GERMAN COVERT OPERATIONS AND ABANDONING WILSONIAN NEUTRALITY

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Master of Arts

By

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Cade Joshua Cover ENTITLED German Covert Operations and Abandoning Wilsonian Neutrality BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT


In the years approaching World War I’s centennial, many scholars have published books reexamining different aspects of the conflict, as well as attempting to update prominent scholarship from years past. These include books focusing on individual battles, such as Verdun, to the importance of the Zimmerman telegram in spurring American desire to join the war effort. One topic of interest that appeals to a more general audience would be that of spy and sabotage activity during the conflict. The topic of spy and sabotage activity might interest a curious reader, but the matter concerning its importance during the war is still largely up in the air. This study discusses the influence of German spy and sabotage operations on the Wilson administration, and how these activities helped lead to the abandonment of Wilsonian neutrality. Although spy and sabotage operations have not been emphasized by many historians as influential, these operations can doubtlessly be connected to President Wilson’s decision to expel German officials and to favor war.
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I. INTRODUCTION

One hundred years ago, America joined one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history. This war, now called the First World War, led to great societal, economic, and political changes not only in Europe but around the world. Following the conflict, America became a significant power on the world stage. The growth of the American military, the rising influence of the American government in world affairs, and the first Great Migration were all consequences of American intervention in the First World War. Woodrow Wilson greatly influenced the decision by the U.S. Congress to declare war. President Wilson’s War Address of 1917 railed against German offenses that threatened American neutrality and appealed to Congressmen concerning the necessity for declaring war against Germany. One of the reasons Wilson gave for going to war with Germany – German spy and sabotage activity in America – has not been emphasized in literature focusing on this decision for war.

Ever since the end of the First World War, many scholars and authors have tried to explain the reasoning behind President Wilson’s decision to favor war, this decision being in stark contrast with his earlier beliefs. The scholarly consensus among most historians is that the revelation of the intercepted Zimmerman Telegram along with German aggression on the high seas (unrestricted submarine warfare and the sinking of ships with civilian passengers, like the Lusitania, the Sussex, and the Arabic) were the main factors that caused President Wilson to break his long policy of neutrality and favor
joining the war effort.¹ Some recent scholars, along with many early revisionist scholars, have also included the role of economic and political relations between the U.S. and Great Britain as an important reason for the break, as well as President Wilson’s hope for a reformation of the international community.²

In regard to the importance of the Zimmerman telegram as a reason for American intervention in World War I, many works on the topic either fall into the revisionist camp or the Wilsonian camp. Revisionists refused to believe that President Wilson’s decision to break neutrality was inevitable, while Wilsonian scholars tended to argue that the president had little choice but to do so. Historian Thomas Boghardt explains it this way: “While Wilsonians cited the telegram as evidence of German conspiracies in the Western Hemisphere, thus justifying U.S. entry into the war, revisionists by and large argued that the British had exploited a legitimate diplomatic German initiative in order to force Washington to engage in the conflict, a step that would serve Allied interests more than the United States.”³ Many books directly following World War I could be categorized under the revisionist camp. These books include John Kenneth Turner’s Shall It Be Again

¹ The Zimmerman Telegram was a note sent from Arthur Zimmerman at the German Foreign Office in Berlin to the German ambassador to Mexico, Heinrich von Eckhardt, dated 19 January 1917. This note contained a proposal to the Mexican government for an alliance with Germany following a decision by the United States to enter the war on the side of the Entente Powers. The German government promised their support for Mexico to reconquer lost territory in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. The American government found out about the contents of this note in February 1917 when they were informed by the British government, who had intercepted and decrypted the note.
(1922), C. Hartley Grattan’s *Why We Fought* (1929), Walter Millis’s *Road to War* (1935), Charles C. Transill’s *America Goes to War* (1938), Alice Morrissey’s *The American Defense of Neutral Rights, 1914-1917* (1939), and Horace C. Peterson’s *Propaganda for War* (1939). Even though these revisionists believed that the Zimmerman Telegram was used as pro-war propaganda, they nevertheless accept it as an influential document on public opinion as well as the Wilson administration.

Following World War II, more authors tended to fall in the Wilsonian camp. Samuel R. Spencer’s *Decision for War, 1917* (1953) as well as Barbara Tuchman’s *Zimmerman Telegram* (1958) are two examples. In both books, the telegram is seen as a real threat to America in the Western Hemisphere. German scholar Friedrich Katz’s *Deutschland, Diaz und die mexikanische Revolution* (1964) largely agrees with Tuchman’s assessment of the telegram and claims that it was a part of Germany’s ongoing effort to expand its influence westward into Mexico. In Arthur Link’s book *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (1965) Link argues that the telegram was a crucial factor that changed the opinions of President Wilson as well as the American public. These and other scholars argue on the Wilsonian side of the

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4 John Kenneth Turner’s *Shall It Be Again* (1922) and C. Hartley Grattan’s *Why We Fought* (1929) are examples of early revisionism. Both Turner and Grattan were journalists at the time of writing their books and were critical of foreign interventions by the U.S. government. They both cited the fact that Arthur Zimmerman’s alliance proposal with Mexico was reliant on the U.S. breaking ties with Germany and joining the Allies. These two early revisionists (along with later ones) do not place importance upon Zimmerman’s Feb. 5, 1917 message to Heinrich von Eckhart to start negotiations with Mexico before an American break with neutrality. For more information on the revisionists concerning the Zimmerman Telegram listed here, see Thomas Boghardt’s *The Zimmerman Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America’s Entry into World War I*. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 11-13.
Zimmerman telegram historiography. A more modern outlier would be Ernest Mckay’s *Against Wilson and War* (1996) which defends those who were opposed to America’s entrance in the war.\(^5\)

The other factor that most historians agree drove President Wilson to abandon neutrality would be German aggression on the high seas during 1914-17. Although both revisionist and Wilsonian authors discuss German aggression on the high seas, the opinions regarding German aggression do not divide as much along revisionist and Wilsonian lines as the opinions about the Zimmerman Telegram do.

Robert W. Tucker’s *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War* (2007) stresses the importance of German offenses on the high seas and the conflicts related to maritime law. Tucker, describing President Wilson’s struggle for neutrality, states at the very end of his introduction, “There was no cause that, once recognized, would free him from the dilemma that was in no small measure of his own making. Only the German decision to pursue unrestricted sub-marine warfare could do that.”\(^6\) Tucker also argues that President Wilson’s partiality toward the Allies made keeping a policy of neutrality very difficult in light of German abuses. Having said this, Tucker disagreed with many revisionists on

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\(^5\) Ernest A. Mckay, *Against Wilson and War: 1914-1917*, 178. In his book Mckay also defended the theory that the U.S. Civil War could have been avoided “if cooler heads had prevailed and eliminated romantic myths that still persist.” (2) This view has been thoroughly refuted by many Civil War historians, including the famed author and Yale Professor David W. Blight.

their argument that a policy of strict neutrality could have guaranteed U.S. non-
intervention in the war.\footnote{Ibid., 78.}

A more recent publication, M. Ryan Floyd’s *Abandoning American Neutrality:*
*Woodrow Wilson and the Beginning of the Great War, August 1914-December 1915*
(2013), also agrees that German aggression on the high seas (most notably submarine
warfare) played an important role in the changing of President Wilson’s mind.\footnote{M. Ryan Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 187-88.} Floyd’s
book differs from others on the topic in that his analysis of Wilson’s decision to abandon
neutrality focuses primarily on the economic and political ties between the U.S. and
Great Britain. Many of the revisionist authors writing in the U.S. interwar period also
argued the case that these ties led to the Wilson administration breaking neutrality.\footnote{Two prominent interwar revisionist works that make the case for economic and political ties to Great
Britain being significant to a break with neutrality would be H.C Engelbrecht and F.C. Hanighen,*Merchants of Death* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1934) and Charles C. Tansill, *America Goes to War* (New
York: Little, Brown, 1938).} Floyd's book seeks only to analyze the events of 1914-1915 in their relevance to the
abandonment of U.S. neutrality, thereby limiting its scope.

Still another argument by some historians is that Wilson’s desire for a
restructuring of European political relations drew him to abandon neutrality. Chief
Wilson biographer and historian Arthur S. Link makes this case in his *Wilson: The
Struggle for Neutrality* (1960). Link argues that even as early as 1914 Wilson “would not
be willing to participate in any peace movement that seemed likely to promote a German

\footnote{Ibid., 78.}
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Britain being significant to a break with neutrality would be H.C Engelbrecht and F.C. Hanighen,*Merchants of Death* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1934) and Charles C. Tansill, *America Goes to War* (New
York: Little, Brown, 1938).}
triumph.”\textsuperscript{10} Before and after the U.S. joined the fighting in Europe, Wilson wanted to be an arbiter in the peace process between warring nations and encourage the fair treatment of smaller European nations. Wilson’s issuing of his “Fourteen Points” in January 1918 is one example that expressed this desire. Other scholars that make this case include Thomas J. Knock, Kendrick A. Clements, and John Milton Cooper Jr.\textsuperscript{11}

The historical literature focusing on the causes of American intervention in the First World War center primarily on German submarine warfare and the Zimmerman telegram. Strangely absent from this literature is the role of German espionage and sabotage activity in forcing Wilson’s hand in 1917. During the years 1914-1917, German spies and saboteurs were responsible for numerous violent activities in America. Many of these activities sought to prevent trade between the U.S. and Germany’s enemies Britain, France, and Russia. The most violent plots included attempting to dynamite transport structures (Welland Canal and Vanceboro bridge), engaging in mild chemical warfare, and firebombing vessels headed overseas. Non-violent plots included the forging of passports for German officers residing in America, inciting strikes among factory workers, and buying up raw materials. Due to a British naval blockade at the start of the First World War, Germany was unable to secure reliable trade with the neutral United States and wanted to even the odds by using covert operations. Some of these plots were

successful, while others failed miserably. One of the most famous successful sabotage operations was the Black Tom munitions depot bombing. About 1,000 tons of munitions and small arms (ready to be shipped to Russia) were the prime target of the saboteurs at Black Tom. Although the Irish Clan Na Gael group and the Indian Ghadar Party were suspected as possible conspirators, further investigation concluded that German agents were to blame.

Scholars such as Reinhard Doerries and Dwight R. Messinger, as well as journalists Jules Witcover, Chad Millman, and Howard Blum, have written about German spy and sabotage activity in the U.S. during the period of 1914-17.\textsuperscript{12} Contemporaries to many acts of sabotage, British Captain Henry Landau (a former member of SIS) and

\begin{center}
\textit{Figure 1 Sorting Munitions at Black Tom Depot}
\end{center}

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journalist John Price Jones were among the earliest to publish books concerning German spy activity. However, the historiography surrounding German sabotage and spy activity occurring during this period is little in number compared to the volume of literature focusing on the causes of American intervention in World War I.

German spy and sabotage operations were an important reason for war between the U.S. and the Central Powers. This reason is not one that has been given significant attention by scholars. In this study, I intend to show that German sabotage and espionage operations were among the primary motives behind President Wilson’s decision to abandon his policy of neutrality in favor of war with Germany. Four days following President Woodrow Wilson’s War Address (2 April 1917), Congress declared war against Imperial Germany. President Wilson had, up until that point, supported a policy of strict neutrality. This study does not explore how German spy/sabotage activity affected the opinion or judgement of Congress. In order to explore the opinions of individuals within Congress, a much more comprehensive study would be needed.

Three main points support the conclusion that German sabotage and spy activity was a factor which contributed toward the Wilson administration’s break with its policy of neutrality. The first is that Wilson made public claims that Germany’s espionage and

sabotage were part of the reason to favor war. Members of his administration were even more concerned at times than Wilson himself. The second point is that correspondence within the Wilson administration reflected concern surrounding German spy activity, and also that reports of German plots disturbed the President. The third point is that these German sabotage and spy activities resulted in the investigation of German officials and the issuance of the persona non grata by President Wilson to German diplomats in the U.S. These points are supported not only by Wilson’s speeches and writings, but also by the findings of scholars like Dr. Reinhard Doerries.

Doerries’ Imperial challenge : Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American relations, 1908-1917 (1989) has been hailed by Thomas Boghardt as a “superb study” and described by Arthur S. Link, leading authority on Woodrow Wilson scholarship, “as definitive a treatment of the subject as can be written and probably ever will be written.” Doerries’ book, first published as Washington-Berlin 1908/1917 (Düsseldorf, 1975), is a study of German Ambassador Count von Bernstorff and German-American relations from the German perspective during the period of 1908-1917. Doerries delves into such topics as American opinion of Germany prior to war in 1914, German wartime propaganda among different ethnic groups within the U.S., the German

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15 Arthur S. Link, forward in Reinhard R. Doerries, Imperial challenge : Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American relations, 1908-1917; translated by Christa D. Shannon, xv.
government’s interaction with the U.S. government during the U-boat crises, covert operations of German representatives and agents within the U.S. during 1914-1917, the German government’s interest in the Mexican Civil War, and finally the formal break between the German and American governments.\textsuperscript{16}

Another scholar, Dwight R. Messimer, wrote \textit{The Baltimore Sabotage Cell: German agents, American traitors, and the U-boat Deutschland during World War I} (2015). In \textit{The Baltimore Sabotage Cell}, Messimer describes the actions of German agents and American sympathizers who were involved in the submarine resupplying operations centered in Baltimore, MD. The U-boat \textit{Deutschland} was used to carry cargo from American shores back to Germany, bypassing the British blockade via submersion. Messimer charts the life of this U-boat including its transition to the military sub U-155.

Even popular historians and writers find the topic of spies and sabotage irresistible. Among these authors are Jules Witcover, Howard Blum, and Chad Millman. Jules Witcover’s \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom: Imperial Germany’s Secret War in America, 1914-1917} (1989) examines the history of Imperial Germany’s acts of sabotage during American neutrality and how Woodrow Wilson sought to continue that neutrality despite German deception.\textsuperscript{17} Witcover has been a columnist and political reporter for more than 50 years, and has worked with \textit{The Baltimore Sun, The Washington Star, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Newhouse Newspapers}, and (Chicago) \textit{Tribune Media}

\textsuperscript{16} Reinhard R. Doerries, \textit{Imperial challenge}, ix-x.
\textsuperscript{17} Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom}, ix.
Although dated, *Sabotage at Black Tom* has remained next to Reinhard Doerries’ *Imperial Challenge* as one of the best secondary sources concerning German sabotage and spy activity.

In journalist Howard Blum’s narrative *Dark Invasion: 1915* (2014), Blum describes the actions of the New York German spy ring under German Ambassador von Bernstorff through the eyes of Tom Tunney (NYC Police Captain) and other investigators. Many personal accounts like ones from Captain Franz von Rintelen (chief German operative) and Captain Tunney, as well as government documents and newspapers were used to piece together a story of sabotage against America. Howard Blum was inspired to write the book when he first found out that Tom Tunney had been the leader of the New York Police Department’s Bomb Squad from 1913 to 1917. The many successful and failed plots by the German spy ring are documented throughout the book, ultimately leading up to America’s intervention in World War I. Blum describes President Wilson’s reaction to German sabotage by stating, “With his growing awareness of Germany’s extensive secret operations against America, Wilson had been forced to rethink how he looked at the world.”

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20 Blum, *Dark Invasion*, 419.
Another journalist, Chad Millman, wrote *The Detonators: The Secret Plot to Destroy America and an Epic Hunt for Justice* (2006). This historical work tells the story of three lawyers who attempt to prove that Germany was responsible for the Black Tom munitions explosion. In his review for the book, Thomas Boghardt stated, “His is a very readable and informative study that goes beyond the mere question of who blew up Black Tom.”21 The case against the German government lasted well into the 1930s. This is a foreshadowing for the eventual German spy operations in World War II America. Millman also describes the persecution of German Americans as a result of spy operations in World War I.

These journalists, together with scholars, provide indispensable information regarding the activities as well as the importance of German agents and sabotage during the period 1914-1917. Although they do not always document the responses of Woodrow Wilson or his administration to the discoveries of German sabotage or spy activity, these secondary sources give very useful information in assessing the extent of German operations within America.

Primary sources, such as those provided by detective Thomas Tunney, Wilson biographer Arthur S. Link, German officer Franz von Rintelen, and others, prove that German spy and sabotage operations are connected to the decision to abandon a policy of

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neutrality. In the second chapter, many German spy or sabotage plots are examined in order to provide context for the discussion concerning Wilson’s abandonment of neutrality. Throughout the thesis, I have emphasized those activities which attracted the attention of American authorities at the time.
II. GERMAN SABOTAGE AND SPY ACTIVITY IN AMERICA

German sabotage and spy activity in America during the years 1914-1917 can be broken down into separate campaigns. One campaign focused on the disruption of American trade to Britain, France, and Russia. Another focused on the returning of German military personnel from America to Germany. Still another focused on the subsidizing of German leaning newspapers and organizations for the reason of spreading pro-German propaganda. Due to the limited amount of information on the topic, only the most sensational or damaging acts of sabotage or spy activity seem to attract the attention of many historians today. Such is the case for the Black Tom munitions depot explosion. The Secret Service, the Investigation Bureau, as well as the N.Y.C. police department were responsible for the investigation of these incidents. Although many German offenses may be hard to trace back to their initial root, there is no denial that the German Ambassador to Mexico and America during 1908-1917, Johann von Bernstorff, was funding and encouraging sabotage and spy activity.¹

So far, no scholar has been able to prove that Bernstorff was the orchestrator behind all of the major acts of sabotage or spy activity. Many early writers such as Henry Landau, John Price Jones, and Paul Merrick Hollister - and, later, Jules Witcover - argue in favor of Bernstorff’s centrality in the matter.² U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing

¹ Witcover, Sabotage at Black Tom, 56; Doerries, Imperial challenge, 142-143.
² Landau, The Enemy Within, 4-9; Jones, Hollister, The German Secret Service in America, 6; Witcover, Sabotage at Black Tom, 55-57.
wrote in his diary in May 1916, “From numberless circumstances, which came to my knowledge, I have not the slightest doubt but that Bernstorff, during the early part of the war, not only was cognizant of all the that was going on but probably directed the activities of his country’s agents…”

Although Bernstorff routinely denied knowledge of spy or sabotage activity, his positions gradually became untenable in light of the evidence against him. One example of Bernstorff’s awareness of illegal German activity can be seen in his communication with the Foreign Office in Berlin on the topic of passport forgeries: “Owing to private letters addressed to me from the Foreign Office and the official instructions to Mr. Papen to send home as many officers as possible, it has been necessary to give the latter false passports about which, under the present circumstances, I have no qualms.”

Count Johann Heinrich Andreas Hermann Albrecht von Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, was a man with a good reputation in Washington. Despite his reputation as a womanizer—later exposed by the media—he maintained respect in many social and political spheres. Before the souring of German-American relations due to the sinking of ships like the RMS Lusitania, Bernstorff had a good relationship with President Wilson. Ironically, Wilson would later feel greatly betrayed by the Ambassador.

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5 Blum, Dark Invasion: 1915, 347.
Bernstorff had made a visit to Berlin in summer 1914, meeting with Major Walter Nicolai. Nicolai was the head of Abteilung IIIB, the Kaiser’s secret intelligence service. Nicolai informed Bernstorff that Germany would soon declare war, and that the ambassador would be in charge of recruitment for sabotage operations in America. The objectives of these operations would be the undermining of American trade to Britain and her allies, encouraging pro-German propaganda, as well as preventing American intervention in the war. In order to perform his duty, Bernstorff was given the equivalent of $150 million in German Treasury notes, which he carried with him in a suitcase back to America. Along with his attachés Franz von Papen (military), Karl Boy-Ed (naval), and Dr. Heinrich Albert (commercial), Bernstorff established a recruiting method for

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6 Ibid., 36.
possible agents and planned the first operations. Some of their operations went unnoticed before America declared war, while others would be brought out into the open, and ultimately to Wilson’s attention. According to a later admission by commercial attaché Dr. Albert, the funds Bernstorff received were to serve for “buying munitions for Germany, stopping munitions for the Allies, necessary propaganda, forwarding reservists—and other things.” The British were the first to gain awareness of these operations by intercepting messages from Germany to America.

The British Cryptographic Service worked in what is known as “Room 40” to decipher German transmissions sent from Nauen, Germany to the German Embassy in Washington, DC. “Room 40” was actually an institution of British strategic imperial listening services which monitored communications involving Britain’s enemies. Technically, sovereign nations were not permitted by international law to tap or sabotage neutral cables. In this case, Britain monitored cable traffic from neutral countries under censorship. Britain, working around international law, intercepted German messages sent to the Americas and also cut two Azores-New York cables in the spring of 1915. British

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9 Millman, *The Detonators*, 11-13; Franz von Papen eventually served as German Chancellor in 1932 and then Vice-Chancellor under Adolf Hitler in 1933. He was largely responsible for Hitler’s ascension to power by encouraging German President Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as Chancellor in early 1933. Papen had thought that Hitler would be easily controlled due to the lack of Nazi influence in government. After the purge known as the “Night of the Long Knives”, Papan found himself under house arrest. Eventually Papen decided to resign as Vice-Chancellor, but later accepted an offer for a position as Ambassador to Austria. In Austria Papen used subversive tactics similar to those he had experienced in America during the First World War.


Captain Reginald “Blinker” Hall was in charge of “Room 40” when British intelligence agents intercepted a German message concerning spy/sabotage operations in America.\textsuperscript{13}

![Figure 3 Captain Reginald Hall, British Director of Naval Intelligence](image)

By July 1915 Captain Guy Gaunt, British Counter-Intelligence Officer and Naval attaché to Washington, was given a memo from British SIS head Mansfield Smith-Cumming implicating the German secret service in a campaign of sabotage against American trade.\textsuperscript{14} Guy Gaunt communicated this information to Franklin Polk, councilor for the Department of State and intelligence liaison to President Woodrow Wilson.\textsuperscript{15}

This message was of great importance due to the possibility of America joining the war if provoked. No specific names or criminal activities were mentioned in this

\textsuperscript{13} Reinhard R. Doerries, \textit{Imperial challenge}, 179.
\textsuperscript{14} Howard Blum, \textit{Dark Invasion: 1915}, 108
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
message, but it was clear that secret German operations were taking place inside America. The first men entrusted with the task of investigating these operations were N.Y.C. Police Captain Thomas Tunney, Deputy Commissioner Guy Scull, and Sergeant George Barnitz.

Polk arranged a meeting between Guy Gaunt, Guy Scull, and N.Y.C. Commissioner Arthur Woods in which they discussed the possible culpability of the German government in mysterious ship and factory bombings occurring in and around the New York harbor area. Woods decided that an investigation was necessary, but that the investigators should be careful not to leak information that would disrupt German-American relations. Captain Thomas “Tom” Tunney, having previous experience in capturing anarchist bombers such as the Italian group “Brescia Circle,” was an obvious candidate to the head investigations centered in New York harbor. Even though his first request to investigate mysterious ship and factory bombings was denied by Woods, he was eventually assigned the task after the meeting arranged by Polk. Tunney had been friends with Guy Scull before working with him in the German spy investigations. Scull was an adventurer for sure. He had fought in the Spanish-American War with Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders,” worked as a news correspondent in multiple countries, and was once on an exploration to find a sunken Spanish galleon.\textsuperscript{16} Sergeant Barnitz was Tunney’s right-hand man, working on previous cases and participating in the anarchist

bombing investigations. Together these men uncovered many of the ongoing and potential plots carried out by Bernstorff’s spy ring.

**Sabotage Campaign**

The most significant campaign of German intrigue was the prevention of trade from America to Britain and their allies. These included the planned destruction of a canal, the injection of anthrax into horses being shipped overseas, the incitement of strikes at factories, and the firebombing of cargo vessels. Some of these efforts failed to materialize, while others were more successful in disrupting trade.

One of the first plots involved in this campaign was one to dynamite the Welland Canal in Canada. The canal was a major waterway connecting lakes Ontario and Erie. This canal was essential for Canadian shipping, and Britain received much food and war supplies from their Canadian allies. For this task, Franz von Papen hired a German agent named Horst von der Goltz to assemble a team that would carry out this mission. These men were German sympathizers largely from New York. Goltz lists them in his own memoir by the names of Fritzen, Busse, Tucker, and Covani.\(^{17}\) Once the men were briefed on the task and witnessed the amount of security present at the canal, they panicked. Goltz assured them that the task was possible, and that he would scout the area

using an airplane to find the most unguarded places.\textsuperscript{18} When he returned to their hotel room two days later, all the recruited men had fled. Papen was very disappointed in the waste of time and resources that this cost him, and blamed Goltz for the failure.

Woodrow Wilson expelled Papen in December 1915 in part due to the Welland Canal debacle.\textsuperscript{19} When the Federal government indicted Papen of sabotage activity in 1916, this plot was used as clear evidence. Since Papen had already returned to Germany by then, the indictment was more damaging to his reputation in America than in Germany. While the Welland Canal plot failed, the attack on the Black Tom munitions depot succeeded at disrupting trade.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{papen.jpg}
\caption{Franz von Papen, German military attaché}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Blum, \textit{Dark Invasion: 1915}, 83.
The most well-known act of sabotage by German agents in America during the period of 1914-1917 was the destruction of the Black Tom munitions depot in Jersey City, New Jersey. The depot was the property of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and was holding 1,000 tons of munitions and small arms that were to be shipped to Russia.20 Around 2 a.m. on 30 July 1916 one giant explosion shook the entire harbor area, breaking windows as far out as twenty-five miles away. Smaller explosions continued throughout the night. Although German sabotage was suspected by investigators, two other theories were brought forth early in the investigation: that the Clan Na Gael group or the Indian Ghadar Party caused the explosions.21 Investigators were quick to point out that the explosion might have resulted from an accident, for smudge pots had been lit by watchmen that night, but this was ruled out as a possible cause for the explosions.

Investigations following the incident eventually concluded that German agents were responsible for the attack at Black Tom; long after the war, The German American Mixed Claim Commission (1932-39) concurred.22 Three accomplices -- Michael Kristoff, Kurt Jahnke, and Lothar Witzke were most likely the saboteurs behind the attack, but

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21 The Irish Clan Na Gael organization was originally created in the 19th century as an American centered Irish Republican group. A sister group to the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the Clan Na Gael organization supported Irish independence and even went as far as allying with Imperial Germany following the outbreak of World War I. The bombings related to the Clan Na Gael organization as well as their connections to other militant Irish nationalists are described in Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012) The Indian Ghadar Party was founded in 1913 by Punjabi-Sikhs seeking to promote Indian independence from British rule. For more information on the Ghadar Party’s activities see Maia Rammath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011)
there is reason for skepticism: Kristoff was later diagnosed as being mentally challenged, while Jahnke, and Witzke were German agents stationed in California, making it difficult for them to travel all the way across the country to Black Tom and back in a timely fashion.\(^23\) Post-war investigations held Germany responsible for the explosion. To the dismay of the injured party, reparation payments took decades to be paid.\(^24\)

German sabotage was not limited to bombing operations, but also included mild chemical warfare. In 1915, *Abteilung IIIB* recruited a young surgeon named Anton Dilger for a plot to spread anthrax and glanders among horses being sent to the Allies from America to Europe.\(^25\) A graduate of Johns Hopkins University and a field surgeon for the German army from the start of the Great War, Dilger was an ideal choice for the germ operation. Strains of anthrax and glanders germs were developed in Germany, then smuggled into the U.S. Working in a building that became known as “Tony’s Lab” (located in a subdivision of Chevy Chase in Washington, DC), Dilger helped manufacture the cultures for the inoculation of Europe-bound horses and mules.\(^26\) Although a second lab was set up in St. Louis, the cold weather prevented the germs from surviving and

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\(^{24}\) Under the 1921 Treaty of Berlin, the Lehigh Valley Railroad sought damages against Imperial Germany from the German-American Mixed Claims Commission. In 1939, after long investigation, the commission ruled that Germany was to blame. It wasn’t until 1953 (after Hitler’s Germany failed to comply) that both sides agreed upon a $50 million reparation, and the last payment of $4 million was issued in 1979. For more information, see Burkhard Jähnicke, *Washington und Berlin zwischen den Kriegen: Die Mixed Claims Commission in den transatlantischen Beziehungen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003), 309.


\(^{26}\) Witcover, *Sabotage at Black Tom*, 126, 137.
ultimately brought an end to the entire operation. If the germs could not survive exposure to the cold, it was a waste to continue funding the project. Captain Tunney and President Wilson were not aware of these anthrax plots until captured documents revealed the operations. What Tunney did experience firsthand was the destruction of cargo ships and munitions plants. Two names were relevant to the bombings on the New York coast: Paul Koenig and Captain Franz von Rintelen.

Paul Koenig was a former security chief for the Hamburg-American passenger line. He was a thug boss when von Papen decided to hire him for sabotage efforts on the docks. Koenig knew many of the dock workers by name and could intimidate them in order to get what he wanted. For months Koenig either paid off or bullied dock workers into doing what he wanted them to do. Some placed bombs or satchels without much protest, while others were bribed not to guard particular piers and ships.

Tunney began suspecting Paul Koenig to be involved in some way in the mysterious ship bombings. It wasn’t until Tunney started listening in on Koenig’s phone conversations that he had a lead. George Fuchs, who was a relative of Koenig, gave details to one of Tom’s agents about Koenig’s operations. Koenig had sent Fuchs to deliver dynamite to German agents in Canada. This information was what Tunney needed to search Koenig’s personal office and home. Tunney’s agents hit pay dirt. They

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27 Millman, The detonators, 42; Dwight R. Messimer, The Baltimore Sabotage Cell, 31-32
28 Blum, Dark Invasion: 1915, 94.
29 Millman, The detonators, 56.
found a notebook with spies’ names, their aliases, contact information, meeting locations, and their operations.\textsuperscript{30} The most damning piece of evidence in the notebook was listed as the man whom Paul Koenig worked for, von Papen.

Franz Rintelen von Kleist, a junior officer of the German admiralty staff in Berlin, was in charge of a large sabotage operation to prohibit trade between the U.S. and the Allied powers. Dispatched to the U.S. in 1915, Rintelen (aided by Ambassador Bernstorff’s attaches) conspired with German dock workers and Irish longshoremen to fire-bomb vessels leaving New York harbor.\textsuperscript{31} Taking advantage of Paul Koenig and Dr. Bunz’s recruiting efforts as well as Dr. Walter Scheele’s “cigar bombs,” Rintelen was able to cause a small dent in Allied shipping leaving New York. The exact number of ships that were firebombed still remains unknown, although Michael Warner supports the claim that bombs were placed on four dozen ships between 1915 and 1917.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom}, 83, 90.
Dr. Walter Scheele was a German spy in America for twenty years while reporting to German officials on advances in explosive technology. Under a cover as the president of the “New Jersey Chemical Company,” Scheele was able to develop a small explosive that mixed picric and sulphuric acids together in order to create an intense flame. These explosives, deemed “cigar bombs,” were small in size while able to create a reliable flame which melted the lead casing leaving only small (if not any) traces of the device behind.

Needless to say, Rintelen utilized these “cigar bombs” in his sabotage operations. Although Rintelen had his hands full recruiting saboteurs for these operations, he was also involved in schemes of organizing labor and fomenting strikes. Rintelen, being recalled to Germany in August 1915, was intercepted by the British naval intelligence

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34 Reinhard Doerries from the introduction in Captain Von Rintelen, *The Dark Invader: Wartime Reminiscences of a German Naval Intelligence Officer*. (Lovat Dickson Limited, 1933), xix
and sent to Donington Hall as a prisoner of war. He was eventually handed over to American authorities and sentenced to twenty months in prison in November 1918.\(^{35}\)

**Forgery of Passports**

The second campaign of spy and sabotage activity was the effort to forge passports in order to return German military personnel residing in America (mainly reservists) to their homeland of Germany. As stated before, Ambassador Bernstorff was fully aware of this campaign. The man who was put in charge of the procurement of forged passports was named Hans von Wedell.\(^{36}\) Since Germany had lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers just in the first six months of the war, it was thought that recruiting men from America could help boost the German army in its time of need. Unfortunately for Germany, America’s strict policy of neutrality necessitated that any ship docked in American ports at the start of the war could not join the hostilities. Many German vessels remained interned on the American East Coast for the entirety of the war.\(^{37}\) On top of this, members of the British navy routinely boarded merchant vessels asking passengers to show their identification. Despite these concerns, the German government began to finance about one thousand members of the reserve officer corps making their journey back to European shores. The only problem was that the requirements for obtaining

\(^{35}\) Reinhard Doerries from the introduction in Captain Von Rintelen, *The Dark Invader: Wartime Reminiscences of a German Naval Intelligence Officer*, xxiii

\(^{36}\) Doerries, *Imperial challenge*, 145.

\(^{37}\) Blum, *Dark Invasion*, 76.
passports in America had gotten much more difficult to fulfill. As Jules Witcover has noted, “Under pressure from Britain and France, the United States tightened its previously very loose passport requirements to include more extensive proof of American citizenship and a photograph of the applicant.” In an attempt to get around this obstacle Bernstorff, along with attachés Papen and Boy-Ed, decided to hire a man to manufacture phony U.S. passports. This man, Hans von Wedell, recruited local citizens to get their picture taken and sign a document. He then used the information to create a phony passport. The incentive for participation was $20 in cash. Eventually Wedell’s greed got the best of him, and he started giving out $5 per participant and pocketing the other $15 that Papen had supplied him with. Once these citizens caught whiff of what was going on, in their anger they promptly contacted the police. The operation was shut down by police suddenly only months into the effort, and Hans von Wedell escaped to Cuba upon his failure. Even though this was a disappointment for Bernstorff, hundreds of reserve officers used these phony passports to successfully travel back to Germany safe and sound.

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39 Blum, *Dark Invasion: 1915*, 90.
Subsidizing of Newspapers

The final campaign of German spy and sabotage activity involved the subsidizing of pro-German newspapers and organizations in America. Confiscated documents from Dr. Heinrich Albert (commercial attaché) revealed the subsidizing of George Sylvester Viereck’s newspaper *The Fatherland* as well as various German- and Irish-American organizations.40 Although many in the government suspected that Germany was paying off pro-German newspapers, it was not until summer of 1915 that proof was found.

In May 1915, just months before the raid on Koenig’s home and office, a German U-boat sank the British passenger liner RMS *Lusitania*. With 1,198 lives lost, and more than 120 of them being American lives, the sinking of the *Lusitania* enraged Wilson. Directly following this event, President Wilson commanded Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo (who was also in charge of the Secret Service) to start surveillance of the German and Austrian embassy personnel.41 It was not long before Secret Service members were listening in on Embassy phone calls, and even using some of Tunney’s tapped lines as well. On 23 July 1915, Secret Service agent Franke Burke seized German attaché Heinrich Albert’s briefcase as the German diplomat was leaving an elevated train in Manhattan. Albert failed to identify Burke and could not catch up to him. Once again, investigators hit the jackpot, this time McAdoo gaining credit for the catch. In the briefcase, there was a treasure trove of documents detailing ongoing and potential

41 Ibid., 339.
German intrigue. These operations included using a factory in Connecticut to buy up raw materials used for weaponry, paying off workers to cause strikes, and bribing journalists to write pro-German news stories.\(^{42}\)

\[Image\]

\textbf{Erich Muenter}

Separate from the German campaigns of sabotage and spy activity were the violent actions of a German-American by the name of Erich Muenter. Although no proof has been found which could connect him with the German Embassy or Bernstorff’s attaches, his actions gained press notoriety and investigation by Police Captain Tunney.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 344-345; Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom}, 121.
A former Harvard Professor named Erich Muenter was a German sympathizer who became a radical activist and participant in sabotage activities. After his wife was murdered under mysterious circumstances, Muenter changed his name to “Frank Holt” and lay low in Mexico. Fed up with news of America supporting Britain through massive trade, Muenter decided that he should go back to America and punish those responsible for backing trade between America and Britain. Muenter gained access to the U.S. Capitol building in order to dynamite the Senate floor. Noting that the Senate was not in session, and that there was a switchboard covered with a drop cloth, he decided to place the dynamite underneath the drop cloth. The bomb exploded on 2 July 1915 with no casualties.  

![Image of burned room](image.jpg)

*Figure 7 Aftermath of the U.S. Capitol Building Explosion*

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On the next day, Frank Holt (a.k.a. Erich Muenter) traveled to J.P. Morgan Jr.’s estate to confront and possibly kill him. Morgan was the major purchasing agent of war supplies for Britain and France at that time, with over $2 billion in loans coming from J.P. Morgan and Company.\textsuperscript{44} J.P. Morgan Jr. even pressured the U.S. government to approve commercial credits for the Allied governments.

Dressed as a businessman, Muenter pleaded with Morgan’s butler, but ultimately had to brandish his weapon to force the butler to let him in. Muenter found two of Morgan’s children and led them at gunpoint up the stairs of the mansion to confront Morgan. Muenter continued up to the second floor, and seeing J.P. Morgan Jr. charging at him, Muenter fired, hitting the banker in the abdomen and in the leg. Morgan eventually tackled Muenter and with help was able to restrain and disarm the man. Morgan’s injuries were not fatal, and attendants found the two bullets that had penetrated

\textsuperscript{44} Blum, \textit{Dark Invasion}, 139.
through his body. Once Muenter was arrested and handed over to police, Tunney received instructions from N.Y.C. Commissioner Woods to investigate the incident and question the would-be assassin. Muenter was being held at a jail in Glen Cove, New York. Tunney questioned Muenter, still thinking that his name was “Frank Holt.” Muenter confessed to the Capitol Building bombing and eventually gave Tunney a location for a trunk of stockpiled dynamite. The day after Tunney located the dynamite, Erich Muenter was found dead in his cell with two gunshot wounds. It was later presumed by law enforcement that a German agent had shot him twice while his cell was unguarded.

Other than Erich Muenter’s violent activities, many of these acts of sabotage can be traced back to one of German Ambassador Bernstorff’s attaches -- Karl Boy-Ed (naval), Franz von Papen (military), or Dr. Heinrich Albert (commercial), or the German Ambassador himself. The first knowledge of German spy/sabotage activity in America came from British Intelligence.

45 New York Tribune. “J.P. Morgan Shot by Pro-German Fanatic Who Set Senate Bomb; Condition Good”. Sunday July 4th, 1915
46 Tunney and Hollister, *Throttled!* , 194.
47 Blum, *Dark Invasion: 1915*, 326.
It is important to note that the British SIS and Naval Intelligence were the first to gain awareness of the German plans to commence sabotage on American soil. British Intelligence officers were careful not to give away the fact that they had broken German codes or that the British military was responsible for illegal surveillance. The American Military Intelligence Division (MID), the Bureau of Investigation (forerunner of the FBI), as well as the Secret Service all became involved in operations to catch German spies and saboteurs. Michael Warner, formerly a historian for the CIA and the Historian for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, writing on the topic, notes, “With British help, American counterintelligence agencies finally organized themselves and even took the offensive against German networks in the final months of the war. The Army expanded its tiny Military Intelligence Division (MID), hiring detectives from the NYPD...
Bomb Squad and eventually assigning several sections to domestic security duties…"

These efforts led to the unveiling of many German plots as well as the embarrassment of German officials due to the uncovering of damning evidence against them.

The German spy and sabotage operations were far too many for President Woodrow Wilson not to take notice of. Although British Intelligence had informed him somewhat, the operations that took place between 1914-17 became largely an American affair. Wilson’s speeches show that he recognized the threat of these German intrigues and felt compelled to tell the public how important they were. The most important speeches in this regard occur in 1917, as the President became clearer about his motives and intentions in the Great War.

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III. WILSON’S PUBLIC WORDS CONCERNING GERMAN SABOTAGE AND SPY ACTIVITY

President Wilson’s public words often told more about his own opinions than his private statements did. Historian Robert Tucker stated, “A case may be made that Wilson revealed himself as much in his public utterances as he did privately. It may even be that he revealed himself more in speaking to the public.”¹ From 1915 to 1917, Woodrow Wilson mentioned German spies and sabotage in many speeches. The most significant of these speeches were Wilson’s War Address to Congress and Flag Day speech, both from 1917. Besides these two, there were other speeches (in 1915 and 1916) that mention German intrigues, although not always in the same breath as “war.” Even so, all of these together provide a significant body of evidence to show the importance of German spy and sabotage operations and their relevance to Wilson’s decision to favor war.

Before 1917, President Woodrow Wilson was critical of siding with any belligerents fighting in the First World War. Shortly after the war broke out, Wilson addressed Congress with the statement, “Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned.”² Wilson also ran in the 1916 election with the slogan, “He Kept Us Out of War.” Former President Theodore Roosevelt called Wilson “the lily-

¹ Tucker, Woodrow Wilson and the Great War, 23.
livered skunk in the White House” when the president did not declare war following the discovery of the Zimmerman telegram.\textsuperscript{3} If there was anyone who could differ more with the pro-war and anti-German statements of former President Theodore Roosevelt, it was President Woodrow Wilson. As a former college professor and then Princeton University President, it was not in Wilson’s nature to take huge risks without considering all the potential consequences. To be involved in a war that was thousands of miles away and not directly threatening American security did not seem like a worthwhile venture.

When President Wilson took the podium on 2 April 1917 to address a special joint session of Congress, he was truly a changed man- a man who was not only swayed by German offenses occurring frequently, but also one who suffered the loss of a wife three years prior.\textsuperscript{4} In his speech, asking Congress for a declaration of war, the President stated, “…we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts -- for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations…”\textsuperscript{5} This did not sound like the President Wilson who in 1914 considered American intervention in the war a crime


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against civilization. In continuing his speech, Wilson described Germany’s efforts as a “...war against all nations” and stated that the world must be “made safe for democracy”.

A less commonly noted section of his speech deals with the actions of German agents in America:

One of the things that has served to convince us that the Prussian autocracy was not and could never be our friend is that from the very outset of the present war it has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies and set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot against our national unity of counsel, our peace within and without our industries and our commerce. Indeed it is now evident that its spies were here even before the war began; and it is unhappily not a matter of conjecture but a fact proved in our courts of justice that the intrigues which have more than once come perilously near to disturbing the peace and dislocating the industries of the country have been carried on at the instigation, with the support, and even under the personal direction of official agents of the Imperial Government accredited to the Government of the United States. Even in checking these things and trying to extirpate them we have sought to put the most generous interpretation possible upon them because we knew that their source lay, not in any hostile feeling or purpose of the German people towards us...but only in the selfish designs of a Government that did what it pleased and told its people nothing.

Here is a clear reference to the German Embassy being connected to spy activity in America before the war. There is a lot to analyze in this one statement, and much can be gleaned from it. First, Wilson’s language here is unusually strong in describing these

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8 Ibid.
activities. The German government “filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies” as well as “set criminal intrigues everywhere afoot.” If German spy activity or sabotage were not a serious concern, why would the president make these almost hyperbolic claims? It is clear that the president knew about spy activities, as given testament by his personal statements and the discoveries of American and British intelligence services.

Another significant point about this paragraph is Wilson’s absolute certainty about German intrigues. His statement that “it is unhappily not a matter of conjecture but a fact proved in our courts of justice” that German intrigues were commissioned by officials of the German government offers legitimacy to the claim that Germany was behind acts of spying and sabotage. At the same time, President Wilson carefully distinguished the known perpetrator of these actions -- the Imperial German government -- from those who were ignorant of these things -- German citizens.

In certain ways, President Wilson’s statement looks similar to that of a letter from former President Theodore Roosevelt to John Price Jones in February 1917. Before the publication of Jones’ *The German Spy in America* (1917), Roosevelt wrote to Jones,

Your statements are evidently for the most part based on official German records, happening in the course of prosecuting the various criminals, who by direct instigation of the German government, have for the last two and a half years been using this country as a base for war against the Allies, and more than this, have in effect been waging war on us within our own boundries, no less than the high seas. Our people need to know of the certain facts that you set forth. They need to understand that Germany has waged war upon us, and has waged war against our
property, and has waged war against the lives of non-combatants, including women and children, and therefore a far more evil war than one waged openly.\(^9\)

Both Roosevelt and Wilson believed that the German government was not only encouraging sabotage or spy activity, but guilty of the “instigation” of them. This can be seen clearly in the actions of German attaches’ Papen, Boy-Ed, and Albert, some of their actions coming as a direct result of commands given by the German ambassador Johann von Bernstorff.

Wilson’s Flag Day speech, delivered on 14 June 1917, also accused the German embassy of spy and sabotage activity. In 1916, President Wilson (via proclamation 1335) requested that citizens recognize the day that the U.S. Continental Congress adopted the U.S. flag as a day that should “be given special significance as a day of renewal and reminder” including “special patriotic exercises” and a day to “rededicate ourselves to the nation.”\(^10\) This unifying proclamation stood in contrast with the public’s division of opinion about the war waging in Europe as well as domestic issues at home.


http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=62991
On Flag Day of 1917, Wilson gave a speech at Sylvan Theater in Washington D.C. In his speech, the president gave reasons for how America was “forced into the war.” After his initial statements, Wilson launched into this accusatory paragraph:

It is plain enough how we were forced into the war. The extraordinary insults and aggressions of the Imperial German Government left us no self-respecting choice but to take up arms in defense of our rights as a free people and of our honor as a sovereign government. The military masters of Germany denied us the right to be neutral. They filled our unsuspecting communities with vicious spies and conspirators and sought to corrupt the opinion of our people in their own behalf. When they found that they could not do that, their agents diligently spread sedition amongst us and sought to draw our own citizens from their allegiance, — and some of those agents were men connected with the official Embassy of the German Government itself here in our own capital. They sought by violence to destroy our industries and arrest our commerce. They tried to incite Mexico to take up arms against us and to draw Japan into a hostile alliance with her, — and that, not by indirection, but by direct suggestion from the Foreign Office in Berlin. They impudently denied us the use of the high seas and repeatedly executed their threat that they would send to their death any of our people who ventured to approach the coasts of Europe. And many of our own people were corrupted. Men began to look upon their own neighbors with suspicion and to wonder in their hot resentment and surprise whether there was any community in which hostile intrigue did not lurk. What great nation in such circumstances would not have taken up arms? Much as we had desired peace, it was denied us, and not of our own choice. This flag under which we serve would have been dishonored had we withheld our hand.

12 Ibid.
Similar to his War Address, President Wilson spoke as if the American government had little choice in the matter of whether or not to join the war raging overseas. Germany had “denied us [America] the right to be neutral,” as well as “denied us the use of the high seas.” Once again, Wilson mentioned spies and “agents” infiltrating society and spreading sedition, and also seeking “by violence to destroy our [America’s] industries and arrest our commerce.” Wilson then connected these sinister actions with his decision to favor war: “What great nation in such circumstances would not have taken up arms?” Clearly, the intent of the president was to show that all of these actions by the German government were important to the abandonment of neutrality. Howard Blum and John Price Jones both mention parts of Wilson’s Flag Day speech and its relation to the importance of German spy and sabotage activity.13

Before 1917, President Wilson spoke publicly about people he deemed to be enemies within America who were sympathetic to foreign nations. Seeing as many German Americans aided saboteurs Paul Koenig and Franz von Rintelen, and also Military attaché Franz von Papen, it is very likely that Wilson was inspired to condemn the actions of these individuals in his speeches. Unity of thought was very important to Wilson. He wished for citizens to take his side and to see him as a president who knew what was best for his country. If there were Americans who harbored private hostile or traitorous thoughts and held great sympathy for the homeland of their ancestors, it could

be detrimental to Wilson’s more patriotic program. As Wilson himself said in his December 1915 State of the Union address,

There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America, who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life; who have sought to bring the authority and good name of our Government into contempt, to destroy our industries wherever they thought it effective for their vindictive purposes to strike at them, and to debase our politics to the uses of foreign intrigue…Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out. They are not many, but they are infinitely malignant, and the hand of our power should close over them at once. They have formed plots to destroy property, they have entered into conspiracies against the neutrality of the Government, they have sought to pry into every confidential transaction of the Government in order to serve interests alien to our own.\(^\text{14}\)

These foreign-born citizens involved in sabotage activities were just as vital to the success of German plans as were agents in the field. As mentioned previously, numerous dock workers of German and Irish descent were recruited by Franz von Rintelen for the firebombing of vessels headed out of New York Harbor.\(^\text{15}\) As stated crudely by the then NYC Police Commissioner Arthur Woods, “…German residents devised the inhuman scheme of making chemical fire bombs and infernal machines to be placed on ships carrying passengers and supplies, with the deliberate intent and purpose that the ships


\(^{15}\) Doerries, Imperial challenge, 182.
should be crippled or sunk in mid-ocean—it mattered not to them that all on board might find a watery grave.”\textsuperscript{16} This fits with President Wilson’s statement “They have formed plots to destroy property, they have entered into conspiracies against the neutrality of the Government…” Captain Henry Landau, a former member of SIS (MI6) during World War I, claimed in his 1937 book that 43 American factories suffered from mysterious fires or explosions and four dozen ships were bombed as well – with total estimates of the damage at around $150 million.\textsuperscript{17} Jules Witcover believed that there were nearly two hundred suspected acts of German sabotage on American soil during the period of neutrality.\textsuperscript{18}

In his 1916 acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination for President, Wilson repeated similar phrases and terms as the ones used in his December 1915 State of the Union address. Although a shorter section of the speech is given to the topic of foreign intrigue, one cannot help but notice the similarities.

The passions and intrigues of certain active groups and combinations of men amongst us who were born under foreign flags injected the poison of disloyalty into our own most critical affairs, laid violent hands upon many of our industries, and subjected us to the shame of divisions of sentiment and purpose in which America was contemned and forgotten. It is part of the business of this year of

\textsuperscript{17} Landau, \textit{The enemy within}, 38, 300.
\textsuperscript{18} Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom}, ix, 321.
reckoning and settlement to speak plainly and act with unmistakable purpose in rebuke of these things, in order that they may be forever hereafter impossible.\textsuperscript{19}

In both speeches, Wilson condemned what he called ‘the poison of disloyalty,’ and asserted that persons not born under the American flag were committing violent acts against American industry. In the two years prior to American intervention in World War I, Wilson had increasingly encouraged unity of thought and this reflected in his policies as well as statements. If the country was to overcome the divisiveness of the war raging in Europe, American citizens must be allegiant to America above all other nations. At his June 1916 address to the Associated Advertising Clubs in Philadelphia President Wilson stated,

In the first place, I believe, and I summon you to show your belief in the same thing, that it is the duty of every American in everything that he does, in his business and out of it, to think first, not of himself or of any interest which he may be called upon to sacrifice, but of the country which we serve. "America first" means nothing until you translate it into what you do. So I believe most profoundly in the duty of every American to exalt the national consciousness by purifying his own motives and exhibiting his own devotion.\textsuperscript{20}


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Related to the push for loyalty was the push for a “true spirit of neutrality”\(^{21}\) which would benefit Wilson’s hope for a chance to broker peace following the war’s conclusion. In the quote above, Wilson endorses an “America first” mentality that challenges one’s individualistic motivations and desires. Whatever the road ahead, Wilson needed complete devotion to what he or the Congress decided to do about the war raging overseas. German spies and saboteurs, as well as those recruited by German officials, would provoke even more negative sentiment toward Imperial Germany than already existed. In other words, German intrigue was bad for German-American relations as well as detrimental to the neutral feelings that Wilson thought American citizens should have.

This potentially unifying speech was delivered in the same month that Wilson signed the National Defense Act of 1916. This act expanded the Army as well as the National Guard. Although President Wilson initially rejected the arguments of the Preparedness Movement, a movement to strengthen the U.S. military in reaction to the start of World War I, he realized that America had to be ready for an attack by an outside power. The most well-organized of the Preparedness groups was the National Security League (NSL). The NSL was bankrolled by big businessmen like Cornelius Vanderbilt,

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[https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson’s_Declaration_of_Neutrality](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson’s_Declaration_of_Neutrality)
Henry C. Frick, and Simon Guggenheim and espoused conservative interests.\textsuperscript{22} Wilson, even though not agreeing with conservative interests, knew that preparedness was an important issue.

By late 1916, President Wilson’s earlier position that America could be “too proud” to fight was eroding. It became clear that if Wilson did not act in the war, his dream of brokering peace might actually backfire on him. If Germany won the war, it was unlikely that Wilson would have a say in instituting a just resolution. One of the many examples of Wilson’s change of heart came in his November 1917 speech to the American Federation of Labor about seven months after declaring war on Imperial Germany:

Any body of free men that compounds with the present German Government is compounding for its own destruction. But that is not the whole of the story. Any man in America or anywhere else that supposes that the free industry and enterprise of the world can continue if the Pan-German plan is achieved and German power fastened upon the world is as fatuous as the dreamers in Russia. What I am opposed to is not the feeling of the pacifists, but their stupidity. My heart is with them, but my mind has a contempt for them. I want peace, but I know how to get it, and they do not.\textsuperscript{23}

President Wilson, who had previously stated that America joining the war effort was a “crime against civilization,” was arguing against the pacifists’ “stupidity” in November 1917. He did not deny his desire for peace, but clearly Wilson changed his former position and made it known not only through action but also through his speeches.

It is clear through examining President Wilson’s public words that German spy and sabotage activity was a significant factor for his decision to abandon a policy of neutrality and favor war. The fact that Wilson implicated the German Embassy in relation to sabotage/spy activity in his 1917 Flag Day address as well as “official agents of the Imperial Government accredited to the Government of the United States” in his 1917 War Address is unmistakable evidence for the importance of these activities. Besides these speeches, Wilson’s 1915 State of the Union Address and his 1916 Democratic nomination speech were instances where President Wilson stressed the danger of what had already occurred involving foreign born individuals destroying industry and inciting disloyal actions.

German intrigue not only threatened war, it undermined President Wilson’s former plea for Americans to be neutral in thought and fair with all parties involved in the war effort. In Wilson’s aforementioned 1915 State of the Union Address, the president even goes to the extent of stating that the “hand of our power should close over them at once” and that these foreign born “creatures” be “crushed out.” These are strong words coming from a president who did not decide to favor war for another year and four
months after this speech. Certainly, sabotage and other acts of intrigue were on the
president’s mind from 1915 onwards.

The president’s speeches are not the only body of evidence which show that
German spy/sabotage activity influenced Wilson’s decision making. Wilson’s private
words also reflect concern over German spy/sabotage activity. At times, Wilson’s
suspicions of German spy activities bordered on paranoia. Personal correspondence
between Wilson and his close advisors, and even a private citizen, show his interest in
German intrigue. These communications provide another body of evidence separate from
Wilson’s public words.
IV. WILSON’S PRIVATE STATEMENTS CONCERNING GERMAN SPY AND SABOTAGE ACTIVITY

President Woodrow Wilson is one of the most studied presidents of the last century. As a leader in the American progressive movement, a wartime president, and scholar, Woodrow Wilson has become a central figure in the study of American politics, war, and social movements. His correspondence, as collected and annotated by noted Wilson scholar Arthur Link, shows that German intrigue was a real concern for the president, and not just a topic that was discussed in his speeches.1 During the period of 1915-16, while many revelations concerning German sabotage activity were discovered, Woodrow Wilson’s discussions reflect a president who was often annoyed at German intrigue and divided over how he should approach the issue. German officials, especially the attachés of German Ambassador Bernstorff, were of great suspicion to the president due to their connections to specific acts of sabotage or spying.

Certain illegal German activities were less dangerous or nefarious according to President Wilson. For instance, Hanz von Wedell’s operation to forge passports didn’t upset him as much as later illegal acts. As Link stated, “The Washington authorities were perhaps annoyed, but they certainly understood the natural desire of German soldiers to return home, and they were not inclined to blame German envoys for trying to make this

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1 Dr. Arthur Stanley Link (1920-1998), the leading authority on Wilson scholarship, was editor of the massive 69 volumes included in The Papers of Woodrow Wilson (1966-1983). His 5 volume biography of Woodrow Wilson, entitled Wilson (1947-1965), as well as his many other biographical works on Wilson have become authoritative among scholars. Dr. Link’s work provides invaluable commentary on the context of Woodrow Wilson’s letters, as well as the opinions of his key advisors.
possible.” American authorities were aware of the forging of passports and their connection to the German Embassy as early as December 1914. Wilson, upon sending evidence of these forgeries to the Attorney General, wrote him stating:

As the Secretary of State requests, I am handing you the enclosed papers. The subject matter is evidently of the most sensational kind [for it directly implicated the German Ambassador]. I hope that you will have it looked into thoroughly, but that, at the same time, you will have all possible precaution taken that no hint of it may become public unless and until it materializes into something upon which we have no choice but to act.

The early criminal acts by German agents or their underlings were enough to plant a seed of distrust into the president’s mind, but not enough to elicit draconian responses from him. When German Ambassador Bernstorff was eventually confronted with the evidence of the misstep, he was able to settle the dispute by giving up one of his men as a scapegoat and promising not to engage in passport fraud again. Bernstorff, in writing to the German Foreign Office on the matter, stated, “Ruroede will plead guilty… so that further discussions and cross examinations are impossible. For this Ruroede receives $10,000 for the support of his family (regardless of the length of his prison term,

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from one to five years) and, after he is discharged from prison, $5,000 for a new start.”  

Military attaché Papen, even though involved in the plot, was spared from the trial which led to the conviction of Carl Ruroede in March 1915.

Figure 10 Edward Mandell House

The advisors in whom President Wilson confided the most about German spy/sabotage activity were Edward Mandell House (simply known as Colonel House in personal correspondence), Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo. House was a businessman and avowed Democrat from Texas before he became a friend of and advisor for Woodrow Wilson (then New Jersey

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governor) in 1911. House would go on to help Wilson win the 1912 Democratic nomination for the presidency. Although not taking a formal position in President Wilson’s cabinet, House remained a chief advisor on foreign affairs and diplomacy for the president. House also played a supporting role at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

Robert Lansing, a conservative Democrat from New York, was appointed by President Wilson as Secretary of State following William Jennings Bryan’s resignation in June 1915. Previously, Lansing had been a councilor to the State Department. Lansing provided a stark contrast in attitude and belief to Bryan in that he believed war between the United States and Germany was inevitable and that a harsh response to the sinking of the RMS Lusitania was needed. In 1916, Lansing formed the Bureau of Secret Intelligence in order to gather information concerning illegal German and Austrian activity in the U.S. Due to the fact that the Bureau of Investigation (forerunner of the FBI), the Department of Treasury Secret Service, and the Post Office Inspection Agency often saw overlap in the collection of information regarding foreign intrigue, Wilson allowed Lansing to form the new organization.

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Lansing’s note to the president regarding this issue included the following opening paragraph:

There has been an unfortunate and probably unavoidable lack of coordination between the different Departments of the Government charged with the investigation of violations of law, growing out of the activity of agents of the belligerent Governments in the country. It seems to me that it would be advisable to have a central office to which results of investigations could be reported day by day and the proper steps taken to continue such investigations in the most efficient way.8

Lansing had already been using former Military Information Department (MID) and Secret Service agents to gather information prior to the formation of the Bureau of Secret Intelligence. The Military Information Department was the first Intelligence

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branch of the U.S. Army, and was in operation from 1885 to 1903. This department was originally tasked with the duty of collecting military information on foreign countries. This department is not to be confused with the later Military Intelligence Division (also MID) which was founded in May 1917.

William Gibbs McAdoo Jr. was the 1912 presidential campaign manager for Woodrow Wilson before he was appointed as Secretary of the Treasury in 1913. In 1914 McAdoo married Wilson’s youngest daughter, Eleanor Randolph Wilson. In addition to his responsibility in helping prevent the collapse of U.S. markets during the financial crisis of 1914, McAdoo was also head of the Secret Service. Following the *Lusitania*
crisis in May 1915, McAdoo was commissioned by the president to surveil the Austrian and German embassies.

The hottest year for German intrigue inside the United States was 1915. In January revelations surfaced concerning the failed plot to dynamite the Welland Canal. Then, on 2 February a German saboteur was captured while attempting to blow up the Vanceboro bridge, and by April 1915 Walter Scheele and Franz Rintelen were actively making and deploying incendiary bombs for the destruction of vessels and factories.\(^9\) Events also occurring in 1915 were the U.S. Capitol Building bombing, the recovery of Dr. Heinrich Albert’s suitcase by the Secret Service, and the interception of damning documents in possession of Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Konstanin Dumba.\(^10\)

While aware that German spy and sabotage operations were taking place, it was not until August 1915- with the recovery of the briefcase belonging to German commercial attaché Dr. Heinrich Albert- that Wilson voiced serious concerns about German intrigue to his advisors. After being briefed about the contents of the briefcase by McAdoo, Wilson advised him to meet with House and Lansing about what should be done. The three advisors decided to leak the contents of Albert’s briefcase to the major newspaper *The New York World*. By not giving away the fact that U.S. officials confiscated the briefcase of a fully accredited diplomat, the U.S. government would not face any diplomatic backlash from Germany.

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\(^10\) Ibid., 322.
The briefcase contained intimate details of how German agents planned on influencing American newspapers, how agents attempted to buy raw war materials in an effort to corner their production, and how Germans planned on encouraging resentment among factory workers. On 10 August 1915, Col. House wrote President Wilson concerning the leaking of information to the New York World:

McAdoo was here this morning and told me the story. I think he has done a fine work. The publication will cause excitement and deep feeling. It may, in my opinion, even lead us into war, but I think the publication should go ahead. It will strengthen your hands enormously, and will weaken such agitators as Mr. Bryan and Hoke Smith. The people will see things as those of us that know the true conditions have long seen them, and it will make it nearly impossible to continue the propaganda.

House’s allegation that the publication may “even lead us to war” was a serious one. Following the release, politicians and journalists alike were calling for the removal of German diplomats and even the German Ambassador himself. Although none of the German plots were in violation of American neutrality (in a strict sense), their revelation helped thoroughly discredit German sympathizers and those who held pacifist beliefs. Arthur Link wrote that this “Albert Affair” was an “event of immense importance.”

12 Edward House to Woodrow Wilson, 10 August 1915, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol. 34, 158.
Jules Witcover states that after this incident, Dr. Heinrich Albert was known in public print as “the minister without portfolio.”

The timing of the incident could not have been worse. The negotiations concerning the *Lusitania* incident were still on the mind of many in the government, and the British steamer *Arabic* (also a passenger liner) sank from a U-boat attack about one week after the press covered the Albert affair. Three Americans were killed in the *Arabic* sinking, while total number of deaths from the attack reached 44.

Right before the Albert affair, President Wilson, in a letter to Col. House, expressed his feelings regarding German spies and intrigue:

> I note what you say about your interview with Spring Rice and about your talk with Burns. I am not sure of the latter. Are you? But I am sure that the country is honeycombed with German intrigue and infested with German spies. The evidences of these things are multiplying every day, and we know a great deal more about them than Burns realizes.

Wilson’s statement, “I am sure that the country is honeycombed with German intrigue and infested with German spies” might come across as hyperbolic and unrealistic, but the exposure of German intrigue throughout 1914-1915 influenced his thinking on the matter. The statement from Wilson was a response to a letter from Col.

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14 Witcover, *Sabotage at Black Tom*, 121.
House in which House discussed his meeting with British Ambassador Cecil Spring Rice and American detective W. J. Burns. The relevant section of House’s letter is as follows:

Spring-Rice said that the Germans have marked for destruction light-houses, tunnels and important bridges etc. etc. in this country and that they have men upon every one of our battleships. He also said that the German propaganda was financed largely by German-American citizens who did not know how the money they were contributing was being used. W. J. Burns, the detective, was here the other day and confirmed this. Burns said, by the way, that he thought that time had come when this Government should have accurate knowledge of every suspicious character in the country. He thought it could be gotten with comparative ease.

British Ambassador Cecil Spring Rice was friends with J. P. Morgan Jr. as well as Theodore Roosevelt. J. P. Morgan Jr. was the main financier for the Allies, and like Roosevelt, favored U.S. involvement in the war. Being pressured by his own government to convince the U.S. government to join the war on the side of the Allied nations, Spring Rice often gave anti-German information to officials and advisors who surrounded the

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16 William J. Burns was one of the most well-respected detectives of his time. During the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt he was commissioned to investigate and expose the corruption of San Francisco’s Mayor Eugene Schmitz and also the political boss Abe Ruef as well. In April 1911, Burns was responsible for apprehending the McNamara Brothers who were behind the bombing of the Los Angeles Times building. He would later be known by Arthur Conan Doyle as the “American Sherlock Holmes.” For a contemporary article about Burns, see The Atlantic, “The Man Arthur Conan Doyle Called ‘America’s Sherlock Holmes’”, 20 November 2013. Accessed 20 June, 2017.

17 Edward House to Woodrow Wilson, 2 August 1915, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol. 34, 63.
president. In this case, he helped stir a reaction from President Wilson concerning German spies.

Passport fraud was not the only act of German intrigue President Wilson knew about before August 1915. The actions of German agent Franz Rintelen von Kleist began to surface in June/July 1915. Aside from Rintelen’s aforementioned connection to the firebombing of vessels and the fomenting of strikes, Rintelen was also involved with the plot to destroy the Welland Canal and the formation of the bogus labor union Labor’s National Peace Council.\(^\text{18}\)

The way in which the first information concerning Rintelen reached President Wilson is very interesting to say the least. Rintelen, who was given some amount of freedom by the German government to work on his own terms, let his ego get the best of him. In late June or early July 1915, Rintelen traveled to Kennebunkport, Maine and spent the night at a fashionable hotel there. While in Maine, he met an American lady by the name of Anne L. Seward.\(^\text{19}\) Little did he know that this Anne Seward was the niece of the former U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward. She gained his confidence, and in very little time found out about his connection to the German government. Rintelen even, during a moment of intimacy, told her that he was a secret German agent and that he had planned the sinking of the *Lusitania*.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 562; see also Witcover, *Sabotage at Black Tom*, 118.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 562-563.
For Anne Seward, these things seemed too alarming not to tell government officials. After writing Secretary of State Robert Lansing regarding her interactions with Rintelen, she wrote President Wilson in a letter dated 2 July 1915. Although Arthur S. Link wrote in his commentary for The Papers of Woodrow Wilson that the letter to Wilson was “missing in all known collections,”21 German scholar Reinhard Doerries found the letter and included it in the notes section of his Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917. The letter in its entirety is as follows:

As a niece of former Secretary of State, William H. Seward, I make bold to write to you about a matter of doubtless no weight whatever but of potential seriousness. Last June in Germany I met a socially prominent Berlin banker. He is now here as (I am convinced) a secret but intimate emissary from the Kaiser. Whether his mission be friendly and his presence here harmless his utterances are distinctly offensive and his threats alarming. His national prominence in Germany and his high military rank coupled with his numerous aliases, his frequent changes of address give rise to uncomfortable suspicions. I have recently met him at dinners in New York three times and I feel increasing uneasiness from his sojourn here.

While seeking to do no injustice to a quasi-acquaintance and desiring above all to avoid publicity I nevertheless feel I cannot decently shrink from putting in your way means of probing a sinister situation or one which points to organized antagonism.

I prefer not to write the conversation which caused me to communicate with you but if I knew where to reach Mr. Axson, your brother in law, I could easily tell him. My address will be in Kennebunkport Maine should you even

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decide to notice the matter. Having freed my conscience by telling you I can only hope that you will understand the spirit in which this is written and believe me.\textsuperscript{22}

Three days following the sending of the letter by Anne Seward, the president sent his own reply in which he enthusiastically inquired about sending an official to procure more details about her encounter with the German officer:

I am sincerely obliged to you for your letter of July second, which I have read with a great deal of interest, and I shall take the liberty, if I may, of asking the Secretary of State to send someone who is entirely trustworthy but who will attract no attention to Kennebunk Port to see you, so that he may learn fully from you what you think, I believe rightly, we should look into.

May I not say that you seem to me to have performed a public duty in a very considerate and admirable way?\textsuperscript{23}

`This “someone” whom the Secretary of State sent was an assistant named Chandler P. Anderson, the intel liaison for Lansing. Once he probed Miss Seward about her experience, he returned to Washington on 10 July and reported back to Robert Lansing. The Assistant Attorney General, Charles Warren, took over the investigation and sent agents of the Bureau of Investigation to find out more. What they brought back was very disturbing. Learning that this man was none other than Franz Rintelen von

\textsuperscript{22} Anne L. Seward to Woodrow Wilson, 2 July 1915, in Doerries, \textit{Imperial Challenge}, 341.  
\textsuperscript{23} Woodrow Wilson to Anne Seward, 5 July 1915, \textit{The Papers of Woodrow Wilson}, vol. 33, 473.
Kleist and a leader of an underground spy network, the federal agents dug deeper and found out about Rintelen’s support of Huerta and Mexican counterrevolutionaries.24

Arthur Link stated that these disclosures “struck like a bolt of lightning among officials in Washington”25 Even though federal agents were hot on Rintelen’s trail, the British government eventually caught him on a return voyage to Germany. He ended up being interned at Donnington Hall for questioning. He then spent the next twenty-one months as a POW in Britain before being sent back to the United States to face federal charges for his actions related to sabotage. Rintelen’s own account of his time as a prisoner in Britain and America are described in the memoir, The Dark Invader: Wartime Reminiscences of a German Naval Intelligence Officer (1933).

One statement by Wilson at an event in Cincinnati, Ohio during his 1916 Presidential campaign showed how much he emphasized spying and intrigue as a cause for war. When the president was asked what started the war, he exclaimed, “an interlacing of alliances and understandings, a complex web of intrigue and spying, that presently was sure to entangle the whole of the family of mankind on that side of the water in its meshes.”26 Although this statement was not one addressing German-American relations, it nonetheless provides another example of Wilson recognizing the importance of intrigue and spy activity and its relation to the war.

24 Link, Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 563
25 Ibid.
The events during the summer of 1915 tested the resolve of President Woodrow Wilson and his advisors. By leaking the contents of Dr. Albert’s briefcase to the *New York World*, Wilson was willing to risk what his closest advisor thought might lead America to war. German intrigue weighed so heavily on the president that he told the same advisor that he was “sure” that the country was honeycombed with German intrigue and filled with German spies. President Wilson’s words to Anne Seward would also lead an observer to believe that he was interested in possible threats concerning spies.

These examples of President Wilson’s private words concerning German spies and sabotage are one body of evidence which can be added to Wilson’s public statements. Together, these support the argument that German spy/sabotage activity was a significant factor that contributed to Wilson’s break with a policy of neutrality. There is one more body of evidence that supports this argument: Wilson’s official actions as president in reaction to German spy and sabotage activity.

It can be shown that President Wilson used his political and diplomatic power to suppress the growing threat of German intrigue, even if it meant compromising relations with Germany. Understanding the history of the relevant American intelligence organizations gives further clarity regarding the investigation of German spy/sabotage activity. Since the Bureau of Investigation, the Secret Service, the Bureau of Secret Intelligence, and the New York Police department were all involved in the matter, it is appropriate to elaborate on their respective roles.
V. WILSON’S ACTIONS AS PRESIDENT TO COMBAT THE PRESENCE OF GERMAN INTRIGUE

In 1915 and 1916, President Wilson’s official actions show that he took charges of German sabotage and spy activity seriously. When warning German officials was not enough, he began to target those officers who were at the center of plots that could threaten America’s neutrality. Investigations into the activities of the German as well as Austro-Hungarian Embassies revealed damning information that, once exposed, provided serious rifts in the diplomatic relationships between the U.S. and the Central Powers. During Wilson’s presidency, he was informed by foreign and domestic intelligence services concerning German intrigue. The British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, forerunner of MI6) was responsible for some of the first discoveries regarding German spy operations in America. As argued in chapter II, it took time for American counterintelligence services to organize themselves so that they could adequately combat German intrigue and discover the responsible parties. Throughout the period of 1914-1917, many organizations claimed that it was their responsibility to commence domestic counterintelligence programs.¹

The Bureau of Investigation, the United States Secret Service, the Bureau of Secret Intelligence, and the New York City Police Department all had a part to play in the

investigation or combat of German intrigue. The Bureau of Investigation performed their own investigation of the Black Tom munitions depot explosion. The Secret Service, among other things, seized the briefcase of German commercial attaché Dr. Heinrich Albert, discovering numerous plots and propaganda efforts. The Bureau of Secret Intelligence was responsible for spying on high level German and Austro-Hungarian diplomats and businessmen in hopes of discovering their connections to criminal activity. Lastly, the New York City Police Department was responsible for the investigation of mysterious factory and ship fires in the New York harbor area, as well as the search for German saboteurs. Each of these organizations, except for the Bureau of Secret Intelligence, had previous responsibilities separate from their role in the investigation and combatting of foreign intrigue.

The American Bureau of Investigation (BOI) was the forerunner of the FBI and was under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Justice. The Bureau of Investigation’s precursor was an organization known as the National Bureau of Criminal Identification, started by the National Chiefs of Police Union in 1896. The National Bureau of Criminal Identification was responsible for the collection of information used to identify known criminals and aid in providing law enforcement with appropriate information. The Bureau was made more prominent by President Theodore Roosevelt after anarchist attacks drew more attention toward organized crime. In 1908 the Bureau was reformed and renamed the Bureau of Investigation. Former members of the Secret Service were added to the Bureau, and in 1910 the Bureau was in charge of enforcing the
Mann Act. The Mann Act made it illegal to transport women or children for the purposes of prostitution and other acts deemed immoral. Following German acts of sabotage, agents from the Bureau of Investigation were commissioned to investigate certain cases.²

The United States Secret Service was originally an arm of the U.S. Department of the Treasury (starting in 1865) used for fighting counterfeiting and major acts of fraud. The Secret Service’s other main purpose was and is to protect current and former national leaders as well as foreign dignitaries and leaders visiting the U.S. In 1915, William McAdoo used Secret Service agents to investigate foreign leaders suspected of sabotage and spy activity. As previously discussed, Secret Service members confiscated the briefcase of German commercial attaché Dr. Heinrich Albert and discovered many alarming plots.

The Bureau of Secret Intelligence was created in 1916 by the Secretary of State Robert Lansing. That same year, Congress authorized the bureau to conduct investigations under the authority of the Secretary of State. The purpose of this organization was originally to investigate foreign diplomats and agents, especially those of the Central Powers- Germany and Austria-Hungary. Lansing had a desire for this secretive organization to have similar authority as the Secret Service and to develop its own investigative force. Unfortunately, most of the agents that Lansing could muster came directly out of the BOI and Secret Service. On top of this, the Bureau of Secret

Intelligence had little in the way of law enforcement power since the Justice Department was already in charge of handling federal violations pertaining to foreign matters.

The New York City Police Department’s bomb squad, under the direction of Police Captain Thomas Tunney, had experience capturing anarchist bombers such as the ‘Brescia Circle’ as well as using undercover operations to gather information. The officers and agents under Captain Tunney investigated illegal German activity in the New York Harbor area but were limited by jurisdiction. As the historian for the FBI, John F. Fox Jr., notes:

The New York City Police Department's bomb squad provided most of the investigators targeting German saboteurs and subversives, but the squad was handicapped by jurisdictional limits and local focus. The federal response was fragmented and ineffective. The State Department was primarily responsible for tracking the actions of hostile intelligence agents on US soil, but it had no investigative arm. Instead, State borrowed detectives from Justice's Bureau of Investigation and Treasury's Secret Service. The Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and the Army's Military Intelligence Division (MID) had counterintelligence capabilities, too, but were limited to investigating activities related to military facilities and responding to certain neutrality problems on the US-Mexico border—matters in which the Bureau also played a role. All told, in 1914 there were fewer than 300 federal agents collecting intelligence and identifying and countering foreign intrigues against the United States.³

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As one can imagine, these intelligence-gathering bodies struggled over how much power each one had to conduct investigations, as well as what exactly should be done with the content of the information collected. A case in point was the dispute over the contents of German attaché Albert’s confiscated briefcase. While Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo and Secretary of State Lansing were in favor of leaking the contents to the media, Bureau of Investigation Chief Bielaski and Attorney General Gregory disagreed. Beilaski and Gregory argued that releasing the information would make the President and the Justice department look weak since Albert could not be prosecuted based upon the contents of the suitcase. McAdoo and Lansing knew that there was not significant grounds to take legal action against Albert, but thought that it would combat German propaganda in the media as well as strengthen Wilson’s position against German aggression if the contents were leaked. Ultimately, McAdoo and Lansing got their way when Wilson gave them permission to release the information to the *New York World* under the condition that the source of the materials should not be known.\(^4\) These conflicts, confusing at times, shed light on a most famous statement by the then New York City Police Commissioner Arthur Woods in 1919:

> The lessons to America are as clear as day. We must not be caught napping with no adequate national Intelligence organization. The several Federal bureaus should be welded into one, and that one should be eternally and comprehensively vigilant. We must be wary of strange doctrine, steady in judgement, instinctively

repelling those who seek to poison public opinion. And our laws should be amended so that while they give free scope to Americans for untrammeled expression of differences of opinion and theory and belief, they forbid and prevent the enemy plotter and propagandist.\(^5\)

Woods’s statement showed a desire for a governmental intelligence agency that was very powerful, but very discerning at the same time. While careful to support freedom of speech and thought, Woods wanted the “enemy plotter and propagandist” to be prevented from influencing others. Even though these agencies were quarrelsome, Woodrow Wilson used the different agencies’ insights to make crucial decisions.

By the end of 1915, Wilson declared three men connected to spy and sabotage activity *persona non grata*. These men were Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Konstanin Dumba, German naval attaché Captain Karl Boy-Ed, and German military attaché Captain Franz von Papen. The expulsion of Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Dumba took place in September 1915. His connection to spy and sabotage activities ran through a series of documents captured by British authorities, and then exposed to the newspapers. On the same night as the sinking of the *Arabic*, German Ambassador Bernstorff, Ambassador Dumba, and an American journalist and known German sympathizer, James J. Archibald, were dining together.\(^6\) Since Archibald was on his way to Europe soon, Dumba gave him a packet of information that was to be sent to Vienna. Upon Archibald’s


arrival at Falmouth, British authorities searched him and seized the documents in his possession.\textsuperscript{7}

![Figure 13 Ambassador Konstantin Dumba](image)

These documents contained a letter from Dumba to the Austrian foreign minister Baron Burian in which Dumba endorsed the fomenting of strikes, bribing of workers, and undercutting production in American factories. Dumba mentioned Bethlehem Steel plants being a potential target for these actions as well as other plants in the American Midwest.\textsuperscript{8} A very damning statement in the letter is as follows: “I have the impression that we could if not actually prevent at any rate very much disorganize the manufacture of munitions of war at Bethlehem and in the middle west and hold it up for months which the German military attaché states is of great importance and would considerably

\textsuperscript{7} Link, \textit{Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality}, 646.

\textsuperscript{8} Witcover, \textit{Sabotage at Black Tom}, 125.
outweigh the relatively small cost.” A message was sent from British authorities to Wilson on 1 September 1915 containing a copy of Dumba’s letter. The next day, Lansing wrote to the president concerning the nature of the note:

You have undoubtedly read the flimsy of the strictly confidential dispatch from London, No. 2732, September I, 7 P.M., in which there is a copy of a letter signed by Ambassador Dumba and which was taken from Archibald who was carrying it to Vienna. It seems to me that the conduct of the Ambassador is of a very serious nature and that we should consider at once what steps should be taken in regard to it.

Lansing, aware that the sinking of the SS Arabic had already been plaguing the president, knew that this trespass by Dumba could sway Wilson even further to the side with the Entente over the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. After all, three American lives were lost in the sinking of the Arabic and this new revelation implicated Franz von Papen. The letter implied that Franz von Papen was “highly enthusiastic and encouraging” of Dumba’s proposed acts. Alexander Nuber, Austro-Hungarian Council-General in New York, was also encouraging of these activities. Wilson’s reply to Lansing came on 3 September:

The contents of the strictly confidential dispatch from London, No. 2732, September 1, 7 P.M. are certainly serious enough, and I entirely agree with you that we shall have to take some decided action with regard to the activities of Dumba as well as those of Bernstorff. But when, and how? I take it for granted that we shall first wish to make sure of Germany’s concessions and of their exact terms before dealing with either of these allied Ambassadors about the other matter.12

Once these documents were made public, Wilson and Lansing both agreed that Dumba should be expelled from the country. The story first hit American newspapers on 6 September 1915. Wilson communicated to the Foreign Office that Dumba should leave “by reason of the admitted purpose and intent of Ambassador Dumba to conspire to cripple legitimate industries of the people of the United States and to interrupt their legitimate trade.”13

Although President Wilson wanted to recall Franz von Papen as well as other members of the German government, he held off until more incriminating evidence of wrongdoing was found. This additional evidence came in November 1915. Documents were seized from the aforementioned Paul Koenig, director of the Hamburg-American line, by NYC Police Captain Tunney directly implicating the two attachés in German spy activity. Captain Tunney found a black memo book that chronicled German spies’ activities including operations that were deemed “D-cases.”14 These “D-cases” were

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13 Woodrow Wilson, 6 September 1915, quoted in Witcover, Sabotage at Black Tom, 125.
14 Witcover, Sabotage at Black Tom, 128.
operations involving the destruction of a particular object or building. On 29 November Lansing wrote the president,

I feel that we cannot wait much longer to act in the cases of Boy-Ed, von Papen, and von Nuber. I believe we have enough in regard to the activities of these men to warrant us to demand of the German Government the recall of the two first named and to cancel the exequatur of von Nuber, giving notice to the Austro-Hungarian Government that we have done so. The increasing public indignation in regard to these men and the general criticism of the Government for allowing them to remain are not the chief reasons for suggesting action in these cases, although I do not think such reasons should be ignored. We have been over-patient with these people on account of the greater controversies under consideration for several months and did not wish to add to the difficulties of the situation by injecting another cause of difference.15

Wilson wrote Lansing back immediately after reading the note:

There need be no further delay in this matter. I would be obliged if you act at once in regard to it. May I advise that you act in the following manner? I. That you inform the Austrian Chargé that von Nuber’s exequatur will be cancelled at once, and that the exequatur be then recalled after a courteous interval, perhaps, in which to await the Chargé’s reply; 2. That you informally inform the German Ambassador that Boy-Ed and von Papen are personae non gratae, but that we wish to afford him an opportunity to have them promptly withdrawn without forcing us to make the formal demand that they be replaced, as we shall be obliged to do if they are not voluntarily recalled. I think that he will appreciate the courtesy and that it may be well to

avoid a public course of action just now, though we should not hesitate to take it if there is no voluntary action.\textsuperscript{16}

Wilson knew that it was the right time to expel these diplomats, and that the action would not upend the ongoing German-American negotiations surrounding the sinking of the Arabic. Arthur Link stated that the case against Boy-Ed was “airtight” and that Wilson’s subsequent decision to issue both Franz von Papen and Boy-Ed \textit{persona non grata} was “directly implicating the German government in the intrigues.”\textsuperscript{17} Austro-Hungarian Consul General Alexander von Nuber was also implicated in the collected documents. He was expelled with the two others on 1 December. While counseling President Wilson on the need to expel the three men guilty of offense, Lansing added at the end of the letter, “As you know, I believe that we will soon have to go even higher up in removing from this country representatives of belligerents who are directing operations here. It would appear that these higher officials consider our patience to be cowardice.”\textsuperscript{18} Lansing, more so than Wilson, was willing to expel as many German officials as it took to send a message to Germany. Again, Lansing considered a diplomatic break with Germany inevitable.

President Wilson’s actions to expel members of the German and Austro-Hungarian governments show that he took their crimes and covert activities seriously.

\textsuperscript{18} Robert Lansing to Woodrow Wilson, 29 November 1915, \textit{The Papers of Woodrow Wilson}, vol. 35, 264.
Konstantin Dumba’s actions, as well as Papen’s and Boy-Ed’s, in directing sabotage against the United States made clear that the German and Austro-Hungarian governments were willing to risk a diplomatic severance with America in order to accomplish their wartime goals. These actions ended up costing them their reputation and planted more seeds of distrust in the president’s mind concerning the Central Powers. Wilson’s official actions, in these instances, provide another body of evidence for the case that German spy/sabotage activity was a significant reason for his eventual break with Germany.
CONCLUSION:

Without a doubt, President Wilson abandoned his policy of strict neutrality and favored war for many reasons. Although German sabotage and spy activity is not emphasized in scholarly literature concerning Wilson’s change of heart, it is inescapably clear that it played an important role in his decision. Wilson included German intrigue among the themes he discussed in his War Address to Congress on 2 April 1917, implicating the German Embassy in these crimes. The inclusion of sabotage and spy operations in speeches before and after the War Address show that Wilson was aware of these activities throughout the period of American neutrality. Wilson’s personal correspondence offers an image of a president who was concerned, and even occasionally paranoid, about German spies. Wilson’s advisors were often torn themselves and discussed with the president about what steps should be taken. Even when Wilson’s closest advisor, Col. House, warned the president that releasing information about German covert operations to The New York World may lead to war, Wilson still decided to leak the information. Finally, Wilson’s actions showed serious concern about German spy and sabotage activity, expelling four high ranking government officials due to their connections with these intrigues.
For too long, most scholars have treated German covert operations with marginal importance. German submarine warfare, the Zimmerman telegram, and Anglo-American relations dominate the historical discussion on the causes of American intervention in World War I. Although mentioning particular acts of sabotage or covert activity, like the Black Tom munitions depot explosion or the “Albert Affair,” scholars tend to treat these as isolated incidents and not part of an overall campaign, lessening their importance and scope. Usually, it is argued that these activities enraged citizens through the medium of newspaper articles and anti-German propaganda. Seldom do scholars acknowledge how important spy and sabotage activities were to President Wilson.

Some scholars, even while recognizing the importance of German covert operations, do not address their effect on Wilson himself. Stanford Professor Thomas A. Bailey noted in his Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace (1947) that “The Submarine was clearly the precipitating cause of our war with Germany, but this does not mean that there were not other and highly important contributory causes. German espionage…German intrigue…and German sabotage as high-lighted by such disasters as the Black Tom explosion, mightily aroused the American people.” Dr. Reinhard Doerries, at the end of his chapter on German unofficial and covert activities, stated, “Undoubtedly, the disclosures of ever new violations and outrages contributed to keeping the American people continuously suspicious of Germany’s intentions.”

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20 Reinhard R. Doerries, Imperial challenge, 190.
supported the conclusion that Wilson’s advisors wanted Bernstorff removed even as early as December 1915 due to his connections with illegal activities.\(^{21}\)

Early writings, like those of Thomas Tunney, Franz Rintelen, Henry Landau, and John Price Jones, show that much information about German spy activity was available in the two decades following the war. During American neutrality, newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The New York World* brought proof of German intrigue to the public at large. President Wilson’s words to the public only reinforced what the newspapers were reporting. Even though anti-German propaganda was present during American neutrality, the public already had legitimate anti-German criticism coming from these other sources.

There is still much more to the topic of German intrigue than is discussed in this paper. Answering the questions of how German spy and sabotage operations influenced the American public at large, and how Congress’ opinions were influenced by these activities could encompass massive studies in and of themselves. Overall, this topic can be expanded into a much broader study that encompasses many individuals in the government and their opinions regarding German intrigue during the period of 1914-17. Due to the focus and content of this study, this paper aids in the understanding of

American intervention in World War I, as well as President Wilson during those heated pre-war years and the decisions he made in response to German aggressions.
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