group, he quietly consented in the fall of 1943 when the Foreign Nationalities Branch of the OSS decided to back the Labor Delegation.  

Unfortunately, ideological and personal divisions proved an obstacle for both the Germans and the FNB. The exclusive Labor Delegation set itself at odds with “Neu Beginnen,” a rival that sought a larger ideological coalition. Within the OSS, the Foreign Nationalities Branch preferred the former, while the left-leaning Research and Analysis Division favored the latter. Both groups initially courted Thomas Mann, hoping that his prominence as a refugee intellectual would bridge their differences. Ultimately, however, the communist-wary FNB sabotaged the merger by intimating that Mann’s selection was an effort at cooptation by “Neu Beginnen.” Mann’s eventual withdrawal—combined with his own “hard peace” statements—eliminated the prospect of creating a credible “Council of Free Democratic Germans” with OSS backing.  

Despite the diminishing prospect of U.S. government support, wartime German-American and refugee groups continued to seek input into planning for postwar Germany. As with the Steuben Society, each hoped to demonstrate its credibility as a national organization. The result was intensifying competition. In 1945 the United Americans of German Descent played up the OWI’s role in its formation, despite the fact

336 Mauch, 81-3; Bungert, 98-100.  
337 Mauch, 82; 84-5.
that the government no longer showed any interest in the project. Groups that had spoken hopefully of a revolutionary movement within the Reich were still trying to convince Americans of their connections to an anti-Nazi underground. The *Neue Volks-Zeitung* cited the exiled SPD members on its staff, for example, while the Council for a Democratic Germany tried to assemble a broad ideological spectrum of refugees to act as a “shadow cabinet” in representing non-Nazi Germany. Unfortunately, these groups’ obvious lack of connection to any open resistance in Europe, especially the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, sapped their credibility. Perhaps the best illustration of their ignorance is the *Neue Volks-Zeitung’s* reaction to the July 20 plot, which it initially viewed as a ploy by Hitler to justify another purge.

Amidst the competition, the left united with other German-Americans in calling for a “soft peace.” Even as the war in Europe drew to a bitter end, the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* continued to insist on the presence of an active anti-Nazi resistance within Germany. Like other “soft peace” advocates, it drew a distinction between “German” and “Nazi” to argue against the “enslavement” of the vanquished Reich. The German Labor Delegation, representing the Social Democratic Party, printed an official position on postwar Germany in March 1945. It drew its credibility from the fact that its members had been “active in the free labor movement in pre-Hitler Germany.” It warned against

338 Report on Meeting of United Americans of German Descent, March 10, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1408, RG 226, NARA.
340 Michaela Hoenicke surveys the rationale behind “soft peace” arguments, such as the view of Nazism as a curable disease, of the Nazis as gangsters who coerced the German people, or of Germany as a “troubled child.” Michaela Hoenicke, “‘Know Your Enemy’: American Interpretations of National Socialism, 1933-1945,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1998), 292-7; 329-32; 344.
de-industrializing and disarming Germany, exhorting the victorious Allies to restore a democratic Germany to the “community of nations.” Emphases may have differed between these groups and more conservative entities like the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung or the Steuben News, which stressed the Soviet threat, but the commitment to reconciling the American and German peoples was consistent.\textsuperscript{341}

The universality of “soft peace” advocacy among German-American groups made for unusual bedfellows. Within the United Americans for German Democracy, centrists like Victor Ridder and George Shuster worked tentatively with Otto Sattler and other communist members of the Kulturverband. At the same time, the Neue Volks-Zeitung, a long-time critic of the Ridder brothers and the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, praised Ridder for his public assault on Emil Ludwig’s “hard peace” advocacy. In addition, the Volks-Zeitung joined the Staats-Zeitung in pushing for the resumption of regular postal service between the United States and the Western zones of occupied Germany after the war.\textsuperscript{342}

It is not entirely surprising that F.W. Foerster, T.H. Tetens, and other “hard peace” advocates read such awkward alliances as evidence of a pan-Germanism that placed ethnic nationalism among all other political and social considerations.

Despite the harmony regarding “soft peace,” however, fundamental differences persisted. The best illustration is the troubled OWI project, the United Americans of


German Descent. After a year and a half of organizing committees and recruitment efforts, the UAGD finally held an inaugural meeting in June 1944. Victor Ridder declined to attend but sent Ludwig Oberndorf to represent the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung. Since the social democrats still refused to participate, the fifty-four delegates mostly comprised a mix of far-left leaders and assorted cultural organizations. The meeting ended with assurances that the UAGD had the support of the centrist Staats-Zeitung, as well as Solidarität and the German-American, both of which had leftist readerships. The umbrella and its members publicly supported the occupation, but not the division or destruction of Germany after the war.\footnote{Report on Meeting of United Americans of German Descent, June 14, 1944, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1160, RG 226, NARA.}

The details of postwar planning quickly sent the UAGD and its rivals into decline. At a meeting in December 1944, a walkout occurred when the chair refused to entertain a motion. Gustav Faber, the editor of Solidarität, broke from the UAGD a few months later. Apparently angered by Ridder, Faber tried unsuccessfully to create a new umbrella organization under his own leadership.\footnote{Report on Meeting of United Americans of German Descent, December 2, 1944, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1291; Friediger to Poole, February 2, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1354; Memo 38, February 10, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1362; Report 23, February 13, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1369, RG 226, NARA.} What remained of the UAGD in the spring of 1945 dissipated in response to the Yalta Conference. Ridder rejected the Yalta resolutions, including the reaffirmed insistence on unconditional surrender. Leftist elements in the UAGD, especially those who supported the Soviet Union, welcomed cooperation among the Big Three. A new series of disputes followed, dealing the final blow to the troubled UAGD. Some on the left who had supported Ridder during his
lawsuit now turned on him, accusing him of latent pro-Nazism. Outside the UAGD, the German Labor Delegation praised the Yalta Conference, while the Steuben Society warned that it opened the door to Soviet control of Central Europe.\textsuperscript{345}

Similar divisions occurred over the punishment of war criminals. Communist-influenced groups followed the Soviet position on the need to punish industrialists alongside political leaders. The moderate left, including the Neue Volks-Zeitung, wholeheartedly supported the Nuremberg tribunal. The New Yorker Staats-Zeitung reluctantly acknowledged the need for war crimes trials, but more conservative German-American newspapers questioned their fairness and effectiveness. The Wanderer, a German Catholic paper, acknowledged that war crimes had been committed but warned that punishing those responsible would only bolster Communism.\textsuperscript{346} These disagreements show that political and social differences continued to trump ethnic nationalism.

After the German surrender in May 1945, many of these groups either reduced their activity or dissolved. G.P. Bronisch, who had co-founded the Loyal Americans of German Descent in 1941, now washed his hands of ethnic activity, saying he had been “too optimistic” about organizing anti-Nazi Germans. Similarly, Erich von Schroetter, a former officer of the Kulturverband, lamented that neither the far left nor the social democrats had successfully reached the German-American masses, who remained


\textsuperscript{346} These conservative papers included the Detroider Abendpost, the Chicago Abendpost, the Cleveland Wächter und Anzeiger, and the Milwaukee Deutsche Zeitung. “The German American Community Discusses the Treatment of War Criminals,” June 4, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1578, RG 226, NARA.
nationalistic.\textsuperscript{347} No longer needing to demonstrate loyalty and unable to organize Germans politically, the wartime umbrella groups disappeared.

Having survived the war, the \textit{Neue Volks-Zeitung} continued to reap the benefits of its earlier positions. Unlike the Ridders, the Steuben Society, or even the far left, the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} could back its calls for a “soft peace” with reminders of its consistent anti-Hitler stance. As anti-communism increasingly supplanted fears of Nazi subversion, moreover, the \textit{Neue Volks-Zeitung} pointed to a clear record of opposition to Stalinism. In fact, the editors merged the two positions, warning that improper treatment of postwar Germany would only create a new Soviet “Machtergreifung” (seizure of power) on par with that conducted by the Nazis. Unlike groups that twisted their policies to conform to the turbulence of the late 1930s and early 1940s, the socialists highlighted their past to augment their credibility. It is perhaps significant that, when President Harry Truman met with a group of foreign-language editors in August 1948, the German-language representative was Gerhard Seger of the \textit{Volks-Zeitung}, rather than a \textit{New Yorker Staats-Zeitung} editor, as had been the case in previous years.\textsuperscript{348}

It is not surprising that, as a newspaper with longer-term objectives, the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} outlasted the groups that came into being during the war. Many of them had existed solely to defeat Nazism and prevent anti-German sentiment. In contrast, the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} continued its effort to bolster social democracy on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean during and after the war. In 1947 it railed against the Taft-Hartley Act’s

\textsuperscript{347} OSS Chicago Report, May 12, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1512; Friediger to Braatoy, May 12, 1945, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-1514, RG 226, NARA.

weakening of the labor movement. It called for fighting the act in the courts, rather than following the communists’ call for a general strike. In the postwar environment the paper played up its anti-communism, accusing the far left of bolstering rightist politicians like Senator Robert Taft.  

Meanwhile, the editorial board maintained connections with the SPD in postwar Germany. In the *Volks-Zeitung* and in the *New York Times*, Friedrich Stampfer described the Social Democrats as consistent anti-Nazis, advocating their leadership in the Western zones. He also traveled to a party meeting in Nuremberg in July 1947 to speak on behalf of German-American social democrats. When Kurt Schumacher, the head of the SPD, came to the United States to speak before the American Federation of Labor the following fall, the *Volks-Zeitung* invited him to speak at its fifteen-year anniversary celebration. Finally, the editors wrote, the American public would learn firsthand “what the German labor movement is thinking and doing.”

While it had sustained itself through the war, however, the *Neue Volks-Zeitung* did not survive the next decade. Its refugee readership diminished when many recent arrivals, including key contributors like Friedrich Stampfer and Rudolf Katz, returned to Europe. Those who stayed assimilated alongside the older readership. To be sure, a committed socialist clientele kept readership relatively stable, but assimilative erosion continued into the 1940s. The final issue of the newspaper, which appeared on August 6, 1949, revealed the extent to which the paper suffered from the diminution of both of its audiences. Gerhard Seger’s final editorial voiced a familiar complaint about German-

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American ineffectuality, while also criticizing those refugees whose support had been fleeting. For Seger, declining circulation was further evidence of the thankless job of advancing both social democracy and German-language journalism in the postwar era.351

The Volks-Zeitung thus folded in a time when the political left was contracting. While organized labor increased in numerical strength through the 1950s, Steve Fraser has outlined how the rhetoric of power gave way to the goal of increasing the standard of living, and a “global New Deal” replaced socialism as “the far horizon of labor’s vision.” Nelson Lichtenstein has described the “remobilization of business and conservative forces” after 1945 to reverse the empowerment of workers under the New Deal. The Taft-Hartley Act, which the Volks-Zeitung had ridiculed, constrained the ideology, geography, and range of options of organized labor. The “red scare” that followed the Second World War suppressed the American ideological left, limiting not only the overtly communist left but also that embodied by “social democrats” and liberals. Thus, even as it was less able to appeal to workers as Germans, the socialist Volks-Zeitung also found it more difficult to appeal to them as workers.352

Conclusion

Important parallels exist between the trajectory of the German-American ideological left and those of its counterparts on the center and right. Like other ethnic

German organizations—and like the non-German left—the intensity of the rivalry for leadership overpowered the desire for unity. Despite common practical goals of opposing Nazism and defending German-Americans, the socialists at the Volks-Zeitung and the communist-led members of the Kulturverband could not sustain a working relationship because of personal, regional, and ideological differences. The story of wartime umbrella organizations shows that some on the left were actually more likely to deal with centrists like Victor Ridder than with each other. In 1945, in the absence of Nazism as a common enemy, differing opinions on postwar planning made it impossible for these groups to survive.

This is not to say that the German left was without accomplishments. Its early and unequivocal opposition to Nazism is especially notable in contrast to the widespread ambivalence of other German organizations. In a practical sense, as the case of St. Louis suggests, the Kulturverband effectively obstructed the German-American Bund. Later, German labor and mutual aid societies formed the rank and file of the wartime organizations that emphasized German-American loyalty. As more conservative German newspapers became reticent to discuss foreign relations, the activity of these left-leaning groups gave credibility to the assertion of the existence of non-Nazi Germans. Even the State Department, the OSS, and the OWI recognized the benefits of such demonstrations in mitigating ethnic tensions within the United States, despite the fact that they were unable to harness them. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the anti-Nazi record of the socialists helped to bolster arguments for a “soft peace” against accusations of “pan-Germanism.” The Neue Volks-Zeitung, for example, was in a strong position to advocate
for postwar Germany after Ridder’s ambiguous past reduced his stature. Detaching its ethnic nationalism from Nazism had thus placed it in a stronger position.

Indeed, of the organizations included in this chapter, the most successful was the *Neue Volks-Zeitung*. Its ability to merge an older German-American socialist readership with a refugee clientele strengthened its position, as did its ideological consistency. As assimilation proceeded in the 1930s and 1940s and sapped the circulations, the most successful newspapers were those that wooed the small but significant influx of Nazi-era immigrants. Even Ridder had tried to adapt the *Staats-Zeitung* to a refugee audience, a move that brought criticism from nationalist-minded editors. For the *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, a relationship with the SPD provided easy access to left-leaning refugees who came to the United States between 1933 and 1945.353

Circulation numbers support the argument that refugees strengthened the *Volks-Zeitung*. Despite the split with the communists, wartime pressures, existing assimilative trends, and the resentment of some “older” German-Americans, the paper’s readership held steady, from 21,850 in 1934 to 21,270 in 1944, at a time when other old-line socialist papers folded. After the war, as many new arrivals assimilated or returned to postwar Germany, readership fell to just above 17,000 by the final issue in 1949. In contrast, the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* fell from 54,006 subscriptions in 1930 to 25,840 by 1950. The ethnic nationalist *Chicaguer Abendpost* dropped from 46,890 in 1930 to

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7,317 in 1950.\textsuperscript{354} The Volks-Zeitung’s avoidance of controversy and dedicated readership afforded the socialist newspaper a degree of success, but equally important was the SPD connection, which propped up the “Germanness” of German-American socialism.

Despite its strengths, the Volks-Zeitung joined other elements of the left—and of German-America as a whole—in fading away in the postwar era. A paper dedicated to German socialism inevitably suffered as both ethnic association and broader notions of social democracy declined in the United States. Other political and social identities increasingly defined those who had considered themselves German-Americans. As Robert Cazden points out, the influx of German refugee editors did nothing to replenish the declining number of rank-and-file union members who identified themselves as German. As has been well documented by scholars, workers of German descent increasingly defined themselves by class or race, rather than by ethnicity.\textsuperscript{355} It is also reasonable to assume that, because of subsequent geopolitical realities, German-American communists faced persecution for being Communist, but not for being German.

In the midst of such decline, it is noteworthy that the most successful entity on the political left drew its strength from its consistency and from its relationship to the SPD. The former provided protection during radical shifts in international relations, while the latter created a credible—albeit temporary—connection to postwar politics in Germany

\textsuperscript{354} Arndt and Olson, 56; 385; 399. Many socialist organs fared much worse. Even the Wisconsin Vorwärts, once edited by Victor Berger, died out in 1932. Cazden, 35; 169-71; Arndt and Olson, 697.

itself. Interestingly, another group took the opposite approach, divorcing itself from politics, emphasizing adaptability rather than consistency, and relying on German-Americans, not German refugees, for its transatlantic links. Even more interestingly, that group would prove more successful.
CHAPTER 6: “A MULTITUDE OF DEEDS”: THE CARL SCHURZ MEMORIAL FOUNDATION AND “PRE-HITLER GERMANY”

If ethnic nationalism and political aspirations exacted a steep price from interwar German-American societies, what fate might befall an organization that disavowed these methods? Such was the case with the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation (CSMF), which convened in Philadelphia in 1930. Its namesake, Carl Schurz, was one of the liberal “forty-eighters” who emigrated following the failed bourgeois revolution of 1848 in the German states. In America, Schurz befriended Abraham Lincoln, served as a general in the Union Army, and won the affections of many German-Americans through his career as a journalist and Republican senator. Invoking the name and the spirit of Schurz, the CSMF framed its mission in terms of preserving German-American history and promoting cultural relations with Germany. As an organization it cultivated an image of ideological aloofness, maintaining the primary goal of becoming a protector of German heritage in the United States.  

This different approach should not obscure the important overlaps between the CSMF and other prominent organizations. Key members of the CSMF espoused ethnic

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356 Schurz is one of the major icons in German-American lore. For a laudatory biography from this perspective, see Anton Erkelenz and Fritz Mittelmann, eds., Carl Schurz, der Deutsche und Amerikaner (Berlin: Sieben Staebe, 1929), or Claude Moore Fuess, Carl Schurz, Reformer (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1932). A more recent, and more balanced, examination of Schurz is Hans Trefousse, Carl Schurz: A Biography (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982). Draft of CSMF Charter, April 16, 1930, Box 36, Folder 10, NCSA.
nationalism and expressed enthusiasm for the “New Germany,” especially from 1933 to 1935. As an organization, however, the CSMF maintained an apolitical image and quickly adapted to challenges, including questions of loyalty. Another similarity between the CSMF and other German-American organizations is the desire to protect German culture, a cause undertaken by all of the groups and individuals in this study. But the CSMF maintained this goal as its first priority and successfully conveyed an image of Americanism. As a result, it made a stronger bid for leadership in the cultural realm, even transcending divisions within German America. It is significant that, in a decade of ethnic squabbling, the CSMF received support from Paul and Felix Warburg, George Sylvester Viereck, the Steuben Society, Victor Ridder, and members of the Deutschamerikanische Kulturverband.357

This chapter will examine the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation from its founding in 1930 to the early 1950s. It will show how an organization that carried many of the liabilities of other German-American organizations managed not only to survive the war years but also to expand operations in the late 1940s while retaining its original mission of defending German culture. One can summarize its evolution in three phases. In the early 1930s the CSMF supported transatlantic cultural exchanges while laying the groundwork for research on and preservation of German History in America. Around

357 The Warburgs were benefactors; Viereck attended the organization’s annual dinners; the Steuben Society contributed to the CSMF’s publication, the American-German Review; Victor Ridder served on the executive board; and leftist authors, most notably Oskar Maria Graf, received funding from the CSMF’s refugee aid program. List of Contributions, January 23, 1935, Box 3, Folder 1; Annual Dinner Lists, May 4, 1931, May 8, 1933, April 24, 1935, and May 4, 1936, Box 1, Folder 3, NCSA; Theodore Hoffmann, “Steuben Day – September Seventeenth, 1936,” American-German Review 3:3 (March 1937), 24; List of Officers, July 19, 1930, Box 33, Folder 4, NCSA; Correspondence between Wilbur Thomas and Oskar Maria Graf, 1943, Box 41, Folder 10, NCSA.
1935, as connections to Nazi Germany increasingly became grounds for suspicion of disloyalty, the Foundation transformed its exchange program into one providing refugee aid. At the same time, it bound its German cultural work tightly to a program of celebrating America’s heritage. Finally, a reputation of Americanism and work in “pre-Nazi culture” enabled the organization to joint the U.S. Government in exporting that culture to postwar Germany. Thanks to this high degree of adaptability, the CSMF succeeded where many of its counterparts failed.

“A Better Understanding of the German Peoples”

The motivations for the CSMF’s founding were similar to those of the Steuben Society a decade earlier. “German emigration has practically stopped,” noted an early proposal for the organization. “Within a few years we shall have only ‘descendants’ of Germans’ in America.” Like the Steuben Society, the organizers of the new group pledged to save the ethnic German legacy and highlight German contributions to “the development of the American commonwealth.” Another similarity was cultivating connections to Germany. The CSMF’s founders saw “closer intellectual relations between the United States and Germany” as a way to enrich their domestic program. A fundamental difference existed between the two organizations, however. Whereas the Steuben Society planned to foster ethnic strength through legal and political battles, the CSMF intended to focus wholly on cultural and intellectual work. It would host exhibits and lectures and provide materials for German language courses. Envisioning itself as the new cultural center for German America, the CSMF also hoped to consolidate
relevant books and artifacts in a central “American Germanic Institute,” a goal that received broader attention at the first German-American National Congress in 1932.\(^{358}\)

Planning and fundraising began in 1929 and culminated in the first official board meeting of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation on May 7, 1930. At this meeting, and for the next fifteen years, the organization relied heavily on the leadership of two men. Ferdinand Thun, born in Barmen, Germany in 1866, had founded what became the Wyomissig Industries textile firm in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1892. In addition to making large financial contributions, he served as the Foundation’s president from 1930 to 1945 and acted as its chief spokesman in contacts with U.S. and German government officials. Throughout the same years the American-born Wilbur K. Thomas, director of Quaker relief work in Europe from 1918 to 1929, acted as executive secretary of the CSMF and managed the organization’s everyday affairs. The active membership of the organization was a collection of wealthy German-Americans, including Victor Ridder and Paul Warburg, both of whom served on the founding board of directors. At the May 7 meeting, Thomas reported with enthusiasm that the Foundation had received $500,000

\(^{358}\) “Proposal and Appeal for the Establishment of an American Germanic Institute (or Foundation),” Box 36, Folder 11; Draft of CSMF Charter, Box 36, Folder 10, NCSA. These goals are resonant with the internationalist impulse among scholars and professionals in the first decades of the twentieth century, as described in Daniel Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998). They also resemble the transatlantic exchange missions undertaken with the aid of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Weimar government in the same era. See Malcolm Richardson, Jürgen Reulecke, and Frank Trommler, eds., Weimars transatlantischer Mäzen: die Lincoln-Stiftung 1927 bis 1934: ein Versuch demokratischer Elitenförderung in der Weimarer Republik (Essen: Klartext, 2008); Michael Wala, “Reviving Ethnic Identity: The Foreign Office, the Reichswehr, and German-Americans during the Weimar Republic,” in Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner, eds., German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective (Madison: Max Kade Institute, 2004), 326-342.
from its members and from German-American societies across the country. As a result, he said, it could now begin operations.359

Student exchange became the central focus of the CSMF in its first few years. Within a month the board established a partnership with the Institute for International Education (IIE), a nonprofit student exchange organization, and donated $10,000 to its program. The Foundation also gave money to the International Student Service Committee for transatlantic exchanges. Thomas estimated that, in 1930, these donations and its own grants enabled seventy-nine German students to travel to the United States and sent seventy-three Americans to Germany. The relationship with the IIE continued through 1936.360

The board approved an array of other programs. It supplied honoraria to guest lectures for German organizations across the United States. It donated $75,000 to Franklin and Marshall College to create a German department. To mark the centennial of the death of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the spring of 1932, it produced a film for presentation on college campuses and held a national essay contest. By early 1933 it had set up an office in Berlin and hired Dr. Georg Kartzke, an American-educated German scholar who directed the Foreign Student Office at the University of Berlin. At the same

360 CSMF Minutes, July 19, 1930, Box 33, Folder 4; October 15, 1931, Box 33, Folder 5; October 22, 1932, Box 33, Folder 6; June 29, 1936, Box 33, Folder 8; Walter Kotsching to Wilbur Thomas, February 5, 1931, Box 2, Folder 8; Newsletter Number 5, December 17, 1930, Box 34, Folder 10, NCSA. The IIE, whose programs had begun in the 1920s, continued to conduct exchanges with Germany after the CSMF halted its support. Stephen Duggan, A Professor at Large (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), 175-181.
time, the board began making contacts in other American cities with the intent of opening CSMF chapters outside Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{361}

A gift from a wealthy philanthropist, Gustav Oberlaender of Reading, Pennsylvania, strengthened the Foundation considerably. Born in 1867 in the Rhineland, Oberlaender came to the United States at age twenty. He passed through a number of jobs in New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana before entering into the hosiery business in 1906, and a large contract with Marshall Field enabled him to expand his enterprise. Like many industrialists of the day, Oberlaender decided to donate a large portion of his assets to charity. As a German immigrant he made his goal “a better understanding of the German-speaking peoples by the American people.” In 1931 he established the Oberlaender Trust with $1 million of his own money.\textsuperscript{362}

Oberlaender left his trustees with a few simple—and undoubtedly well-received—instructions. To ensure prompt results he required that the trustees spend all of the principal and interest within twenty-five years. Second, he mandated that the executive secretary of the CSMF serve as the chair of the trustees, effectively making the Oberlaender Trust a branch of the Foundation. Finally, he endowed the trustees with a great deal of flexibility, suggesting but not requiring that they send professionals to Germany to study issues of “public welfare.” “The purposes of the Trust are designedly

\textsuperscript{361} CSMF Annual Report for 1930, Box 44, Folder 2; Thomas to Margaret Quayle, May 6, 1931, Box 2, Folder 8; Newsletter Number 6, February 5, 1931, Box 34, Folder 10; CSMF Press Release, April 24, 1932, Box 2, Folder 9; Curt Haensel to CSMF, May 12, 1931, Box 26, Folder 7; List of sites for viewing of Goethe film, Box 26, Folder 7; CSMF Minutes, March 30, 1932, Box 33, Folder 6; CSMF Minutes, May 23, 1930, Box 33, Folder 4, NCSA; Rennie Brantz, “German-American Friendship: The Carl Schurz Vereinigung,” \textit{International History Review} 11:2 (May 1989), 238 n. 35.

\textsuperscript{362} Unpublished Autobiography of Gustav Oberlaender, circa 1940, Box 41, Folder 1; Oberlaender to Trustees and Successors, April 1, 1931, Box 41, Folder 3, NCSA.
very broad,” he wrote the trustees. “You and your successors … have power to change the character of the work, as you think best.” In the coming years, this flexibility proved invaluable not only to the Trust but also to the CSMF as a whole.\footnote{Oberlaender to Trustees and Successors, April 1, 1931, Box 31, Folder 3, NCSA.}

As a subsidiary of the larger CSMF, in the early 1930s the Trust followed closely the recommendations of Gustav Oberlaender. It gave grants to “American citizens who are actively engaged in work that concerns the public welfare … and who will profit by a period of study in a German-speaking country.” The list of Oberlaender Fellows, which contained hundreds of names, included such noted figures as Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois. In addition to these individual grants the Trust also sent groups of professionals to Central Europe to meet with their European counterparts. In 1934, for example, the Trust sent a group of American foresters and lumbermen to Germany and Austria. They toured with representatives of both government and industry, learning their hosts’ methods of conservation and resource management. Another program sent American municipal experts to study city planning and administration in Germany. Upon their return, the Americans published recommendations for integrating European methods into the American setting.\footnote{Oberlaender to Trustees and Successors, April 1, 1931, Box 31, Folder 3; List of Oberlaender Fellows, Box 23, Folder 3; Thomas to Prinz Max Hohenlohe-Langenburg, September 27, 1934, Box 2, Folder 11; “What American Cities Can Learn from German Cities,” 1933, Box 2, Folder 10, NCSA; Henry Graves, “What We May Learn from German Forestry,” American-German Review 1 (December 1934), 32; “Foresters and Lumbermen Visit Germany and Austria,” American-German Review 1 (December 1934), 36.}

While it certainly gave the CSMF a boost, the Oberlaender Trust was only a partial solution to the perennial problem of funding. Over twenty-five years the Trust gave $200,000 in grants to other Foundation programs, but for the most part the CSMF
had to look elsewhere for money for its domestic work. Aside from the Oberlaender
Trust grants, it had begun operations with a $500,000 endowment, which was intended
only to last five years. Wilbur Thomas constantly sought the names of potential members
and made appeals for donations to add to the diminishing endowment. The board also
looked for institutional funding and tried unsuccessfully to make contacts in the
Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations.365

Nevertheless, the leaders of the CSMF remained optimistic as they laid the
groundwork for further expansion. Each year they renewed their support of the IIE
exchange program and made additional grants to individuals. They hoped to create a
companion fund to the Oberlaender Trust that would sponsor German scholars traveling
to the United States. The Foundation played a central role in the First German-American
National Congress in 1932, chairing the segments on student exchange and the creation
of a national German-American academic institution.366

Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Germany presented a new challenge to the CSMF,
as it did for German America as a whole. Emphasizing its apolitical mission, the
organization took an ostensibly neutral position on Nazism. In a press release in April
1933 the board stressed the need for “goodwill [that] is promoted by a more intimate
acquaintanceship” between the United States and Germany. At the same time, it offered

365 List of disbursements by Oberlaender Trust, 1931-1953, Box 43, Folder 2; CSMF fundraising
letter, February 18, 1931, Box 2, Folder 8; Thomas to Diedrich Gristede, December 2, 1935, Box
2, Folder 11; Undated memo on Nicholas Murray Butler, Box 2, Folder 7, NCSA.
366 CSMF Minutes, October 15, 1931, October 20, 1932, October 17, 1933, October 17, 1934,
April 10, 1935, and June 10, 1936, Box 33, Folders 5-7; CSMF fundraising letter, February 18,
1931, Box 2, Folder 8, NCSA; “Exchange of Professors and Students,” Erster National-Kongress
der Amerikaner Deutschen Stammes (New York: Deutsch-Amerikanische Kongress von Gross-
New York und Umgebung, 1932), 17-18; Cornelia Wilhelm, Bewegung oder Verein?
Nationalsozialistische Volksstumspolitik in den USA (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), 155.
veiled criticism of anti-Nazi demonstrations in America, advising against “hasty judgment.” It referred to the “injustice which has been heaped upon Germany” through the Versailles Treaty and urged Americans to “avoid adding fuel to the flames.”

Invoking their mission of promoting international understanding, the officers vowed to continue supporting transatlantic exchange programs. “There is a much greater need for the work of the Foundation than at any other time,” Wilbur Thomas wrote in the minutes. “It would be criminal to discontinue our activities.”

These early messages revealed an ambivalence that soon gave way to open disagreement within the Foundation. Discernible factions emerged, one ardently opposing Nazism, the other espousing ethnic nationalism. The most openly anti-Nazi members of the board were Jacob Gould Schurman—American ambassador to Germany from 1925 to 1930 and now honorary president of the CSMF—and James Speyer, the group’s treasurer. They urged the Foundation to stop funding travel to Germany as long as political oppression continued in the Reich. They said that the organization should focus instead on bringing German-Jewish professionals to the United States. Such a plan would help the victims of Nazism while demonstrating opposition to German policies. But Wilbur Thomas joined Ferdinand Thun and Henry Janssen, Thun’s business partner and a major benefactor, in arguing the opposite. If the goal was to improve mutual understanding, then it made more sense to “get as many worthwhile Americans over to Germany as possible.” Echoing the sentiments of ethnic nationalists in the Steuben Society and other German organizations, they spoke of a need to inoculate the American public against the “distortions” of the mainstream press. Rather than discontinuing travel

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367 CSMF Minutes, April 7, 1933 and May 8, 1933, Box 33, Folder 7, NCSA.
to the Reich, they planned to send professors, members of Congress, and other prominent Americans to Germany to see conditions for themselves. They traded ideas on exchanges with Hans Luther, the new German ambassador, who saw the CSMF as a credible way to improve U.S.-German relations. Thun and Janssen even secured an audience with Adolf Hitler, although their account of the meeting depicts the Führer as hostile to them and their objectives.368

The anti-Nazi faction became increasingly dissatisfied with these activities. Invoking the CSMF’s namesake, Speyer repeatedly called for an official condemnation of Germany: “no doubt you will agree with me that if our esteemed friend, Carl Schurz, was alive, he would not hesitate to come out boldly and voice his indignation against such treatment of a defenseless minority.” Again echoing groups like the Steuben Society, Thomas replied that open protests would only increase anti-Semitism in the United States and pointed once again to the Foundation’s cultural mission. In October 1933, Speyer resigned in frustration, again invoking Schurz’s name: “We owe it to the memory of this great thinker and great liberal to see to it that the Foundation that bears his name does

368 Speyer to Thun, May 9, 1933, Box 23, Folder 3; Kartzke to Thomas, July 21, 1934, Box 23, Folder 3; Thomas to William Borah, December 18, 1934, and Borah to Thomas, December 19, 1934, Box 2, Folder 11; Thomas to Speyer, May 15, 1935, Box 23, Folder 3, NCSA. A later report by Thomas on the audience with Hitler is in Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA. Sander Diamond explains that Hans Luther, a conservative nationalist, believed in collaborating with German cultural organizations that disavowed Nazi politics, in contrast to those like Viereck who directly transmitted Nazi propaganda in the United States. Diamond also says that Luther provided funds to the CSMF to start a publication, but his only source is a memo from August 1933, a year before the American-German Review began publication. Sander Diamond, The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924-1941 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 110.
what he would do…. I deeply regret that the majority of the Committee do not share my views.”

The Foundation’s records indicate that Speyer was not the only one to leave over the issue of National Socialism. Minutes of board meetings from 1933 to 1935 list several efforts to prevent prominent members from resigning, not all of which were successful. Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of *The Nation* and a supporter of the CSMF since its inception, heavily publicized his withdrawal. In a letter to the board he expressed disgust “that any organization bearing the name of Carl Schurz should traffic with despots and tyrants of this kind.” In January 1935 he and the descendants of Carl Schurz issued a press release demanding that the CSMF change its name. Around the same time, Columbia University economist Dr. Edwin R. A. Seligman wrote an open letter in which he, too, criticized the use of Schurz’s name in cultural exchanges with Nazi Germany. The bad press only increased the problem of resignations. In the annual report for 1935, the CSMF lamented the fact that “practically all of our Jewish friends have withdrawn from [our] work.” These and other departures caused a marked decline in financial contributions.

Part of the problem was an ongoing relationship with institutions in Nazi Germany. The CSMF had cultivated contacts within the Stuttgart-based Deutsches

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369 Speyer to Thun, May 5, 1933 and May 9, 1933; Speyer to Thomas, October 6, 1933 and October 30, 1933, Box 23, Folder 3, NCSA.
370 CSMF Minutes, April 10, 1935, Box 33, Folder 8; Oswald Garrison Villard to CSMF, July 11, 1934, Box 2, Folder 11; Open letter to CSMF, for release January 21, 1935, Box 2, Folder 11, NCSA. Seligman’s letter was published in the *New York Times* in November 1934. Villard knew of Seligman’s letter, but earlier correspondence indicates that he had already begun to push for a name change before its publication. “Dr. Seligman Avoids Schurz Foundation,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1934, 3.
371 CSMF Annual Report for 1934, Box 44, Folder 2; Thomas to Gristede, December 2, 1935, Box 2, Folder 11, NCSA.
Ausland Institut (DAI) and had considered publishing studies by Heinz Kloss, a German
linguist at the DAI. Ferdinand Thun maintained a correspondence with Gustav
Moschack of the DAI even after the organization’s cooptation by the Nazis. Thun finally
severed that relationship in February 1934 when Moschack asked the CSMF to promote
Nazi racial ideology in the United States. The relationship with Kloss continued as
late as 1937, however. Commissioned by the DAI to study German America for
propaganda purposes, Kloss also gained support from the CSMF, which hired him to
publish a study of potential research projects on German-Americans, in line with the
longstanding goal of creating a German-American institute. Kloss traveled over 10,000
miles within the United States, writing a 238-page report. Fearing bad publicity, however
the CSMF declined to publish it at the time, although it shared the study with a few
scholars.

372 Gustav Moschack to Ferdinand Thun, January 25, 1934, and Thun to Moschack, February 14,
1934, Box 23, Folder 3; Heinz Kloss to Thomas, April 18, 1931 and April 25, 1931, Box 2,
Folder 8, NCSA.
373 Kloss to CSMF, July 8, 1931, Box 2, Folder 8; CSMF Minutes, April 10, 1935, Box 33, Folder
8; Thomas to DAI, March 15, 1937, Box 23, Folder 4; Itinerary of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kloss, April –
August 1937, and memo, November 23, 1937, Box 3, Folder 3; CSMF Annual Report for 1937,
Box 1, Folder 3, NCSA. The unpublished Kloss manuscript is “Bericht über die
Forschungsmöglichkeiten einer Deutsch-Amerikanischen Arbeitsstelle,” 1938, Heinz Kloss
Papers, HSP. It was later translated and published as La Vern Rippley, ed., Research Possibilities
in the German-American Field (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1980). Cornelia Wilhelm has
criticized Rippley’s introduction for ignoring the report’s ties to the Nazified DAI. She
emphasizes the DAI’s plans for indoctrinating the Pennsylvania Dutch as a motivation for his
1937 research trip. Wilhelm, 145-6 n.28; 153. An earlier study by Arthur Smith says that Kloss,
whose tenure in the DAI predated the Nazi regime, held similar goals to those of the CSMF in
that he sought greater transatlantic dialogue. Admittedly, he became a Nazi sympathizer and
advised the German Foreign Office on how to conduct propaganda in the United States. At the
same time, however, Smith argues that Kloss’s “primary interest was of a research nature,” in
contrast to ideologically driven colleagues like Fritz Gissibl. The actual report confines itself to
research topics, except for a recommendation of continued cooperation with the DAI. Arthur
Smith, The Deutschtum of Nazi Germany and the United States (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965),
26; 40; 118 n.7.
More troublesome was the relationship between the CSMF and the Berlin-based Vereinigung Carl Schurz (VCS). Founded in 1926 to encourage cultural and business interactions between Germany and the United States, the VCS included representatives of I.G. Farben, Deutsche Bank, and General Electric, as well as transatlantic shipping lines such as the Hamburg-America Line and the North German Lloyd. Initially built around a liberal, internationalist ideology, its officers increasingly pushed a nationalist agenda, especially in criticizing the Versailles Treaty. In the early 1930s the VCS and the CSMF collaborated in student exchange efforts, although the CSMF sought to maintain a degree of distance from an organization funded in part by the German Foreign Office. Even after 1933, when the VCS fell fully under Nazi control, Wilbur Thomas wanted to continue cosponsoring student exchanges, which the CSMF did for a few more years. Villard cited this link in his open protest against the CSMF in January 1935.374

The VCS became a thorn in the side of the Foundation not just because of the closeness of their work but also because of the similarity of their names. When bringing Americans to Germany or vice versa, the Vereinigung Carl Schurz translated its name as “Carl Schurz Foundation,” rather than the more accurate “Carl Schurz Association.” The result was that Americans frequently confused the Nazified VCS with the American-based CSMF. Even William Dodd, the American ambassador to Germany, falsely believed that the Oberlaender Trust underwrote the VCS in Germany. The CSMF issued

374 Thomas to Kartzke, August 7, 1930, Box 23, Folder 3; CSMF Minutes, March 15, 1934, Box 33, Folder 7; Draeger to Thomas, April 29, 1937, Box 23, Folder 4; Statement from Thomas on Vereinigung Carl Schurz, Box 44, Folder 2, NCSA; Cornelius Witt, “Amerikareise, 1937,” File AA257, German-American Pamphlets Collection, GSP. An overall study of the VCS is Rennie Brantz, “German-American Friendship: The Carl Schurz Vereinigung, 1926-1942” International History Review 11:2 (May 1989), 229-251.
countless clarifications in private correspondence and in letters to newspapers. The board of directors even considered a name change to solve the problem, although they decided against it. They did, however, increasingly avoid cooperation with the VCS. The confusion continued to haunt them through the late 1940s.375

During the first years of the Hitler regime, the Foundation also established a monthly magazine, the *American-German Review*. A publication that highlighted the “cultural relations of the German and the American people” had been a longstanding goal, which came to fruition with the *Review*’s first edition in September 1934. Intended to boost recruitment efforts and keep members engaged in the CSMF’s activity, the magazine was a self-avowedly “non-political” enterprise.376 Regular features included German contributions to English-language literature, music, film, and scholarship, as well

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375 The *Volksfront* attacked the “Carl Schurz Foundation” for its pro-Nazism, mistaking the CSMF for the VCS. “Karl Schurz der Rassenschädner,” *Volksfront*, November 15, 1936; Memo by Thomas on Vereinigung Carl Schurz, May 8, 1941, Box 23, Folder 4; Thomas to John Huston Finley, May 15, 1934, Box 23, Folder 3, NCSA. Thomas was protesting the error in “Schurz Association Opens Berlin Americans’ Club,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1934. Interestingly, he sent a letter to the VCS to ensure it that the distancing was not meant as an act of hostility toward that organization. Thomas to Kartzke, May 23, 1934, Box 23, Folder 3, NCSA; William E. Dodd, Jr., and Martha Dodd, eds., *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1941), 261; “Carl Schurz Officials Deny Reich Affiliation,” *Philadelphina Bulletin*, January 21, 1935; Thun to Speyer, May 15, 1935, Box 23, Folder 3; CSMF Minutes, November 23, 1937 and October 22, 1940, Box 33, Folders 9-10; Thomas to George McAneny, March 12, 1941, Box 3, Folder 7, NCSA. In his study of the DAI, Arthur Smith leaves open the possibility that Ambassador Dodd’s conflation of the CSMF and the VCS was intentional, as he saw both groups as pro-Nazi. However, Dodd’s inaccurate statements on the Oberlaender Trust, combined with the more widespread confusion of the two groups, suggest that he genuinely misunderstood the relationship between the organizations. Smith, *The Deutschtum*, 56-57. Ralph Bischoff made the same error in 1942 in *Nazi Conquest through German Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 168; 171-2. Decades later, the conflation continued. See Robert Herzstein, *Roosevelt and Hitler: Prelude to War* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 133; 135; Thomas Blantz, *George N. Shuster: On the Side of Truth* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). 97.

376 Early plans for the German Foreign Office to subsidize the *Review* fell apart by the time it was launched, due to Nazification of the VCS and deteriorating transatlantic relations. Klaus Kipphan, *Deutsche Propaganda in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1971), 132.
as travel writings and photo essays from Germany itself. Every issue closed with Wilbur Thomas’s appeal for contributions and new members.377

By the mid-1930s, even the ethnic nationalists in the CSMF began to comprehend the danger inherent in these ostensibly apolitical connections to the Third Reich. Having already avoided publicizing its intellectual exchange programs, the organization gradually phased them out, effectively ceasing international work by 1937.378 Meanwhile, its officers increasingly found that adherence to their domestic mission of protecting German America, if employed correctly, could undo much of this damage while solidifying the group’s position in ethnic leadership. As transatlantic activity fell off, cultural goals received renewed attention.

“Strictly an American Organization”

Paradoxically, the Foundation shaped its recommitment to apolitical domestic activity around the controversy of National Socialism. As Wilbur Thomas wrote in August 1935, cultural work would demonstrate to the American public that “the true spirit of the German people does not necessarily find its best expression in [German] political events of the day.” Separating German culture from Nazism would simultaneously protect that culture from ideological corruption and from additional anti-

377 Magazine Proposal, October 17, 1933, Box 33, Folder 7; CSMF Minutes, May 18, 1933 and October 17, 1933, Box 33, Folder 7, NCSA; American-German Review 1:1 (September 1934) and 1:2 (December 1934).
378 The Foundation’s donations to the IIE decreased during the mid-1930s, ceasing in 1937. In 1936 it ended its support of the Junior Year in Munich program. CSMF Minutes, April 15, 1936, Box 33, Folder 8, NCSA.
German sentiment in the United States.\textsuperscript{379} Other benefits included demonstrating the CSMF’s patriotism and its credibility as a major ethnic organization.

The most significant element of the CSMF’s program in the rest of the 1930s was refugee aid. Despite the larger disagreements that led to Speyer’s resignation as treasurer in 1933, the executive board eventually followed his suggestion and agreed to bring refugee professionals to the United States. As with similar efforts by Jewish-American groups, assisting German exiles was a way to save Germany’s intellectual life from physical destruction by the Nazis. It also became a way to display American patriotism. The CSMF reported to members that, in aiding exiled scholars, it was “serving the American people by helping these newcomers to give of their best.” As intellectual exchanges died out, the Foundation devoted more and more resources to the migration effort. The Oberlaender Trust made refugee aid a priority, offering grants directly to individuals and indirectly through other CSMF programs. By 1940, money for refugees made up about half of the expenditures of the CSMF and the Trust, totaling over $50,000 a year. The Oberlaender Trust ultimately spent one fourth of its assets on the program.\textsuperscript{380}

The CSMF and the Trust typically found potential recipients of aid through referrals. Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, and Felix Warburg, all of whom had been exiles themselves, made several appeals on behalf of colleagues, as did dozens of other

\textsuperscript{379} Thomas to Albert Schweitzer, August 6, 1935, Box 3, Folder 1, NCSA.
\textsuperscript{380} Eleventh Annual Report, April 30, 1942, Box 1, Folder 3, NCSA. The figure of one half is based on the budget for regular operations for 1939-40, which totaled $107,230, of which refugee aid made up $56,000. CSMF Minutes, May 18, 1933, Box 33, Folder 7; Memo on Financial Activities, April 30, 1940, Box 33, Folder 10; Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Report of the CSMF, 1955, Box 1, Folder 2, NCSA, 14.
Either the CSMF or the refugee then located a potential job at a university or institute, at which point the CSMF or the Trust offered to supplement the refugee’s income for the first year by a few hundred dollars. In some cases they added to grants from other private organizations, such as the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Refugee Scholars. In a 1943 report the CSMF and the Oberlaender Trust provided a list of 288 refugees who had received at least one of their grants, with some receiving as many as five. The list included an array of figures including Marxist scholar Ernst Bloch, historian Dieter Cunz, socialist author Oskar Maria Graf, neuropsychologist Otto Loewenstein, novelist Heinrich Mann, and political scientist Leo Strauss.382

The CSMF worked alongside a number of other organizations that conducted similar programs for refugees. These included groups founded for that purpose, such as the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars; larger philanthropic groups such as the Rockefeller Foundation; Jewish organizations, including the Joint Distribution Committee; and individual institutions such as the New School for Social Research and Hebrew Union College. In addition to participating in this effort, the Oberlaender Trust commissioned a study of the aggregate impact of refugee aid. Conducted by sociologist Donald Kent and published in 1953 as The Refugee Intellectual, it surveyed 721 refugee professionals from Germany and Austria. The book assessed the impact of migration both on the migrants themselves and on the United

381 These and countless other examples of referrals are available in Box 3, NCSA.
382 List of Grants to Refugees, Box 23, Folder 3; Memo on Financial Activities of the CSMF through April 30, 1940, Box 3, Folder 10, NCSA.
States. Kent concluded that the Oberlaender Trust was one of the four most important American aid programs for refugee intellectuals.\footnote{Kent shows that, of 104,098 immigrants from Germany—and, beginning in 1939, Austria—to the United States, approximately 7,622 were listed as “professionals.” Like many of the aid efforts, his study focused on this group, of which approximately half were educators. The other three programs that Kent considered most effective were the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the New School for Social Research. Donald Kent, The Refugee Intellectual: The Americanization of the Immigrants of 1933-1941 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 12-15; 115. Volkmar von Zühlsdorff, Hitler’s Exiles: The German Cultural Resistance in America and Europe (London: Continuum, 2004); Hartmut Lehman and James Sheehan, eds., An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933 (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1991); Lewis Coser, Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and Their Experiences (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Jean-Michel Palmier, Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2006); Jarrell Jackman and Carla Borden, eds., The Muses Flee Hitler: Cultural Transfer and Adaptation, 1930-1945 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983). For a discussion of the politics of immigration during the 1930s, see Mary Anne Thatcher, Immigrants and the 1930s: Ethnicity and Alienage in Depression and On-Coming War (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).}

Another initiative in the late 1930s directly tied the Foundation’s cultural work to the preservation of America’s heritage. In 1937 the board of the CSMF revisited the idea of an “American Germanic Institute,” a concept that was mentioned at the group’s founding and endorsed at the First German-American Congress in 1932. The institute would house the administrative offices and library of the CSMF, as well as providing space for exhibitions and larger meetings. Some board members even suggested that a new institute absorb the Foundation itself. While an Institute per se never came into being, in 1938 the Foundation set its sights on a building that could house its offices and functions. The Philadelphia Custom House, formerly the Second Bank of the United States, was empty and had fallen into disrepair. If renovated, its offices, exhibit halls,
and location near Independence Hall would make it an ideal choice for a permanent headquarters, CSMF leaders decided.\(^{384}\)

The board of the CSMF contacted Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, with a proposition. If the National Park Service leased the Custom House to the CSMF, the latter would assume a share of the cost and responsibility of renovation. The Park Service investigated the CSMF and found “no good reason why this agreement cannot be consummated, as the Foundation … pursues no objectives distasteful to the democratic faith of the American people.” On December 18, 1939, Ickes and the board of the CSMF signed a lease agreement. As a result, the Custom House now held the Foundation’s offices, as well as a variety of meetings, exhibits, and other activities for both German and non-German groups in Philadelphia. In addition, by 1943 the CSMF had spent $71,895.27 on restoring and maintaining the building.\(^{385}\)

The acquisition of the Custom House gave the CSMF a stronger claim to leadership in the movement to centralize German-American organizational life. In a press release the board announced that the building would act as a “national clearing house for information on the contributions of Americans of Germanic ancestry.” The CSMF appealed to German societies and individuals to give their records a permanent home in its library, to be available in perpetuity for “studying the history of America.”

\(^{384}\) “Plan ein Zentralinstitutes,” Erster National-Kongress, 69; CSMF Minutes, April 21, 1937, Box 33, Folder 9; Outline for American-German Institute, Box 3, Folder 3; Memo, May 9, 1938, Box 3, Folder 4, NCSA.

\(^{385}\) A.E. Demaray to Under Secretary of the Interior, December 21, 1938, Box 23, Folder 4; Agreement for Use of Old Philadelphia Custom House, December 18, 1939, Box 1, Folder 1; Thomas, “Mr. Ickes and the Old Custom House,” Box 44, Folder 3; Press Release, March 1, 1940, Box 23, Folder 4; CSMF Minutes, December 8, 1942, Box 33, Folder 10; Thomas to Francis Ronalds, May 18, 1944, and May 25, 1944, Box 4, Folder 3; Expense Sheet Related to Renovating the Old Custom House, Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA.
To act as a reference center the library also built a card catalog with entries from other collections across the country. The *American-German Review* regularly publicized new acquisitions to the library, which by 1944 had 10,000 books and 50,000 cards in its catalog.386

The Custom House also provided a link to America’s broader heritage, a fact that became useful in defending the Foundation’s record. Publicity campaigns consistently emphasized the value of the partnership for the United States as a whole. “Our desire,” Thomas wrote in a press release in 1940, “is to see America benefit by the older, more specialized knowledge of Germany.” He also reminded the U.S. Government that it stood to gain from the partnership. Recalling the anti-German hysteria of the 1910s, he asserted that leasing the Custom House “was a revelation of a different attitude on the part of the government toward its citizens,” an attitude that reassured the nation’s Germans. In the face of new tensions with Germany, the leasing of meeting space to non-German groups became a testament to “our whole program of unity in American life.” Whenever questions of loyalty arose, the renovated Custom House stood ready as a counter-argument.387

Another project—the Landis Valley Museum—further illustrates the blending of German and American heritage. Henry and George Landis, elderly brothers, lived just outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where their ancestor had settled in 1717. After


387 Press Release, March 1, 1940, Box 23, Folder 4; and “Mr. Ickes and the Old Custom House,” Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA.
retiring from the metallurgy and surveying trades, respectively, in the 1920s, they began aggressively purchasing antiques and artifacts from “Pennsylvania Dutch” culture. The massive collection of about 200,000 pieces, which included three Conestoga wagons, over four hundred firearms, and assorted glassware and trinkets, crowded the brothers’ property. In 1940 the Oberlaender Trust agreed to build a permanent home for the collection and to hire the Landis brothers as curators. Opening in May 1941, the Landis Valley Museum became a picturesque monument to one of America’s oldest frontiers. As described by one reporter, the museum created vivid images of “how housewives baked and washed, how farmers plowed and harvested, and how apple-cheeked little Germans played and studied in the two centuries these people have prospered.” In his own statement on the museum, Henry Landis attested to the inherent Americanism of the collection, even including the disclaimer that “Germany of today is not the Germany of two centuries ago, and differs so radically from our present Pennsylvania-Dutch culture as to remove all probable or assumed connection therewith.”

Refugee aid and new cultural programming deflected, but did not prevent, criticisms of the Foundation’s ties to Nazi Germany. Jacob Gould Schurman, who had joined James Speyer in advocating a stronger anti-Nazi stance in 1933, had remained honorary president of the CSMF after Speyer’s resignation. He finally tendered a public resignation in the spring of 1940, citing a fundraising pamphlet entitled *A Fifth of a Nation*. He wrote Thun, taking issue with the term “American-German” that appeared in

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the pamphlet. He favored the term “German-American” because it “recognized this group of citizens as Americans substantively, and only adjectively as Germans.” In the pamphlet, “the group is transformed by a stroke of the pen into Germans substantively and Americans adjectively,” as in Amerikadeutscher, the term used by the Nazis to refer to Americans loyal to the Reich. As a result, Schurman wrote, he was “compelled” to resign as honorary president. He also took his case to the press, telling the New York Times that “if the Nazi regime intended to inject any of its propaganda … into any racial or cultural groups of the United States, it might well begin with such subtle and inconspicuous devices as the use of ‘American German.’”

Schurman’s argument was not terribly convincing. In a written reply, Thun pointed out that Schurman had previously written for the American-German Review without complaint and that the CSMF had used the phrase interchangeably with “German-American” for years. In the pamphlet itself, “American-German” appears interchangeably with “Americans of German descent.” The Foundation received dozens of letters of support that called Schurman’s criticism a matter of “hair-splitting” and “super-sensitiveness.” One such letter suspected that the disagreement amounted to an excuse, rather than a reason, for resigning.

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390 Schurman wrote an article on German contributions to the United States in the inaugural issue. Schurman, “Cultural Inspiration from Germany,” American-German Review 1:1 (September 1934), 6-9; Wilhelm, 16; 38-40; Thun to Schurman, May 23, 1940, and Isaiah Bowman to Thomas, May 31, 1940, Box 44, Folder 3; Felix Morley to Thomas, May 30, 1940, and John Haynes Holmes to Thomas, May 31, 1940, Box 3, Folder 6, NCSA.
Schurman, who had served as American ambassador to Germany from 1925 to 1930, was ultimately recalled because of his open criticism of the Versailles settlement. While he was by no means pro-Nazi, his ethnic nationalism had led Hans Dieckhoff, the Reich’s ambassador in Washington in the late 1930s, to describe him in 1937 as one of few outspoken American friends of Germany. Schurman visited Dieckhoff in the fall of that year to warn the Nazi regime against the use of political propaganda among German-Americans. In demanding that the Reich stop meddling in the United States, Schurman threatened to resign from the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation. He undoubtedly felt that this would deal a blow to the credibility of an organization that, while not controlled by the Nazis, aided in strengthening U.S.-German relations. Dieckhoff responded courteously, claiming that the German government engaged in no such behavior. It is unlikely that this assurance convinced Schurman to remain in the CSMF until 1940, but it is also uncertain whether Schurman genuinely believed that the use of “American-German” was an intentional reference to the Nazis’ Amerikadeutsche categorization. In all likelihood, his departure was at least partially motivated by a desire to put distance between himself and an ethnic German organization in the face of an escalating European war. He would not have been the only member thinking along such lines. Because of declining membership dues and donations, the CSMF budget, which had peaked in 1937, had now been cut to less than half.391

A few months later, the Foundation also fell under the scrutiny of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League. In a letter in October 1940, Leo Spanglet of the League wrote to Wilbur Thomas, asking for a response to suspicions that the CSMF was sympathetic to Nazism. According to Spanglet, newspapers in Reading, Pennsylvania had accused Gustav Oberlaender and Henry Janssen of being pro-Nazi. The League wanted proof that the CSMF was “independent of the financial aid of the above named persons.” Thomas pointed out that Oberlaender had died in 1936, and that even before that point the trustees had full control of the funds he donated. He said that Janssen had not been active in the CSMF for years. The League seems to have backed away from further action, although its inquiry alongside Schurman’s resignation shows that ethnic nationalists in the Society’s leadership created a liability.392

A third question of the group’s loyalty, posed by Secretary Ickes, demonstrates how effectively the CSMF had insulated itself from accusations. Citing the resignations of Villard and Schurman, Ickes met with Wilbur Thomas in June 1940, expressing regret that he had ever let the organization rent the Philadelphia Custom House. He told Thomas that he would investigate the CSMF, and if he found a “grain of Nazism” he would “lock up the damned old Custom House and let [them] go to hell.” Ickes softened a bit after hearing Thomas’s side, but he still wanted a public disavowal of Nazism in

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392 Leo Spanglet to Thomas, October 9, 1940, and Thomas to Spanglet, October 18, 1940, Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA. The view of Thun and Janssen as pro-Nazi appears in firsthand accounts, as well. See, for example, George Rhodes, of Federated Trades Council of Reading and Berks County, to Bertha Corets, November 16, 1938, Box 1, Folder 5, AJA.
exchange for letting the CSMF stay in the Custom House. Ferdinand Thun promptly
drafted a reply in which he restated the Foundation’s status as a purely American
institution.393

When Ickes rejected the reply and demanded a more explicit statement, the
conversation became more heated. The Executive Board fired back, attacking a State
Department report that accused them of being “passively friendly” toward National
Socialism. They stood by Thun’s letter and touted their aid to refugees, forwarding a list
of grants that totaled $200,000. Ickes also received a letter from Oswald Garrison
Villard, who confirmed that, since his 1935 resignation, the CSMF reformed itself and
now exemplified “true Americanism.” Nevertheless, Ickes insisted on a simple, strong
declaration of anti-Nazism, and this time set an eviction date of September 16. Their
pride wounded, the executive committee voted unanimously to send “no further letter of
appeasement” to the Interior Department. At the same time, however, they issued a press
release on September 17 that denounced Nazi repression of the “old cultures” of
Germany. The CSMF again mentioned its refugee aid and its work in the Custom House,
and this time it openly declared itself to be against totalitarianism and in favor of “pre-
Hitler Germany.”394 The statement exhausted the short temper of Victor Ridder, who
removed himself from the CSMF’s executive board. Not surprisingly, his resignation
letter cited his carefully crafted anti-Nazi credentials:

393 Memo of Interview with Harold Ickes, June 10, 1940, Box 23, Folder 4; Thun to Ickes, August
7, 1940, Box 33, Folder 10, NCSA.
394 Ickes to Thun, August 12, 1940 and September 6, 1940, Box 3, Folder 6; CSMF Committee to
Ickes, August 23, 1940, Memo to Ickes, August 24, 1940, and CSMF Minutes, September 12,
1940, Box 33, Folder 10, NCSA; Oswald Garrison Villard to Ickes, August 21, 1940, Box 3,
Folder 6, NCSA; “Schurz Group Hits Nazis’ ‘Brutality,’” New York Times (September 17,
1940), 22.
My brother and I have fought Mr. Hitler’s efforts … to dictate the policies of the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung for years and I find it necessary, therefore, to protest by resigning … because I do not wish to seem responsible for the Foundation’s activities…. I would accept no dictation from Dr. Goebbels and see no reason why we should accept the dictation of Mr. Ickes.

The committee also received a handful of angry letters from members regarding the statement, but it concluded that the response was generally positive. The most important outcome, however, was the intended one: Ickes rescinded the eviction threat. The Interior Secretary’s decision is significant, for he was not one to treat accusations of Nazi subversion lightly.395

Thus, despite some problems, the CSMF weathered the years leading up to the Second World War with relative success. Its modified programs lent credence to Thomas’s assurances that the CSMF was “strictly an American organization.” While still facing suspicions and financial problems, the Foundation was able to continue operations as other organizations came under attack. For example, at the same time that George Sylvester Viereck faced indictment for lying in his registration as a foreign agent, the CSMF successfully convinced the government that it did not even need to register.396 It had positioned itself if not to thrive, at least to survive, during the impending war.

395 Riddler’s September 16, 1940 letter is in the CSMF Minutes for October 22, 1940, Box 33, Folder 10, as is the board’s discussion of overall reception of the statement’s reception. For another negative response, see Adam Bernhard to Thomas, November 24, 1940, Box 44, Folder 3; Ickes to Thun, September 20, 1940, Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA; on Ickes and Nazi subversion, see Herzstein, 327-8.
396 Thomas to Kartzke, October 9, 1940, Box 23, Folder 4; Thomas to Eldred Kupfinger of State Department, August 4, 1941, Box 3, Folder 7, NCSA.
The Second World War

In the months after December 1941 the CSMF tried to stay out of the public eye. Wilbur Thomas declined an offer of a radio program on the German Hour in Philadelphia, fearing that misstatements on the air could cause a backlash. The Custom House hosted local German societies and the Foundation continued to aid refugees and augment its library, but it generally refrained from large-scale initiatives or public displays. The board eschewed discussion of Germany itself and further severed transatlantic connections. For example, Ferdinand Thun had given dozens of gift subscriptions of the American-German Review to German citizens, but he cancelled all of them by February 1942. An informant for the Coordinator of Information noted the continued policy of caution, reporting in July that the Foundation had “leaned over backwards” in staying clear of suspicion.397

The editors of the Review acted similarly, altering the magazine’s content in response to the declaration of war. They eliminated discussions of current events in favor of historical pieces on German cultural figures and Germans in the United States. Whereas earlier editorials had stated the mission of promoting German-U.S. cultural exchange, now they emphasized the magazine’s goal of integrating the German-American element into American society. Thomas reaffirmed the American-ness of such work. “America has greatly benefitted [sic] by the coming of the German element,” he

397 Thomas to Thun, February 16, 1943, Box 23, Folder 5, NCSA. The CSMF regularly hosted performances by the Junger Maennerchor and the Harmonie Society. See the collection of pamphlets in Box 300, Carl Schurz Memorial Collection, GSP. “List of Foreign Subscribers to Whom We Stopped Sending the Magazine Beginning with the February 1942 Issue,” Box 36, Folder 13, NCSA; Carl Wittke to B.D. Meritt, July 6, 1942, Microfiche File INT-13 GE-334, RG 226, NARA.
wrote, “and though Germany were completely destroyed, these are fixed contributions to America. Here we must continue to develop our cultural life for our own sake.” He continuously praised the loyalty of American ethnic groups and warned against intolerance. The only discussion of Germany itself came late in the war when Thomas joined the harmony of German-American calls for a “soft peace.”

The brightest spot in the war years was the beginning of a relationship with the State Department. The first evidence of communication is a letter from Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle to Ferdinand Thun in February 1942. Noting a common goal of “safeguarding what is left of classic German civilization,” Berle asked whether the CSMF might help to publish German literary works and to celebrate “free German culture.” Eugene McAneny urged his fellow CSMF officers to meet with Berle because a close relationship with top diplomats was “bound to be of aid to us.” Meetings continued throughout the war years, as CSMF officers and State officials traded ideas on possible programs in the United States, as well as potential postwar activities in Germany. It is clear that, in cultivating this relationship, the CSMF was genuinely interested in future cultural projects, but it also saw the State Department as another means of protection from accusations of disloyalty. It began consulting with State contacts on new activities, even seeking their approval before producing a radio program with the Office of War Information.

399 Adolf Berle to Thun, February 25, 1942 and McAneny to Thomas, March 4, 1942, Box 3, Folder 10; Memo of conversation between Thomas and John M. Begg, State Department, October
The need for caution—and allies—quickly became apparent when suspicions of disloyalty came from yet another federal entity: the Internal Revenue Service. For organizations that did not fall under the purview of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, taxation became a means of control, since many such groups claimed a tax exemption. The IRS could revoke the exemption of any group that, in the view of the government, strayed from its stated mission. Not only was such a group then forced to pay income taxes, but donations to it were no longer tax deductible, a factor that inevitably caused a drop in contributions. The IRS made such a decision regarding the CSMF, notifying the organization on December 15, 1943. The Foundation immediately denied the charges, assuring the IRS that it operated within its mission, and it asked to see the evidence upon which the revocation decision was based.

The CSMF learned that IRS investigators were first drawn to the “mass resignations” in the early 1930s. IRS memos referred to earlier accusations that German exchange students had spread propaganda, charges that the Foundation had dismissed. The CSMF also discovered that the IRS suspected Wilbur Thomas, who had been Executive Secretary since its founding, of pro-Nazi sentiments and activities. Indeed, as

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18, 1942, Box 3, Folder 10; Anderson to Elkinton, January 3, 1947, Box 4, Folder 6; CSMF Minutes, September 23, 1942, October 13, 1942, and November 10, 1942, Box 33, Folder 11, NCSA.

400 In addition to the CSMF, the Nordamerikanischer Sängerbund lost its tax exemption because of alleged “pro-Nazi and pan-German” leanings. It took a two-year legal battle to undo the decision. Charles Barber, “The Nordamerikanischer Sängerbund versus the U.S. Treasury Department, 1944-1946,” *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 30 (1995), 80. Similarly, the Freie Gemeine of St. Louis was accused of straying from its mission of operating a reading room. Only after disclosing the content of its activities did it regain tax exemption at the end of 1946. Cann to Free Community, May 2, 1945; E.I. McLarney to Free Community, October 29, 1946; Tax Return, May 15, 1974, Frei [sic] Gemeinde von St. Louis Records, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

401 Internal Revenue Service notification letter, December 15, 1943, Box 44, Folder 3; McAneny and Thomas to IRS, January 22, 1944, Box 4, Folder 3, NCSA.
one of the ethnic nationalists in the organization, Thomas had made positive statements regarding the “New Germany” in the early 1930s and was a driving force in the Foundation’s early refusal to disavow Nazism. His personal trajectory from optimism to muted criticism of the Hitler regime was fairly representative of German-American leaders as a whole, but in the wartime context his earlier statements were receiving new scrutiny.\footnote{CSMF Minutes, September 12, 1944, Box 33, Folder 13, NCSA; W.H. Coleman to Mr. Lyon, May 15, 1944, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 3844, File 811.42762/154, NARA. For earlier discussions of the propaganda accusation see Stephen Duggan, “The American-German Student Exchange,” \textit{American-German Review} 5:2 (December 1938), 46. To follow the trajectory in Thomas’s private discussions of Nazism see Thomas to Speyer, October 26, 1933 and Thomas to Janssen, July 24, 1934, Box 23, Folder 3; Thomas to A.K. Nippert, December 20, 1938, Box 26, Folder 4; and Thomas to Jewett, June 30, 1941, Box 41, Folder 8, NCSA.}

In addition to the loss of funds, CSMF leaders devoted large amounts of time and resources to fighting the IRS decision. As a result, they cut back on other commitments. They slowed renovation of the Old Custom House, cancelled the production of a film about Carl Schurz, and curtailed pamphlet production. The later war years thus became a low point in activity. According to the minutes of an executive meeting in October 1944, “whatever time could be spared from … the income tax situation was used … to collect overdue membership dues and subscriptions.”\footnote{CSMF Minutes, March 14, 1944, May 16, 1944, October 10, 1944, Box 33, Folder 13, NCSA.}

To regain its tax exemption, the CSMF pursued a number of strategies. It directly challenged the IRS, hiring a series of attorneys to help draft an appeal. Board members pored through their organization’s records, compiling correspondence and other records to demonstrate that their activities since 1930 had remained apolitical.\footnote{CSMF Minutes, October 8, 1946, Box 34, Folder 2, NCSA. As a result of the battle with the IRS, much of the CSMF correspondence relating to Nazism is actually located among the financial documents in Box 44 of NCSA. While the transfer of these documents may imply a}
they turned to their friends in government. In a letter to the IRS, George McAneny and Wilbur Thomas urged the investigators to discuss the situation with the National Park Service, with whom the Foundation co-managed the Old Customs House. Meanwhile, the Foundation brought the problem to its contacts in the State Department, hinting that the tax issue was hindering their cooperative efforts. “You can understand our perplexity,” one letter said, “when the Department of the Interior congratulates us as tenants [and] the State Department opens an intriguing vista while the Treasury strangles our undertakings.” CSMF officials pointed out that they could deliver more quickly on mutual plans if the State Department helped them to lift the tax burden. They also dropped the names of State officials into their conversations with the IRS.405

State Department documents show that its officials did indeed vouch for the CSMF. In May 1944, having already removed tax exemption, the Treasury Department considered freezing the assets of the CSMF and the Oberlaender Trust on the grounds that they had used student exchanges for propaganda purposes. Treasury officials asked the State Department for any information it had on the Foundation and the Trust. After finding no evidence to confirm or refute the accusation in State records, Adolf Berle decided to defend the organizations. He acknowledged that their work with German-based cultural groups in the early 1930s would undoubtedly have linked them to German propagandists, but “if this were sufficient evidence to tie up funds, the Treasury would

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405 McAneny and Thomas to IRS, January 22, 1944, Box 4, Folder 3; Elkinton to Anderson, January 21, 1947, and Elkinton to McAneny, February 14, 1947, Box 4, Folder 6; CSMF Minutes, January 11, 1944, Box 33, Folder 13, NCSA.
equally have to freeze the funds of about half the commercial and cultural organizations in the United States.” He advised against punishing the CSMF and the Trust because it would antagonize German-Americans who were clearly loyal to the United States. “Without a fairly clear case,” he wrote, “freezing of these two organizations would be construed as the beginning of a witch hunt.” The Treasury Department chose not to freeze the groups’ assets, but left the revocation of tax exemption in place.  

Due to health problems, Wilbur Thomas began to reduce his role as executive secretary in 1944, leaving day-to-day operations increasingly to Howard Elkinton. To the Foundation’s surprise, the IRS announced in 1947 that Thomas’s retirement would be grounds for reinstatement of their tax exemption. George McAneny and Howard Elkinton moved delicately, as they were hesitant to offend the man who had run the CSMF since its inception. Elkinton assured Thomas that “no member of the board … had any intent whatsoever of subscribing to the charges levelled [sic] by the Internal Revenue Department.” At the same time, they immediately notified the IRS that Thomas had been officially removed from his position in May 1946. The positioning worked. On June 2, 1947 the CSMF received notification that its tax exemption status would be restored, beginning retroactively in 1946. Four days later, Elkinton wrote to the State

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406 W.H. Coleman to Mr. Lyon, May 15, 1944; RGH Jr. to Berle, May 17, 1944 and May 18, 1944; W.H. Anderson to Political Section of State Department, March 1, 1944; Berle to Coleman and Lyon, May 20, 1944, RG 59, Series 1940-1944, Box 3844, File 811.42762/154, NARA.
Department to inform them of the good news. “Contributions to the Foundation have begun again,” he wrote. “We can now address ourselves to the various undertakings that were begun and remained unfinished.”

“A Very Important Vehicle”

With the restoration of taxation came a third phase in the life of the CSMF: The renewal of cultural exchange with Germany. Like the Steuben Society, the CSMF found that refugee aid was the least controversial form of postwar activity, and it collected money for “the starving people in all of Europe.” It refused, however, to confine itself to the humanitarian sphere. “We fully underwrite these appeals for aid,” a 1946 report said, “but the continued support of cultural activities is very important, as man does not live by bread alone.”

Whereas the purpose of cultural exchanges in the past had been primarily to enrich Americans, this time the focus was on the Wiederaufbau (rebuilding) of pre-Nazi culture in postwar Germany. In the process, the Foundation hoped to rebuild itself.

407 Elkinton to McAneny, March 15, 1947 and March 19, 1947; Suggested text of letter to J.P. Wenchel; William Sherwood to CSMF, June 2, 1947; Elkinton to Anderson, June 6, 1947, Box 4, Folder 6, NCSA.
408 “To the Heart and Hand of America,” American-German Review 13:5-6 (June-August 1947), 46; CSMF Annual Report for 1945 April 30, 1946, Box 1, Folder 3, NCSA. Much of the work for displaced persons took place in collaboration with the American Friends Service Committee, for which Wilbur Thomas and Howard Elkinton had previously served as officers. The AFSC was co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947, in part because of its postwar relief efforts. Nobel Peace Prize Presentation, 1947. [http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1947/press.html].
409 Referring to “Wiederaufbau in Wien,” American-German Review 13:3 (February 1914), 9, Wilbur Thomas said that the CSMF was “keen on all Wiederaufbau items whether in Germany or America.” Thomas to Eugene Anderson, January 21, 1947, Box 4, Folder 6, NCSA.
Eventually, the CSMF openly promoted the new policy, declaring its intent to “bridge the gap since 1933” and to instill in Germany “the values of Western civilization.” In the immediate postwar years, however, the first steps were small. In April 1945 the Review published an article about American influences on the Frankfurt Assembly during the 1848 revolution. An astute reader in 1945 could not have missed the undertones of the article, a study of German-Americans’ “eagerness to present their republic as [a] model for a new German state.” Subsequent articles on the forty-eighters and on American influences in the Weimar Republic carried similar implications. While silent on the Holocaust and reticent to discuss war guilt, the Review consciously emphasized reconstruction efforts in Europe.\(^{410}\)

The implementation of new programs developed slowly due to timidity and lack of funds. The CSMF declined invitations to participate in the reconstruction of the Goethe Haus and the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, although the American-German Review printed appeals for donations to these and other projects in Germany. The Review also carried articles on the problems of postwar Europe such as displaced persons, the destruction of libraries, and the growing restlessness of German youth. In this sense, the magazine became a way for the Foundation to test the waters before becoming more active.\(^{411}\)


The turning point came in 1948. Wartime concerns were giving way to Cold War concerns, and occupied Germany maintained a central position in the calculations of both American and Soviet leaders. As the division of Germany hardened, the United States recognized that tying the Western zones to Western interests and putting Germany “on its feet” would help to provide a counterweight to the communist East. Diplomatic historians in recent years have shown that, in addition to the oft-discussed economic, political, and military elements of this policy, the United States also undertook a program of cultural diplomacy to strengthen the ties of the German people to American society and democracy. That undertaking could only succeed, however, with cooperation from non-governmental entities.

The CSMF was a perfect fit for these plans. Its desire to restore “pre-Hitler” Germany by emphasizing the nation’s liberal elements aligned with the cultural diplomatic goals of the U.S. Government. Early in 1948 the State Department

approached the organization about the possibility of sponsoring a centennial celebration of the 1848 revolution in Frankfurt. To emphasize the historic connections between Germany and the United States, the Department wanted to place Carl Schurz at the center of the event. Speaking for the CSMF, Howard Elkinton responded enthusiastically, offering to send representatives to the ceremony. Within a few weeks he made preparations for George Shuster, the president of Hunter College, to speak. Although a handful of Shuster’s ethnic nationalist statements from the 1930s had emerged in his testimony at Victor Ridder’s libel hearing, his record of anti-Nazism—and his commitment to U.S.-German reconciliation—made him a useful ally for both the CSMF and American occupation authorities.\textsuperscript{414}

To be sure, the CSMF was still moving cautiously. It learned that the American Military Government in Germany had invited a new German organization, the Carl Schurz Gesellschaft (Carl Schurz Society), to participate in the event. Both in its name and its presumed mission, this group sounded dangerously similar to the Vereinigung Carl Schurz, the pro-Nazi organization that had caused the CSMF much difficulty in the 1930s. Elkinton voiced his concerns with the State Department, noting that the Carl Schurz Gesellschaft might be “a ghost arising from a coffin in order to haunt is.” Before proceeding, he would need assurances that involvement with the group “in no way would

\textsuperscript{414}Lt. Col. William Curtin to Elkinton, May 3, 1948; Elkinton to Paul Bodemann, May 20, 1948. Box 2, Folder 1, NCSA. The former managing editor of \textit{Commonweal} and an ardent anti-Nazi, Shuster was a longtime member of the CSMF who had spoken on its behalf in the past. His \textit{Germany: A Short History} (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1944) argues for a historical distinction between German culture and National Socialism. His earlier works, including \textit{Strong Man Rules} (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934) and \textit{Like a Mighty Army} (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935), place some blame for Nazi persecutions on Christians and Jews themselves, but clearly display Schuster’s consistent anti-Nazism. See Blantz, 100-103; 232-3.
remind us of past confusions perpetuated by careless reporters.” Going a step further, he insisted that the State Department co-sponsor the event to ensure shared liability in the event of any “confusions.” After State officials vouched for the new society and arranged for a member of the Bipartite Control Office to attend, Elkinton readily agreed to sponsor the ceremony.  

The centennial celebration took place at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt on September 3, 1948. Frankfurt mayor Walter Kolb convened the ceremony on behalf of the Carl Schurz Gesellschaft, and the Frankfurt Philharmonic provided music. General Lucius Clay, the U.S. military governor, had planned to speak but was represented instead by General Clarence Adcock of the Bipartite Control Board. As the CSMF planned, George Shuster delivered the official address. In it, he told the story of Carl Schurz, suggesting that his dreams for a liberal Germany were not destroyed but displaced. He used Schurz’s career in the United States to present the elements of American liberalism and pluralism. Then he tied the two stories together, arguing that the “echoes of 1848” could again be heard in postwar Germany among a people ready to return to their long-deferred quest for liberal democracy.  

Delighted with the ceremony, American officials showered the CSMF with praise. Mayor Kolb, who was now an officer of the Carl Schurz Gesellschaft, warmly thanked the American group and looked forward to future cooperation in the name of U.S.-German friendship. A representative of the Bipartite Control Office said that the crowd

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415 The official representing the CSMF was Theodore Knauth. Elkinton to Knauth, June 18, 1948; Elkinton to Bodemann, June 22, 1948; Elkinton to Knauth, July 15, 1948; Knauth to Elkinton, July 15, 1948; Elkinton To Bodemann, July 20, 1948. Box 2, Folder 1, NCSA.  
416 Knauth to Elkinton, July 15, 1948; Program for Centennial Celebration, September 3, 1948; Address by George Shuster, Box 2, Folder 1, NCSA.
listened to the speaker “with an interest rising to enthusiasm,” and that the “major credit [for the event] went to Dr. Shuster and his sponsors in America.” John Elliott of the U.S. Military Government said that the CSMF now had “a golden opportunity to do constructive work in Germany.” General Clay, too, foresaw future cooperation: “I should like to go on record that we may petition your Foundation for guidance and assistance that seems desirable or necessary.” Thus, by the end of 1948, the Foundation’s leaders could be optimistic for the first time in years.\footnote{Kolb to CSMF, September 6, 1948; Elliott to Elkinton, September 8, 1948; P. Muschamp to Elkinton, September 13, 1948; Box 2, Folder 1; Lucius Clay to Elkinton, November 6, 1948, Box 4, Folder 8, NCSA.}

The Foundation’s new confidence spurred greater activity. It launched a new subscription drive. It acquired a radio show in Philadelphia whose topics ranged from celebrations of famous German-Americans to the refugee crisis in West Germany. It sponsored lectures and published articles throughout the United States, similarly combining cultural achievements and current events. The \textit{American-German Review}, which had eschewed politics during the war, once again wrote on contemporary issues and controversies. For example, Elkinton published a study of the currency reform in the Western zones in 1948, and another article discussed the problems of “educational reconstruction.”\footnote{List of radio broadcasts on WTEL Philadelphia, 1952-4, Articles the CSMF helped publish, 1952-4, and Lectures, radio and television talks, 1952-4, Box 1, Folder 5; Elkinton to Anderson, January 21, 1947, Box 4, Folder 6, NCSA; Elkinton, “The Tri-Partite Currency Reform, Germany, June 1948,” \textit{American-German Review} 15:2 (December 1948), 23; Alonzo Grace, “Basic Elements of Educational Reconstruction in Germany,” \textit{16:1} (October 1949), 3. Grace was a member of the OMGUS.}

The most important postwar work advanced the mission to restore pre-Nazi culture in Germany itself. In this effort the \textit{Review} became a chief instrument. “It may...
be,” Elkinton wrote, “that the *American-German Review* will be looked upon by the State Department as a very important vehicle of thought.” This prediction proved correct. The State Department held 143 subscriptions of the *Review*, which it distributed in the Western zones, and it started printing official announcements in the magazine. The U.S. Army in Germany received over a hundred copies, which it distributed to its 33 information centers. By the early 1950s the Bonn government ordered 250 issues of the *Review*, a number that eventually grew to 600. Private citizens sent approximately 200 additional gift subscriptions to Germany, and the CSMF made sure that the rectors of all German universities had copies of the *Review* at their disposal. While the addition of these subscriptions would not have significantly boosted the *Review* financially, it is clear that private and public figures saw the magazine as a way to influence German opinion.419

Cultural *Wiederaufbau* included several other projects. The CSMF gave a $5,000 grant to the new Free University in Berlin to hire a guest lecturer from the United States. It granted $10,000 to the Unitarian Service Committee to open a medical research center in Germany. It contributed to the late stages of the restoration of the Goethe Haus in Frankfurt. In cooperation with the military government it organized a contest for teams to develop plans for rebuilding German cities. As in the early 1930s, it once again

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419 Elkinton to Thun, March 12, 1948, Box 4, Folder 7; Elkinton to Miss Royce Moch, April 13, 1948, and Elkinton to R.A. Uhlein, June 22, 1949, Box 37, Folder 2; Henry Kellerman to Elkinton, July 8, 1953, and John Coleman to CSMF, December 17, 1953, Box 37, Folder 4; CSMF Annual Report for 1953-4, Box 1, Folder 5; Annual Report for 1960-62, Box 1, Folder 9; Memo on *American-German Review* in Germany, April 7, 1953, Box 34, Folder 4, NCSA.
invited German scholars to speak in the United States and began fundraising to resume its student exchange programs.\textsuperscript{420}

In 1950 the \textit{American-German Review} printed a special edition honoring the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation for “twenty years and a multitude of deeds.” The editors said that the group’s greatest achievements were its most recent ones: “first, it survived the war; and second, it established confidence in places where policies are formulated, particularly as they concern Germany.” In truth, the two goals overlapped. The relationships with the Interior and State Departments and the OMGUS helped to deflect criticisms of a group that had undeniable, if indirect, links to Nazi Germany.

Government officials, most importantly Adolf Berle, sought out the CSMF and protected it. In the early Cold War, after all, the U.S. government and military were anxious to find such private organizations to augment their credibility in the “democratization” of West Germany. They gained an ally, and the CSMF received both wartime protection and a means to expand its programming in the late 1940s. The relationship became so close that Alonzo Grace, director of Education and Cultural Relations for the OMGUS, even served as the president of the CSMF from 1954 to 1956.\textsuperscript{421}

The founding generation of the CSMF had carried it through the Second World War but was now disappearing. Henry Janssen died in 1948 and Ferdinand Thun a year

\textsuperscript{420} “Foundation Projects,” \textit{American-German Review} 15:4 (April 1949), 29; Hanns Gramm to Thomas Mann, January 21, 1948, Box 41, Folder 12; “Project: The CSM Lectures in Public Personnel Administration,” January 14, 1949, Box 4, Folder 9; Walter Kotschnig to Thomas, February 5, 1931, Box 2, Folder 8; Itinerary for Edwin Redslob, November 29, 1949, Box 4, Folder 12; Elkinton to Thun, May 12, 1948, Box 4, Folder 7, NCSA.

\textsuperscript{421} Arthur Graeff, “As Shadows Lengthen, 1930-1950,” \textit{American-German Review} 16:5 (June 1950), 4; “Twenty Years,” 16:5 (June 1950), 3; Retirement Letter from Alonzo Grace, April 25, 1956, Box 34, Folder 7, NCSA. The delicacy of the U.S. occupation government’s cultural mission is described in studies such as Gienow-Hecht.
later. Both George McAneny and Wilbur K. Thomas, who had remained in an honorary capacity, passed away in 1953. That same year the Oberlaender Trust exhausted the last of its resources. It was now up to a new group of leaders, said the Review, to “support the organization which their elders established and which has proved [sic] its value in the realm of ideas and ideals.” In its annual report for 1954 the board of directors proudly quoted a letter from James Conant, the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany:

This is to express thanks for … the help given by your Foundation in the strengthening of elements in Germany whose aims are to make Germany a worthy member of the democratic West…. Yours is the freedom to pioneer; to operate swiftly, unfettered by the cumbrosomeness so often attendant upon government operations; yours is the privilege of working intimately and personally with those whose influence is and will be great.

For an organization that had battled accusations of Nazism less than a decade earlier, such a letter was certainly worth sharing with its members.

**Conclusion**

It is significant that the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation was able to continue operations during and after the Second World War. In years when George Sylvester Viereck emerged forgotten from prison, the Steuben Society reinvented itself, and the Ridders lost their dominance in the ethnic press, the CSMF expanded its magazine’s readership and restored its transatlantic programs. There are several factors that led to this outcome.

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423 CSMF Annual Reports for 1952-54, Box 1, Folder 5, NCSA.
The elite membership of the organization constituted both an asset and a liability. Oberlaender’s million-dollar donation at the outset of the Great Depression, alongside contributions from people like the Warburg brothers, Henry Janssen and Ferdinand Thun, provided resources that many German-American groups simply did not possess. Their momentum carried the CSMF through periods of low income, especially during the war. At the same time, the ethnic nationalism of key members—especially Oberlaender, Thun, Janssen, and Wilbur Thomas—drew the ire of some officials and private citizens.

The pragmatism and flexibility of the organization maximized the benefit of its wealth while minimizing the damage of individual members’ records. Cash reserves and loose guidelines for spending them meant adaptability in the face of changing political and geopolitical realities. Jettisoning transatlantic exchanges and throwing themselves wholeheartedly into refugee aid, the members of the CSMF offset earlier hints of support for the New Germany. They also rarely missed opportunities to demonstrate their usefulness to their contacts in the federal government.

The most important factor in its success was the CSMF’s ability to fuse its German-American agenda with Americanism. It touted its Custom House renovation, its Landis Valley Museum, and even its refugee aid as methods for enriching American society as a whole. In this sense, the trajectory of the CSMF resonates with John Bodnar’s conclusions about ethnic identity in the mid-twentieth century. Depicting their own heritage as the embodiment of American ideals, Bodnar says, ethnic leaders maintained harmony with mainstream society.Indeed, celebrating the “apple cheeked

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little Germans” on the American frontier was far more appealing than was a call to arms against Puritans, Anglo imperialists, or “internationalists.” In the context of the Second World War and the early Cold War, it is possible to perceive the CSMF’s strategy as a precursor to the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s, when, state-sponsored campaigns folded “ethnic heritage” into civic nationalism.  

Fortunately for the CSMF, its ethnic vision coincided with the federal government’s rhetoric in the 1930s and 1940s, depicting ethnic democracy as the American “way of life,” especially in contrast to fascism and communism.

The new tack extended directly into foreign affairs as well. The desire for a West German ally in the Cold War made it possible to fuse German-American cultural programming with American cultural diplomacy. If the “soft peace” argument relied on a belief in the curability of the Nazi-infected German people, the CSMF hoped to supply a cure. Its postwar cultural work, which tied an image of a German democratic tradition to that of the United States, was one among many such efforts.

It is also worth noting the fate of the Foundation’s massive collection of German-American books, documents, and artifacts. When the CSMF finally ceased operations in 1977, its resources were divided between the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the German Society of Pennsylvania, separated by a distance of two miles in downtown

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426 Bodnar, 72-3; 138-40.
Philadelphia. These rich collections, which have survived the organization that created them, mark a considerable victory in the mission of centralizing and preserving German-American heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the people and organizations that sought to lead German America in the period between 1919 and 1955. It shows that, while the Nazis failed to convert most German-Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, National Socialism became the reference point around which ethnic German societies oriented themselves. Staking careful political positions, prominent German-Americans had to transform their notions of ethnicity and loyalty. In addition, Nazism created a dynamic between ethnic Germans and the U.S. government that was wholly different from that of the First World War. To protect their interests, “professional German-Americans” had to establish a middle position, negotiating with the state and the larger society on the one hand and with their constituents on the other. Uncovering their stories and contextualizing their experiences provides insights on the nature of twentieth-century ethnic leadership and the changing concept of pluralism in America.

German-American organizations’ negotiation with American society pivoted on developing new notions of ethnic nationalism. George Sylvester Viereck utterly failed to adapt, consistently perceiving ethnic leadership in terms of ethnic chauvinism and a longstanding conflict with the Anglo mainstream. At the other end of the spectrum, elite German Jews and the German-American left quickly turned ethnic nationalism against the Nazis, arguing that their activism was saving non-Nazi Germany on both sides of the
Atlantic. Other groups adapted their views over time. The Steuben Society initially shared Viereck’s assertive nationalism but seized upon a greater ideological threat—Communism—to transition into a hyper-patriotic stance. Victor Ridder and the Staats-Zeitung sought a broad constituency that included ethnic nationalists and Hitler admirers. Disavowing the Nazis in 1938, Ridder advocated loyalty and interethnic cooperation but could not entirely escape his prior record. Finally, the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation developed the most forward-looking image of ethnic leadership, stressing Americanism, pluralism, and the virtues of German heritage, rather than German chauvinism.

As they jockeyed for leadership, these subjects often played off of one another. Many of them contrasted their patriotism to the Friends of the New Germany and the Bund, which served as convenient foils. Similarly, the socialist Neue Volks-Zeitung tried to discredit its longtime rivals, the bourgeois Ridders and the Steuben Society, by exposing their equivocations. For his part, Ridder flirted with the Steuben Society at its height but later attempted to deny the connection when it became a liability. In addition, Ridder, like many other leaders, endorsed the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, but he distanced himself when the CSMF’s anti-Nazi declarations threatened to upset his balancing act. Notably, all of the other groups eschewed Viereck, whose activities were too brazen even for the ethnic nationalists. It is clear, then, that these subjects often acted with one another in mind.

If the ideologically charged climate of the 1930s and 1940s required delicate positioning on the part of these organizations, it also required the U.S. government to tread carefully in its dealings with German America. In the 1930s the boycott and counter-boycott were taboo subjects for the Roosevelt administration, which feared
disrupting diplomacy and alienating constituents. During the war, prosecuting the friendless Viereck was a useful way to highlight the threat of subversion, but a press magnate such as Victor Ridder was off limits, lest the government kindle fears of a new anti-German hysteria. The CSMF even played off of such concerns, reminding the government that their partnership was a chance to show a “different attitude” than the “100% Americanism” of the First World War.428

But the state was also proactive in its dealings with German-Americans. As German organizations adopted an idealized notion of American ethnicities operating as parts of a democratic whole, the wartime government highlighted such pluralism as the “way of life” that Americans were defending from external threats. For a nation at war with Germany, ostentatiously including German-Americans in this pluralist way of life was the most persuasive way to demonstrate its authenticity.429 This helps to explain why the Office of War Information endorsed the Loyal Americans of German Descent, a group that listed well-known figures like Babe Ruth and William Shirer alongside German-American organizational leaders. Furthermore, not only did Victor Ridder escape criminal punishment, but he leveraged the prominence of the Staats-Zeitung to win the favor of the OWI. “Conformist nationalism,” then, was a two-way process in which the state and the ethnic group found their options constrained by one another.

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428 Wilbur Thomas, “Mr. Ickes and the Old Custom House,” Box 44, Folder 3, NCSA.
These negotiations extended into considerations of the postwar world. Cold War realities trumped calls for retribution against all Germans, a fact that some officials recognized as early as 1942. In the State Department, Adolf Berle perceived the need to separate “Germans” from “Nazis,” as did the OWI and a faction of the Foreign Nationalities Branch of the OSS. They made common cause with German-Americans who had credibly disavowed Nazism and who wanted to save “pre-Hitler Germany.” While the OWI failed to co-opt the United Americans of German Descent, the State Department and the Military Government effectively worked with the CSMF to reestablish cultural diplomacy after the war. Decades later, scholars would ask valid questions about the connections between “Nazis” and “Germans,” but in the late 1940s, it was in the interest of both the American government and German organizations to overlook them.

After the war, as both the larger German-American public and ethnic German organizations moved into the mainstream, they reflected the racial component of the nation’s evolving notion of pluralism. In the early twentieth century, a white/black dichotomy subsumed a more diverse ethnic map, and the interlocking ethnicities highlighted in Second World War-era pluralism were white. As Americans of European

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descent, the Germans were among those most readily welcomed into this mainstream. While Russell Kazal has written of this trend among German-Americans as a whole, two subjects of this study best illustrate the German-American acceptance of “whiteness” on the organizational level. The Steuben Society’s refusals to abandon its heritage—and its chastisement of minority groups for failing to overcome adversity as German-Americans allegedly did—were emblematic of the “white ethnic.” The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation is an example of a less confrontational version of whiteness. By tying itself to American history in general and by celebrating a heritage that extended back as far as the 1600s, it abdicated immigrant identity altogether, relocating German-Americans among the “old stock.”

This view contrasted sharply with the Anglophobia of earlier forms of ethnic nationalism. For German-American organizations, then, entry into the American mainstream involved a complex interplay of negotiations with the state, society, and potential constituents. Their alignment with “conformist nationalism” had begun in the First World War, but the process was not complete in the 1930s, nor was it dictated in the way that Kazal and others have described it. While scholars such as John Bodnar have suggested that alignment with state-sponsored nationalism involved negotiation, they have focused largely on the cultural realm, whereas this study has highlighted the

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importance of concrete political and organizational goals for both ethnic German societies and the state. 432

This pattern was probably not exclusive to Germans, but the relative weight of key variables may have differed from one ethnic group to another. The German-Americans were unique, for example, in experiencing the heightened tension of two wars between the United States and their country of origin. They represented the largest non-Anglo ethnic group in the United States, but one that found easy acceptance because of its racial characteristics and its long history in North America. Furthermore, German immigration had been in decline for half a century, one reason why German-Americans were far less strident in the late 1930s than they had been in the 1910s. How might negotiations differ in peacetime, or at different points in the development of American notions of pluralism? Furthermore, how might they change for groups undergoing rising immigration or racial persecution? Further comparative study could shed light on the impact of these factors for other immigrant groups. 433

By the year 2000, ethnic America bore little resemblance to that envisioned by the speakers at the German-American Congress in 1932. A majority of German-Americans

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433 For example, Nancy Carnevale’s study of wartime Italian-Americans reveals a number of parallels in the government’s desire both to suppress and co-opt ethnic organizations, but the public evinced greater suspicion of Italians due to a greater language barrier. Still, a shorter period of hostilities meant faster acceptance for Italians that even extended to prisoners of war in the United States. Carnevale, “‘No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War’: Language, Italian-American Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in the World War II Years,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22:3 (Spring 2003), 3-34; Louis Keefer, *Italian Prisoners of War in America, 1942-1946: Captives or Allies?* (New York: Praeger, 1992). One might also note the fact that Americans committed more violence against American-born citizens of color than against groups whose country of origin had declared war on the United States. A useful survey of such dynamics is Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).
felt no conscious link to their ethnic past, despite German remaining the nation’s most-claimed ethnicity.\footnote{Angela Brittingham and G. Patricia de la Cruz, “Ancestry: 2000” (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, June 2004), 2.} But it would be hard to characterize German-Americans—who faced little persecution in the 1940s, advocated for the postwar rebuilding of their country of origin, and settled comfortably into the American mainstream—as defeated. Almost all of the Vereins disappeared, but the Landis Valley Museum, sponsored by the Oberlaender Trust in 1941 as a symbol of German-American contributions to the United States, was still expanding its programming in the twenty-first century.
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THESES AND DISSERTATIONS
