NATIVISM IN THE INTERWAR ERA

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines developments in American nativist thought in the interwar era, with a particular focus on the Great Depression years. Starting in World War I, nativist concerns grew increasingly focused on ideology, guided by the principles of 100-percent Americanism. Fear of foreign "isms," most notably communism, served as the new fulcrum for nativist currents in the United States. This thesis explores three distinct Depression-era right-wing extremist phenomena: The Black Legion, Charles Coughlin, and the German-American Bund. All three were disparate, dissimilar in composition, tactics, and appearance. The Black Legion was an outgrowth of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan and remained virulently racist and anti-Catholic. Coughlin was a Catholic priest who had found himself targeted by the same Klan the Black Legion grew out of. Tasked with starting a parish in a pre-dominantly Protestant community (in which the KKK still exerted a great deal of influence), Coughlin took to the airwaves. Soon, his "radio sermons" took on a more political flavor. Coughlin excoriated business leaders and bankers for their greed, laying the blame for the Great Depression at their feet. Finally, the German-American Bund developed from German-American solidarity movements initiated in the aftermath of World War I. Initially a response to oppressive treatment at the hands of American citizens during the war, some of these organizations, including the Bund, soon took up the cause for national socialism. Yet despite their differences, all three movements were underpinned by a powerful current of anti-communism. It is this common thread that gave shape to interwar era nativism.

Americanism is a matter of the spirit and of the soul . . . The men who do not become Americans and nothing else are hyphenated Americans; and there ought to be no room for them in this country.

Theodore Roosevelt, 1915

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study will be to examine right-wing nativist groups in the interwar years, with an emphasis on the 1930s, and situated within the broader context of American nativism. Nativism has been present in a variety of forms throughout American history, but it is not a passive, static force. Rather it adapts and evolves, its audience shifting along with its targets. Catholics, Germans, Irish, Jews, Communists, and organized labor are just some of nativist ire. Likewise, there is no universal trigger for nativism. Immigration surges and economic depressions are common catalysts, but they are far from the only causes of nativist outbreaks. World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution would both ignite two of the most severe nativist waves in the nation's history. In short, each nativist wave represents a discrete chapter which must be examined within its proper context.

The focus of the case studies contained in this thesis will be an often-overlooked episode in the history of American nativism-the era of the Great Depression. Overshadowed by the more virulent nativism of the 1920s, 1930s nativist figures have commanded less attention from historians. I argue that 1930s right-wing extremism was essentially nativist in nature, and moreover represented a continuation of 1920s nativism, which was underpinned by residual fears triggered by the Red Scare. But the 1930s were not simply a continuation of the 1920s. Global depression, and the rapid spread of fascism throughout Europe created a dramatically different environment for nativist sentiments to spread. The goal, and challenge, of this project then, will be to properly contextualize these nativist beliefs. This thesis examines the figures central to the spread of nativist sentiments as well as the circumstances that prompted them to do so. It considers what "Americanism" meant and how its definition evolved over the course of the interwar era. Concurrently, it identifies the common threads that underpinned the rhetoric of

Depression-era extremists. Finally, it considers the role that newly introduced fascist sentiment played in shaping nativist thought of the 1930s. Before exploring these questions however, it is necessary to examine some noteworthy prior outbreaks in American history.

Nativism: A Brief History

The United States has had a lengthy and complex history with nonnative residents. With its reputation as a melting pot and a land of opportunity, it has since the colonial era attracted people from across the globe seeking refuge, opportunity, and a chance to start anew. Likewise, America's ability to incorporate these masses of people from disparate backgrounds into a united nation has always been at the very core of its national mythology. Yet this influx of immigrants has simultaneously instilled a sense of unease among the American public. In the minds of some Americans, inviting foreign masses has meant risking the dilution of the nation's character and identity, or worse, a complete foreign usurpation of the Republic. To these nativists, the gravest threat posed to America was alien corruption from within.

American nativism is as old as the nation itself. Early fears centered around Roman Catholics, whose true loyalties, nativists believed, rested with the Pope in Rome. In 1836, an exposé entitled *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* was published, in which the author chronicled her conversion to Catholicism, and the subsequent sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of both priests and nuns at the convent she was sent to. The book pioneered an entire genre of "convent expose" literature and stood as the bestselling book in American history (other than the Bible) until the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sixteen years later.[1]

[1] David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 42.

Anti-Catholic nativism reached a crescendo with the emergence of the Know Nothings in the early 1850s. Know Nothings were members of the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, founded in the spring of 1850 in New York City. The group started with just three dozen members, but within two years was rapidly expanding. Concurrently, immigration surged, reaching levels five times greater than the previous decade, with the new arrivals predominantly consisting of poor German and Irish Catholics.[2] Initiates pledged never to vote for Catholic or foreign-born candidates, and to work towards the removal of aliens and Catholics who had already assumed positions of power. But the organization was most marked by its commitment to secrecy. Members were instructed to respond that they "knew nothing" of the organization whenever they were asked. Know Nothings believed that a Catholic majority in the United States would mark an end to religious and civil liberty. Roman Catholic bishops and arch-bishops were bound to "absolute and unquestioned obedience, not only to the present Pope, but to his successors," and were required to "oppose and persecute" all who do not submit to his authority."[3] The Know Nothings quickly surged in membership, drawing in the likes of Nathaniel P. Banks and Jerome Smith, who would, respectively, use the momentum of anti-Catholic hysteria to rise to the positions of Speaker of the House and Boston mayor. Know Nothing members dominated the 1854 elections in Massachusetts. In New York too, they enjoyed great success, electing 19 congressmen (out of 33), and 8 of 13 state senators. and the group quickly coalesced as the American Party.[4] The American Party briefly enjoyed a flurry of success, winning many state elections throughout the North and the South in the middle of the

[2] James McPherson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 131.
[3] Anonymous, *The Wide-Awake Gift: A Know-Nothing Token for 1855,* (New York: J.C. Derby, 1855), 59.

[4] Bennett, 105-117

decade.[5] Though it rapidly declined as Republican Party membership grew in the pre-Civil War years, the Know Nothings demonstrated how powerful nativist currents could be. Following the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan emerged in the South, seeking to preserve the values of the Antebellum South in the face of a newly liberated slave class of African-Americans. Though not strictly nativist, their fears and tactics bore resemblance to other nativist movements, and when the Klan was revived in the 1920s, it would emerge/take hold in communities of the northern states as a largely nativist movement.

Nativism soon grew beyond fears of Papal conspiracies. Nativists believed that immigrants carried with them all types of corruptive foreign influences. In May 1886, working-class protesters gathered peacefully at Chicago's Haymarket Square, striking for an eight-hour workday. However, as police approached, a dynamite bomb detonated, killing eleven people including seven policemen. The subsequent conviction of eight foreign anarchists for their role in hatching the bomb plot crystallized national fears of alien radicalism.[6] Fraternal orders all over the country emerged to protect the nation from this foreign radical "menace."[7] Three weeks after the Haymarket Riots, California attorney Peter D. Wigginton founded a new American Party which quickly gained local appeal in San Francisco. Wigginton sought to secure the American government from "the restless revolutionary horde of foreigners who are now seeking our shores

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[5] Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 52-54.

[6] The guilt of the accused is still a matter of historical debate. Recent revisionist work by historian Timothy Messer-Kruse suggests the perpetrators may have had ties to transatlantic radical organizations. See Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), and Timothy Messer-Kruse, *Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[7] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land*: *Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 53-57.

from every part of the world," and contended that all riots and strikes were a product of foreign influence.[8]

Nativist sentiments were largely tempered in the 1890s and the first few years of the new century (though the assassination of William McKinley by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz in 1901 set off a brief wave of nativist hysteria), but a dramatic surge of immigration starting around 1905 rekindled familiar fears. Peaking in 1907, between 1906 and the outbreak of World War I, more than 650,000 immigrants entered the United States annually, greatly outpacing nineteenth century immigration patterns.[9] With a seemingly endless foreign tide entering American shores, concerned citizens took part in the "Settlement Movement," establishing "Americanization" organizations like the North American Civic League for Immigrants (1908) designed to facilitate assimilation. However, while these organizations were certainly born from nativist fears, they suggested a confidence that foreign arrivals could be properly "Americanized." It would not be until World War I that the next great nativist hysteria would erupt.

Nothing better emblemizes the mercurial nature of America's relationship with immigrants than the experiences of German-Americans in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, Germans were perceived as a sort of "model" immigrant. Considered law-abiding, cultured, and patriotic, they were regarded as the most assimilable of aliens.[10] But with World War I came a rapid reversal in public regard for German-Americans. Suddenly German-Americans were entirely incompatible with the tenets of Americanism. Worse still, German-Americans were to be regarded as potential agents for the German government. Public opinion came to view the German-American Alliance as a fifth column bent on

[8] Ibid, Wigginton quoted on pg. 56.
[9] Higham, 159.
[10] Ibid., 196.

sabotaging America from within. “100-percent Americanism” became the order of the day, and anyone who failed to abide was guilty of “moral treason.”[11] German-Americans however, were scrutinized far more closely than any other so-called “hyphenated Americans.” Theodore Roosevelt declared that any German-American showing signs of disloyalty should be shot or hanged.[12]

In October 1917 Russia succumbed to the Bolshevik Revolution and promptly dropped out of the Great War. To a war-crazed American public, this perfidy could only be the product of a conspiracy between Germany and the Russian bolsheviks. This made the transference of wartime enmities towards German-Americans to communists following the war’s conclusion a natural one. The ensuing Red Scare (1919-1920) marked the most severe national wave of nativist hysteria to date. Decades of anti-radical fears were crystallized by the toppling of Russia’s old tsarist regime. Revolutionary movements gained a foothold elsewhere in Europe as well, as the effects of World War I reverberated all over the continent. In Germany, socialists founded the short-lived People’s State of Bavaria, and communists briefly took power in Hungary. The potential of revolutionary bolshevism was realized, and if traditional European powers were not immune from it, who was? No longer merely the product of grassroots organizations like the Know Nothings; nativism was now spearheaded by the federal and state governments.[13] The histrionics of the Red Scare would soon subside, but foreign “isms,” most especially communism, would remain the preeminent bogeyman in American politics for the remainder of the interwar era.

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[11] Ibid., Theodore Roosevelt quoted on page 197.
[12] *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* volume VIII, edited by Elting E. Morison, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 1207.
[13] Bennett, 197.

The salient nativist movement of the 1920s, and certainly one of the most notable in American history, was the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was resurrected during World War I by William Simmons, who drew inspiration from D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation,* a romanticized and wildly popular portrayal of the Reconstruction-era Klan. The Klan remained largely inert during World War I, but after the war, soon spread like a virus from coast to coast. David Bennett describes this version of the Klan as a final vestige of pre-twentieth century nativism, noting its heavy anti-Catholic flavor.[14] This is partially true, but it would be more accurate to define the Klan as an amalgamation of multiple nativist fears. The Klan proved remarkably adaptive, targeting whatever group or "ism" concerned a local community the most. The Klan retained its racist roots everywhere, but the South especially. In other locales, anti-Catholicism predominated. Elsewhere, anti-communism. Still other local branches targeted unions, believing them to be sowing the seeds of radical revolution (yet other Klan chapters supported local unions, and found common ground with some union members in their support of immigration restriction). The Klan stoked nativist fears both new and old, but it was its anti-communism and anti-radicalism that most aptly symbolized the group's activities in the north in this era. The increasingly conservative regimes of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge increasingly favored big business at the expense of organized labor, which they both perceived to be a potentially dangerous vessel of revolutionary discontent. These administrations also sought to limit immigration, passing, for the first time in American history, immigration quota laws in 1921 and 1924.[15] Entering the 1930s, fear of radical revolution was foremost on the minds of nativists. But the onset of a global depression opened the door for extremists outside the United States as well,

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[14] Ibid., 210.
[15] Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 113-127.

and in Europe fascism took root in Italy, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Spain, and fascist movements sprung up in several other countries during the 1920s and 1930s. Any appraisal of concurrent nativist movements must account for this torrent of fascism and the extent of its influence on American nativism.

Fascism and Nativism

Evaluating interwar extremist movements in the United States first requires, for comparative purposes, some exploration of a separate far right-wing movement: fascism. However, providing an all-encompassing definition of fascism is all but impossible. Traits of fascist ideology include ultra-nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-capitalism, anti-communism, anti-liberalism, and the employment of violence, wielded by an authoritarian state, to achieve political aims.[16]However this list is neither exhaustive nor does it help to pin down the ideologies of individual fascist movements. Fascist movements in Europe and elsewhere were largely distinct from each other, preventing any attempt at a concise definition. Still, scholars have for decades attempted this very task.

Emilio Gentile argued that fascism sought to displace religion in society. Fascist movements established their own "system of beliefs, myths and rituals, centered on the sacralization of the state."[17] Another scholar, Roger Griffin, argued that fascism represented a form of "palingenetic ultra-nationalism." When society became excessively decadent, revolution would occur and a new community would rise from the ashes (palingenetic) of the old.[18] Yet these definitions are not immune from scrutiny. Fascism may have been secular in nature, but

[16] Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2-5.
[17] Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," *Journal of Contemporary History,* 25, no. 2/3 (1990), 230.
[18] Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism,* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Mussolini could not suppress the Catholic church. It may emphasize regeneration from the remains of a ruined society, but as Stanley Payne notes, this feature is not exclusive to fascism.[19]

However, fascism does bear some definitive characteristics. For one, many fascist movements blend populism with elitism. Fascists sought to appeal to the masses while also emphasizing the importance of the elite class.[20] Another important feature was the implementation of violence in various forms. In Mussolini's view, "fascism does not on the whole believe in the possibility or utility of perpetual peace."[21] Still, a comprehensive definition remains elusive.

It is fascism's malleability that poses such a significant challenge for any historian examining interwar right-wing extremism in the United States. That there is overlap between fascism and nativism is undeniable. But to what extent? And how much should we read into it? Certainly, anti-communism, nationalism, and the use of violence to enforce ideology can be observed in nativist movements but given that many of these movements predated fascism's inception, they can hardly be said to have been influenced by fascist thought. American nativism and European fascism thus represent two strands of ideology, alike but disparate. The challenge then, is to accurately connect American interwar extremism to its appropriate strand, while acknowledging that this is not entirely an either/or proposition.

Like fascism, nativism is a frustratingly amorphous term. How it manifests depends heavily upon time and place. The Know Nothings capitalized on anti-Catholic anxiety. Late 19th century movements catered to anti-radical fears. The KKK of the 1920s in many ways consolidated all these disparate fears, at once tapping into anti-communist, anti-Catholic, anti-

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[19] Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 4.
[20] Ibid., 14.
[21] Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile, "The Doctrine of Fascism," (1932), 24.

Black, and anti-radical fears. However, some clear points of demarcation can be seen between the two ideologies. In contrast to fascism, nativism is defensive in nature. While fascism seeks revolutionary change, nativists seek to preserve and protect existing structures. Of course, this distinction is not always neat. Michigan's renowned Roman Catholic priest, Charles Coughlin for instance, sought an overhaul to what he perceived to be the rotten edifice of capitalism in order to protect the nation's political structures and other key organs of Americanism from encroaching communism. An off-shoot of the Klan called the Black Legion (and to a lesser extent the Klan before them) employed violent vigilantism to intimidate communists and other "undesirable" elements. However, fundamentally these movements generally sought to preserve existing structures from what they perceived to be a foreign menace.

Purpose and Aims

This study contends that the right-wing extremism of the 1930s is best placed on the broader continuum of interwar nativism. These nativists sought to ensure the preservation of 100-percent Americanism by defending against the spread of communism and other undesirable foreign "isms." This shift in focus created openings for individuals and groups previously classified as alien, like Father Charles Coughlin, and the German-American Bund, to adopt nativist rhetoric for their own purposes. It will build upon the work of several scholars, most notably John Higham, David Bennett, and Robert Murray. John Higham's *Strangers in the Land* argues that the peaks and valleys of nativist sentiment throughout American history are directly correlated with the vicissitudes of the American people's confidence in the nation's assimilative structures. Oftentimes, as long as the United States is socially and economically healthy, nativist fears remain largely suppressed. However, when assimilative structures are pressed (i.e. in times

of economic distress, political hysteria, or when there is a sudden surge in immigration), nativist sentiments thrive, and immigrants often serve as convenient scapegoats for nativist fears.

Robert Murray's *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria* still stands as the single most valuable work on the first Red Scare, the documentation of which is surprisingly sparse. Murray concludes that while the Red Scare can be said to have ended in 1920, "a more detailed analysis . . . would probably show that the Red Scare was a much more vital conditioning factor for the "Roaring Twenties" than has generally been supposed."[22] However, a brief sample of scholarly works on the subject show that few attempts have been made to make this connection. Fewer still have made any attempt to connect Depression-era extremists to the Red Scare. Emblematic of this is Andrew Burt's *American Hysteria: The Untold Story of Mass Political Extremism*, which asserts that the Red Scare's conclusion left Americans feeling "ashamed of the anti-Bolshevik hysteria."[23] However, Burt does not spend any time addressing interwar nativism.[24] Works like Ann Hagedorn's *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America, 1919* (2008) and Todd J Pfannestiel's *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism* (2003) are both very useful analyses of the first Red Scare, but like Murray's work, offer little insight into its long-term effects.

One scholar who does make some effort to connect the Red Scare the subsequent nativist developments is David Bennett who, in *The Party of Fear*, argues that the first Red Scare represented a significant paradigm shift in patterns of nativist thought. With the Red Scare, emerging in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of World War I, nativist fears

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[22] Robert Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).
[23] Andrew Burt, *American Hysteria: The Untold Story of Mass Political Extremism,* (Guilford CT: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 97.
[24] Ibid., 73-97.

shifted from alien persons to alien ideology.[25] Aliens ceased to be intrinsically threatening; rather it was their potential to serve as vessels for corruptive foreign "isms," particularly communism, that stoked nativist concerns.

Strangers in the Land still stands as one of the most significant works on American nativism, but John Higham's analysis ends in the mid-1920s. David Bennett's study is more comprehensive than that of Higham but affords little time to the movements examined in this text. Bennett notes the Black Legion's KKK lineage, but also observes that it demonstrated "characteristics of European fascists."[26] Why the Black Legion was able to build a strong localized base of support is left to the reader to speculate. Similarly, the German-American Bund owed "almost everything to the inspiration of Adolf Hitler's success in the Third Reich."[27] Yet the Bund adopted a façade of Americanism to broaden its appeal. The Bund's membership, many of whom witnessed first-hand the ugly side of the hyper-patriotism espoused by 100-percent Americanism movements during World War I, elected to reappropriate it for their own purposes. That they were a National Socialist organization is undeniable, but it is also of secondary importance. They masked their fascism with a veneer of Americanism drawn straight from the previous decade, a point which warrants further investigation.

In *America for Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States*, Dale Knobel argues that 1930s right-wing movements were not nativist at all, but rather are better categorized as "racist organizations." He notes Charles Coughlin's anti-Semitism, but makes no mention of his anti-communism. Knobel confidently concludes that the nativist movement "disappeared"

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[25] Bennett, 3.
[26] Ibid., 246-7.
[27] Ibid., 247.

during the Great Depression.[28] But the distinction between racism and nativism is a subtle one, and overlap is bound to occur, as this thesis will demonstrate. Dismissing the nativist influences on Coughlin's rhetoric is a mistake, and Knobel makes no mention of organizations such as the Black Legion at all.

In *The Politics of Unreason*, Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab note the Black Legion's ties to the nativist movements of the 1920s and further contend that the organization's fascist characteristics were largely cosmetic, but their analysis goes no further. On the other hand, Coughlin, to these authors, marked the most dramatic break from American nativism and was the most fascistic of Depression-era right-wing extremists.[29]

As these examples show, Depression-era right-wing movements are categorized quite broadly. Fascist influences are frequently noted but it is important not to overstate the extent to which these movements were influenced and fueled by fascist ideology. Beyond associations with fascism, little effort has been made to tie these various movements to a common ideological thread. This can largely be attributed to two factors. One, many of these movements were small and localized. The Black Legion for example, failed to make significant inroads beyond its Ohio and Michigan roots, despite existing under Virgil Effinger's stead for over half a decade. Other movements like William Dudley Pelley's Silver Legion and the German American Bund were even smaller, attracting just a few thousand full-fledged members at their peak. A second factor, related to the first, is that these movements were disconnected from one another; they lacked the same sort of unifying structure enjoyed by the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. Instead, dozens of disparate movements and organizations sprung up in various locales across the country.

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[28] Dale Knobel, *America for Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 276-278.
[29] Lipset and Raab, 157-189.

Consequently, it is easy to dismiss these groups on an individual level as insignificant. However, taken together, these movements captured the hearts and minds of a significant swath of the population.

This thesis adopts a case-study approach in order to offer comparative analysis on three of the more noteworthy right-wing phenomena of the Depression-era: The Black Legion, Charles Coughlin, and the German-American Bund. In the case of the Bund, the veracity of their "Americanism" is not analyzed here. Regardless of whether or not it was a front, it marked the organization's public image for the final years of its existence. Each case study, on the surface, marks a more significant break from nativist tradition than the last. The Black Legion adopted a militaristic structure and employed violence to achieve its political ends, drawing comparisons to fascist organizations. Yet it remained fundamentally true to its KKK roots. In adopting a case study approach, common threads can be established showing that, even though these movements were characterized by significant and fundamental differences, they were all undergirded by similar nativist philosophies stemming from the 100-percent Americanism of the previous two decades.

As a Catholic, Coughlin would seem an unlikely candidate to espouse nativist rhetoric. Likewise, the German-American Bund sprung forth from movements created to offer German-Americans protection against American nativists. Yet both used the rhetoric of 100-percent Americanism to gain notoriety (to varying degrees of success). In fact Coughlin drew in an equally unlikely fanbase-the (now significantly reduced) Ku Klux Klan.[30] Nativism had not died. It had merely changed form. This study identifies common threads uniting Depression-era

[30] Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 197.

nativism to show how these movements took shape and how they were influenced by nativist sentiments stemming from World War I and the Red Scare.

Organization and Layout

The opening chapter will explore the genesis of the "100-Percent Americanism" movement, which emerged during World War One as a celebration of all things American, and a repudiation of all things foreign (but particularly so called "hyphenated Americans"). Next, it examines the broader significance of the Red Scare. Wartime fears of German-American sabotage gave way to postwar fears of communist plots. The Red Scare, far from being a mere temporary bout of hysteria, functioned as the fulcrum for nativist ideologies throughout the interwar era. The Bolshevik Revolution had confirmed the perils posed by communism. Communist agitators had succeeded in toppling one of the world's great powers. No longer was the extent of the danger posed by radical agitation seen as occasional flare-ups like the Haymarket Riot. Now the very existence of the Republic was at stake. The Scare calcified fears of communist influence within the labor movement. Additionally, foreigners could only be tolerated insofar as they could be assimilated. The remainder of the chapter examines the immediate fallout of the Red Scare. Labor movements declined throughout the decade as public, political, and media pressure increasingly diagnosed any form of labor protest as products of foreign militant agitation. Meanwhile, the Ku Klux Klan, revived in 1916 but slow-growing during World War I, rapidly spread coast to coast by using a blend of old and new nativist sentiments to appeal to a broad swath of people. This chapter will show that the foundation for new nativist sentiment was set in the 1920s, and it was from this foundation that Depression era right-wing extremism sprung forth.

The second chapter examines the Black Legion. Of the three case studies explored here, the Black Legion is most directly tied to 1920s nativism. Originating in Bellaire, Ohio, the Black Legion began as a part of that town's Ku Klux Klan chapter. However, its leader, local physician William Shepard, envisioned a more secretive, intimidating fraternal order. Shepard eschewed the daytime parades and public gatherings of the Klan and moved his organization underground. By the early 1930s, leadership had shifted to Virgil Effinger, who headed the Black Legion from Lima, Ohio. From 1931-1936, the Legion gained a robust following along the Dixie Highway corridor spanning Lima to Detroit. Under Effinger's leadership, the Black Legion targeted communists and labor agitators, hoping to defend their nation against what they believed to be an imminent Bolshevik revolution. The Legion was partially successful in capturing the latent nativist sentiments which had propelled the KKK's rapid ascent a decade earlier, but ultimately the organization was limited by its own commitment to secrecy.

Chapter three will focus on Charles Coughlin, the "radio priest" whose voice dominated the airwaves in the Depression-era United States. Coughlin was more effective than any other contemporary right-wing individual or organization at cultivating a base of support founded upon nativist principles. Initially using his radio pulpit to share biblical parables and anecdotes from the life of Christ, Coughlin soon veered into the realm of politics, warning millions of weekly listeners of the perils of bolshevism. Coughlin however, deviated from traditional forms of nativism, turning his attention instead to what he perceived to be the root cause of the spread of insidious foreign ideas: the greed of capitalism. Capitalism was, in Coughlin's view, a broken system that fostered inequality which in turn fueled the spread of communism. Coughlin saw himself as a bulwark against communism's proliferation, warning listeners of its presence while advocating for a more "Christian" system based upon his tenets of social justice. As the 1930s

progressed, Coughlin's broadcasts were increasingly riddled with anti-Semitism and Nazi apologia; but his fear of communism taking root in America underpinned every message.

The fourth and final chapter explores the German-American Bund. The Bund was, of the case studies examined in this thesis, most incongruent with nativism. The Bund grew out of post-World War I German-American solidarity movements. Initially designed to promote the interests of German-Americans, these organizations soon became vessels for promoting National Socialism. Fritz Kuhn, the Bund's leader, sought to work directly with Hitler's regime to spread National Socialism in the United States. But the Bund's activities soon invited tenacious attacks from the public, press, and politicians seeking to root out un-American ideas and organizations.

In response, the Bund attempted to transmute itself into, at least insofar as the public was concerned, an organization promoting 100-percent Americanism. The Bund rejected its foreign provenance, deemed its critics fanatics fixated on pursuing Nazi specters, and recast itself as an organization dedicated to preventing America's corruption at the hands of "Jewish-Bolshevism." The Bund modified its National Socialist principles to fit neatly within a nativist framework, even as the very nativists their message was designed to appeal to rejected them on the grounds that they were promoting foreign "isms" on American soil. The Bund's failure lay in its inability to adequately extricate itself from its foreign origin, composition, and interests. Its downfall demonstrates at once the continued prevalence of nativist sentiment held over from the previous decade as well as fascism's incompatibility with the nativist audience it was most designed to appeal to.

Right-wing movements from the Great Depression era have been under examined by historians to date. The first Red Scare marked a turning point in the history of American nativism, which shifted fears to foreign ideas over foreign peoples (while also serving to link the

two). This study will, through three case studies, establish that a common fear and hatred of communism existed underpinning the disparate right-wing movements of the 1930s.

CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS

By early 1919, America was primed to wage a domestic war against bolshevism. The spark which would ignite a nationwide panic took place in February 1919 in Seattle. From February 6-11, a general strike involving more than 60,000 workers across several unions, including the AFL and IWW, occurred, effectively shutting down the city.[31] The strike was peaceful, with no violent incidents reported or arrests made. However, to a shaken media and legions of readers, it marked the beginning of a revolution.

The press was quick to interpret the Seattle strike as a bolshevik plot connected to labor groups such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). One paper from nearby Chehalis reported that the strike was the product of "[t]he radical element, containing Bolshevikism, I.W.W'ism and other isms that are un-American." A week later, the same paper reported that primary mastermind behind the strike was a man went by Leon Green, but whose real name was "Leon Butouetsky, a Russian bolsheviki, who came to Seattle on purpose to spread his anarchistic doctrine."[32] The *Berkeley Daily Gazette* drew parallels with Russian revolutionary activities in Petrograd[33] two years prior. According to the *Gazette* radical strike leaders carefully studied the tactics employed by Russian revolutionaries and "tried to duplicate the initial steps of the same here" in the hopes that "we would surrender because of economic pressure and suffering of our people."[34]

Seattle mayor Ole Hanson did little to calm the hysteria. In fact, he was all too eager to fan the flames of panic. In a statement issued in multiple papers throughout the region, Hanson

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[31] William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*: *1914-1932,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 70.
[32] "A Dangerous Situation," *Chehalis Bee Nugget,* February 14, 1919. *Chehalis Bee Nugget,* February 21, 1919.
[33] Petrograd was the capital of Tzarist Russia and the primary site of revolutionary actions in both phases of the Bolshevik Revolution
[34] *Berkeley Daily Gazette,* February 13, 1919.

not only reaffirmed the presence of radicals and foreign agitators in Seattle unions; he understood how it happened- "the unions have admitted to their ranks under the stress of war conditions every Bolshevik and IWW who desired to join. These men have secured control of many labor organizations." But it was not just radicals who were to blame. More conservative union members had "shown their yellow streak by allowing the foes of organized government to run their unions and their affairs."[35] Hanson had long been suspicious of the IWW's motives, making his reaction to the strike rather predictable. However, he soon found added motive for playing up the radical connection.

Hanson quickly took action against the strike by requesting a US Army regiment from nearby Fort Lewis. Then, in a garish display that would not have been out of place in the propaganda newsreels of European fascist movements, he draped an American flag over his car and personally led the troops into downtown Seattle. The strike's abrupt conclusion made Hanson a national hero. Several weeks later, he resigned and set out on a nationwide tour giving speeches on the dangers of domestic bolshevism, an undertaking which netted him $40,000 in seven months (more than five times his salary as mayor).[36] Hanson was the first but would be far from the last figure to benefit from the Red Scare. But just as important, Hanson had conflated the chimerical presence of nefarious foreign revolutionaries with the activities of ordinary union members. This would prove an enduring theme of the Red Scare.

The Red Scare saw the cultivation of preexisting nativist sentiments paired with the residual hyper-nationalism and paranoia of World War I to form a highly combustible marriage. In the post-war years, the American public would redirect these wartime fears and hatreds towards a new Bolshevik "menace." As panic spread nationwide, "bolshevik" became a flexible

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[35] Ole Hanson quoted in, "'Red Seattle, Never' Cries Mayor Hanson," in *Oakland Tribune*, February 8, 1919.
[36] Robert Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 66.

term that could be used to describe anything deemed un-American, including "unassimilated" aliens and the labor unions they allegedly infected. The Red Scare was born from war-time hysteria, which, after a brief tempestuous fury, largely subsided. However, the conceptual links it forged among anti-Americanism, immigrants, bolshevism, and labor unions would prove far more durable. These fears would form the bedrock for new manifestations of American nativism in the interwar era.

Prior to World War I, shifting immigration patterns were beginning to create a sense of unease among many Americans. By 1914, nearly 80% of the one million immigrants admitted annually came from Southern and Eastern Europe and were predominantly Catholic and Jewish. This, combined with the sheer quantity of foreign born citizens (nearly 14% of the population by 1920) helped lead to the formation of organizations like the North American Civic League for Immigrants in 1908 and the Committee for Immigrants in America in 1914. These organizations, and others like them, focused on assimilating new immigrants into "one nation."[37] In 1915, the National Americanization Committee developed as an outgrowth of the Committee for Immigrants. This organization pushed Americanization efforts even further, seeking to sever new immigrants' ties with their old countries and fully immerse them in American culture. Befitting this more aggressive posture, the old slogan of "Many Peoples, But One Nation" was replaced with "America First."[38]

America's entry into World War I accelerated these trends. Under wartime conditions, the NAC sought to suppress all signs of disloyalty and dissolve minority cultures altogether. The organization recommended maintaining a semi-annual registration of the entire national alien

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[37] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955). 241
[38] Ibid., 243.

population and advised employers on how and where to use alien employees in order to protect against potential sabotage.[39] As America's involvement in the war ramped up, additional organizations would emerge, ostensibly to protect it from domestic threats.

Independent agencies like the American Defense Society and National Security League, along with the government sponsored American Protective League, worked initially to spread substantial amounts of propaganda to stir up the nation's appetite for war.[40] Additionally, these organizations, as well as others like the Boy Spies of America, the Home Defense League, and the Liberty League, employed a vast network of spies who reported to various government intelligence divisions. By the fall of 1918, the APL alone employed more than 300,000 spies.[41] Of particular concern initially were the 8 million Americans who were either born in Germany or had at least one parent from Germany. However, the list of potential threats soon expanded dramatically with the passage of the Selective Service, Espionage, and Alien Acts. Together, these acts made it a crime to "obstruct" the war effort, which by 1918 meant disseminating any form of criticism towards the US government or American participation in the war, while also granting the government the authority to deport any alien residents who threatened to overthrow it.[42] In an environment suddenly characterized by paranoia and hyper-vigilance, the far left soon found itself in the crosshairs of these organizations.

In 1917, the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (known colloquially as "Wobblies") represented the far left of the American political spectrum.[43] They also held little

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[39] Higham, 248-9.
[40] Murray, 18.
[41] Ann Hagedorn, *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America, 1919,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007) 29.
[42] Ibid 25-30
[43] It bears noting that anarchists remained a relevant contingent on the far left in the early 20th century. The 1920 Sacco-Vanzetti Affair, in which two anarchists were accused and convicted (with no shortage of controversy) of killing a paymaster and a guard during an armed robbery, quickly became one of the most significant stories of the decade. For more on this and other anarchist activity, see Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist*

interest in supporting U.S. intervention in Europe. In April 1917, socialist leaders condemned America's declaration of war and resolved to protest conscription, censorship, war drives, and all other means employed to support the war effort. Unsurprisingly, overt hostility to the war effort confirmed in the minds of many Americans that the Socialist Party was working in concert with Germany to sabotage America from within. Soon, socialist meeting halls were raided by angry mobs while leading members of the party found themselves targeted by the courts (including Victor Berger who was barred from assuming his seat in the US House of Representatives due to his violation of the Espionage Act).[44]

The more radical but less organized Industrial Workers of the World were also subjected to national disdain during the war. Unlike the socialists, Wobblies supported direct action in order to undermine capitalism. The IWW's preferred weapon was the general strike, and prior to World War I, it frequently collaborated with workers in mining camps, lumber mills, and textile mills to employ it. However, for these workers, the IWW was simply a means to an end, and with few exceptions ties with the organization were severed following the conclusion of these strikes. In fact, at its height, the IWW maintained a permanent membership of just 60,000 members.[45] But this did not preclude the organization from becoming a subject of fear and distrust during the war, often because it was associated with immigrant workers who in turn were associated with possible insurrectionist plots. At one point, rumors spread that Wobblies would throw union workmen under the wheels of freight trains if they did not agree to cooperate with

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Background, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), and Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010).

[44] Todd J. Pfannestiel, *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism, 1919-1923* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 7-8.

[45] Ibid., 9.

efforts to sabotage the war program.[46] The Bolshevik Revolution would only exacerbate these tensions.

In March 1917, the tsarist regime in Russia collapsed. Eight months later, the bolsheviks assumed control of the country and ended Russia's participation in the war. In the United States, this was interpreted not only as a direct threat to capitalist and American principles, but as a perfidious act designed to sabotage the war effort. American intelligence operatives were certain that Russian bolsheviks had conspired with Germany to overthrow the tsar and end Russia's participation in the war.[47] Consequently, a firm link was established between bolshevism and an enemy that had been deemed an existential threat not only to America, but everything America stood for. Although the war was over, in the minds of many Americans, it was plain to see that this threat had merely taken a new form.

Despite Hanson's apparent triumph, the Red Scare would soon spread rapidly from coast to coast. A number of officials throughout the country received suspicious packages in the mail, some of which were filled with explosives. These mail bombs resulted in few casualties but did much to sustain national hysteria (it mattered little that there was no rhyme or reason to the pattern of recipients, or that many of the targeted officials were themselves leftists). The press vilified the senders, referring to them as "human vermin," and "dynamitards."[48] One paper stated that, unless preventative action was taken, "We may as well invite Lenin and Trotsky to come here and set up business at once."[49] This would all coincide with numerous May Day parades and marches planned by labor groups.

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[46] Ibid., 30.
[47] Pfannestiel, 30.
[48] Ibid., 72.
[49] *Washington Post,* May 2, 1919.

While May Day parades had taken place since the 1890s, the backdrop of the Red Scare would produce unprecedented tension for 1919's celebrations. In Cleveland, two major riots occurred on Euclid Avenue and in front of the socialist headquarters on Prospect Avenue. Euclid Avenue, home to the city's shopping district, saw rioters throw ink bottles, shoes, and any other ballistically viable merchandise they could get their hands on at May Day parade participants. At the socialist headquarters on Prospect, rioters raided the building and dumped any materials they could find onto the street, including typewriters, chairs, and desks.[50] One person was killed and 40 injured. The Cleveland Police Department responded by arresting 106 mostly foreign socialists and assigning them complete blame for the rioting.[51]

In New York, the Russian People's House was raided by a group of soldiers who confiscated radical literature while forcing the residents to sing the Star-Spangled Banner.[52] A socialist daily paper, the *New York Call*, also found itself targeted by angry demonstrators. Around 200 soldiers, sailors, and marines rioted outside the paper's headquarters and "gave every evidence of thorough enjoyment while they were beating up a dozen employees of the *Call*, and later when they threw some of them from windows and doorways." These soldiers proceeded to Madison Square Garden where more May Day participants had gathered. Initially it seemed as if violence would be avoided in this instance, but as the soldiers were preparing to leave a man and a woman emerged from the Garden and the woman opened her coat to reveal a red tie. "Instantly three sailors rushed for her, knocked her down, tore the tie from its fastenings and maltreated the woman as she lay on the sidewalk."[53]

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[50] *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* May 2, 1919, referenced in Murray, 75.
[51] Murray, 76.
[52] Ibid., 75.
[53] "Riots Mark May Day in Many Cities," *Syracuse Herald,* May 2, 1919

If a voice of reason in the midst of hysteria was to be found anywhere, it would not be from the federal government. Following the announcement of the Seattle strike, the Overman committee, a five-member subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was tasked with investigating "Bolshevism and all other forms of anti-American radicalism in the United States."[54] In June, it released a report which seemingly validated the sense of dread which permeated the nation. The committee reaffirmed the public's fear that Bolshevism and Russia were linked to "radical revolutionary elements" in the United States. More importantly, like the press, the Overman Committee saw no meaningful distinction between these radical revolutionary groups and moderate labor organizers. While not all unions completely subscribed to radical doctrine, "all seized upon Bolshevism as a rallying cry and are undertaking to unite all of these elements under that banner for the purpose of accomplishing the initial step in their common formula . . . the overthrow of existing governmental institutions and the complete demoralization of modern society." If organized labor interests were to succeed in the United States, the minority would "control as dictators the majority," and millions of Americans would be disenfranchised including

> farmers, merchants, and manufacturers, both large and small, all persons receiving interest on borrowed money or bonds, rent from real estate or personal property . . . all traders, merchants, and dealers, even though they do not employ another person in the conduct of their business. All preachers, priests, janitors, and employees of all churches and religious bodies.[55]

In short, radical ideology had fully saturated the ranks of organized labor, and the efforts of labor were in diametric opposition to the interests of the people of the United States. Organized labor had established itself as a clear and present threat to the American way of life.

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[54] *New York Times,* February 4, 1919.
[55] "Senators Tell What Bolshevism Really Means," *New York Times,* June 15, 1919

The committee's report also seized upon nativist fears. In addition to disenfranchising millions of Americans, all aliens (who did not belong to these prohibited classes) would be immediately enfranchised. Moreover, bolsheviks would see to the "opening of the doors of all prisons and penitentiaries" which would make "the domination of the criminal and most undesirable alien elements of the country . . . a comparatively easy matter."[56] The committee's solution was to "Americanize" the nation's residents. The concept of "Americanization" would come to be as ubiquitous as it was nebulous in the 1920s, but it is clear the committee believed in the importance of assimilating foreign-born citizens. This meant that any foreign language newspaper was "a danger to the country unless they are utilized to assist in the assimilation of the alien element."[57] Moreover, the committee advised that any foreign-born resident must provide evidence showing they were at least on the path toward assimilation before they could be considered citizens eligible for political participation.[58] Far from providing a rational voice, the Overman Committee instead crystallized the fears of the American people. "Foreign" had become synonymous with "bolshevik." Alien ideologies had infested organized labor, and if preventative action was not taken, the American way of life could not endure.

In September, American steelworkers announced they were going on strike. Although the Progressive Era had seen substantial advances in labor standards and working conditions, the steel industry had proven largely immune to change. Steel industry management had effectively crushed union efforts in the 1890s, leaving workers without any sort of labor organization. As a result, working conditions and wages stagnated compared to other industries. In 1919, steelworkers worked an average of nearly 70 hours per week.[59] However, worker wages placed

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] David A. Shannon, *America Between the Wars, 1919-1941,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 21.

them more than $100 below the established minimum subsistence level and $500 below the "American standard of living" for families.[60] A strike, then, would seem a rational move for those employed in the industry, and by the end of the first week nearly 400,000 workers had joined the work stoppage. In response, head of US Steel Corp Elbert Gary worked to link the strike to bolshevism and the press quickly followed suit. Newspapers downplayed financial motivations for the strike, in some cases asserting that workers made as much as $70 per day.[61]

Instead, it was posited as another instance of organized labor advancing the cause of Bolshevism. As one editorial from the *New York Times* stated, the strike was a maneuver for "power, for the control of the industry, and it is a strike upon flagrantly false pretenses." The editorial asserted that, far from a product of poor working conditions, the strike was actually the master plot of a "few radical agitators" carried out by "a large number of paid organizers" persuading the rest of the strikers to "act under the leadership of the radical or 'red' element." Moreover, participants were those most susceptible to radical beliefs, largely "foreigners . . . who were more easily persuaded to quit work than the more sober-minded and steady wage earners in the industry."[62] This editorial, and others like it, essentially reasserted the findings of the Overman Committee. Bolshevism was the disease, and the only way to prevent its spread was through the inoculating power of Americanization.

Tensions in 1919 culminated in the Centralia Massacre in November. Centralia, Washington served as home to one of the state's two IWW halls. Its poorly timed reopening that summer had prompted local fears over radical activity. In October, local businessmen formed the Centralia Protective Association to defend Centralia from further radical influence. Mounting

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[60] Interchurch World Movement of North America Bureau of Industrial Research, *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920): 94.
[61] Murray, 142-143.
[62] "A Strike of False Pretenses," *New York Times,* September 23, 1919.

tensions would come to a head on Armistice Day, which the local chapter of the American Legion had planned to commemorate with an afternoon parade.

IWW members, no doubt aware of the events of the previous summer, were wary of a possible raid on their headquarters. Erring on the side of caution, they stationed armed guards in the IWW hall, across the street in the Avalon Hotel, and a quarter of a mile away on Seminary Hill. As the parade participants marched past the hall, some of their ranks doubled back, prompting confusion among both Legionnaires and Wobblies alike. Some of the Wobblies panicked and opened fire on the parading ranks, striking several members of the crowd. The shooters were quickly apprehended by crowd with the exception of one—Wesley Everest.

Everest fled the scene, shooting one of his pursuers in the process, but was soon tracked down and arrested. In jail, Everest was at least safe from an incensed mob, but this sanctuary would prove fleeting. A local power outage afforded the mob an opportunity to break Everest out of his cell and exact vigilante justice. He was viciously beaten before being driven to a secluded spot near the Chehalis River. Here, the mob emasculated him, hung him by a short rope, and when this failed to satiate their bloodlust, cut him down and hung him with a longer rope. After finally killing him, his body was returned to the jail where it was put on display for the other Wobblies present. The mob obtained its final bit of revenge by forcing a group of Wobblies to dig Everest's grave, finally bringing this sordid ordeal to its conclusion.[63]

Unsurprisingly, this atrocity was largely ignored in the press coverage of the event. Instead, the spotlight was placed on the Wobblies, who according to the press, were far from panic-stricken workers, but in reality, hardened revolutionaries. In the aftermath of the event, the Berkeley chapter of the American Legion issued a statement sending condolences to the

[63] Murray, 182-184.

Centralia chapter, whose members were "murdered in cold blood by alleged IWW's."[64] The *Oakland Tribune* reported that the Centralia jail was "crowded with reds" following the shooting and that if the subsequently formed posse found any additional participants "no attempt will be made to bring them back alive."[65] Arizona Governor Thomas E. Campbell urged a campaign of "extermination" against IWW, the aims of which he claimed to be at a "minimum, . . . the destruction of society and organized government."[66] The *New York Times* concluded that the only possible explanation for the Centralia Massacre was that the IWW "hoped by this unexpected blow to terrify the American people."[67] It further claimed that the slain American Legionnaires were killed because they "believed in the American flag" and were "martyrs to that belief . . . From the scene of their slaughter there has sprung up and spread a national horror and detestation of their slayers which embraces the whole horrible association to which those murderers belong."[68]

Press coverage and political opportunism had transmuted IWWs into hardened, bloodthirsty revolutionaries. Their actions were not seen as fear-driven self-defense, but a deliberate assault upon American ideals. Soon after, anti-radical activity was triggered along the entirety of the West Coast. Members of the Spokane American Legion acting in an augmentative law enforcement capacity, rounded up 74 Wobblies. Further arrests were made in Tacoma, Washington. In Oakland, California a mob destroyed every radical meeting place they could find, to prove (evidently oblivious to the irony) that "law and order shall prevail."[69] The Red Scare's final odious chapter was set to be written.

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[64] *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, November 14, 1919.
[65] *Oakland Tribune,* November 12, 1919.
[66] *Santa Ana Register,* November 14, 1919.
[67] "Radicalism Run Mad," *New York Times,* November 13, 1919.
[68] "The Centralia Awakening," *New York Times,* November 14, 1919.
[69] Murray, 185.

In August, U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer received $500,000 to establish the General Intelligence Division which would function as the Justice Department's investigative wing. Three months later, the division launched its first major raid, targeting the Union of Russian Workers. The URW formally advocated the complete overthrow of governmental institutions, but few of its members subscribed to these beliefs. However, nuance would not prove to be a defining feature of Palmer's operations. This raid, the first of what would come to be known as the Palmer Raids, precipitated numerous raids around the country, resulting in a multitude of arrests. In New York City alone, 73 radical centers were seized, and 500 people arrested. Meanwhile, these raids, combined with recent events like the Centralia Massacre, had pushed the general public into a state of hysteria. Congress was overwhelmed with petitions from the American Legion, Rotarians, the Elks Lodge, and numerous other clubs and societies stating that "the time has arrived when Americans should assert themselves and drive from these shores all disloyal aliens."[70] By December, the Soviet Ark, an Army transport ship adapted for the purpose of transporting "dangerous" immigrants back to their native lands, was loaded with 249 passengers and set to embark.

The conception of the Soviet Ark marked the culmination of months of dehumanizing propaganda stemming from American politicians, media, and citizens alike. Ole Hanson bluntly asserted that "the syndicalist, whether called bolshevist or IWW, is simply a revolutionary criminal; that each and every one teaches the commission of crime, that each and every one commits crime in the exact proportion as his courage and opportunity permit."[71] And if the strike in Seattle had succeeded, the city would have been turned over to "thugs and blacklegs, who

[70] Murray, 193-206.
[71] Ole Hanson, *America Versus Bolshevism,* (Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920): X.

would loot, rape, and kill, and establish a region of terror."[72] With rhetoric like this, justifying the illegal deportation of 249 people was a relatively simple matter. The *New York Times* looked to America's past, rationalizing "nowhere in the seventeenth century does toleration exist, except as a matter of necessity . . . that these men, so much appealed to by the native American radicals today, were intolerant makes them neither worse nor better. For the salvation of the State they then acted for what they believed to be the best interest of the State." America, asserted the *Times,* was not conceived as a melting pot; rather, it merely tolerated the presence of foreigners when it had to. And in the dark days of the Red Scare, preserving the security of the state against bolshevism was a necessity because it represented "an autocracy infinitely more savage, tyrannical, and subversive of liberty and equality . . . that is what the Bolsheviki who have left us, the too numerous Bolsheviki who remain, have been trying to teach."[73]

The Palmer Raids continued into 1920. In Detroit, roughly 800 people were arrested and imprisoned for nearly a week in a narrow, dark, and windowless corridor in the city's old federal building. Prisoners were forced to sleep on a bare floor and stand in long lines to access the facility's sole toilet. After a week had passed, all but 140 were released. Further investigation found that most were "ignorant foreigners" that did not understand why they were being held.[74] Frederick Barkley noted that the detained included "a 17-year-old boy, who had been caught while at the House of the Masses to see a man about a job . . . four to a dozen men who had simply been having a drink of near-beer in a café . . . [and] at least one man who had simply stopped out of curiosity."[75] The dubious value of these raids did not deter the press from cheering Palmer on. In fact, it only seemed to confirm the threat bolshevism posed on American

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[72] Ibid., 86.
[73] "Our Native Radicals," *New York Times,* January 18, 1920. "Two Ideas," *New York Times,* January 20, 1920.
[74] Murray, 210-216.
[75] Frederick Barkley, "Jailing Radicals in Detroit," *The Nation,* January 31, 1920.

shores, and that Palmer was the nation's savior---"This is no mere scare, no phantom of heated imagination—it is a cold, hard, plain fact."[76] The "success" of these raids led Palmer to promise New Yorkers the spectacle of a "second, third, and fourth Soviet Ark sailing down their beautiful harbor in the near future."[77]

However, these additional arks would prove unnecessary. By spring 1920, it was clear that bolshevism's spread had largely been contained in Europe. The fear of Western European collapse had never manifested. Moreover, the new decade brought with it a prolific array of new leisurely distractions which took the public's mind off the bolshevik menace. In the build up to May Day, 1920, Palmer again attempted to stoke the flames of Red hysteria, issuing a statement that numerous "high officials" had been targeted for assassination by communist agitators. "A warning," assured Palmer, had "been issued by the department to all those whose names are included in the list of marked men, and the department has taken steps to furnish protection."[78] In a move which would foreshadow McCarthyism three decades later, Palmer refused to reveal the list of targeted officials.

But this time there would be no red-hysteria to greet him. Newspapers mocked his fear mongering and the general public responded with indifference.[79] Palmer's status as a vanguard against Bolshevism was over, and with it so was America's first Red Scare. But the scars of the Red Scare would persist much longer, and they would have a profound effect on the nation's political and social landscape in the ensuing years.

The histrionics of the Red Scare would fade quickly, but the underlying revulsion of foreign "isms" which fueled it would persist throughout the interwar era. No organization did

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[76] "All Aboard the Next Soviet Ark," *Washington Evening Star*, January 3, 1920.
[77] *New York Times,* February 29, 1920.
[78] "Nationwide Plot to Kill High Officials on Red May Day Revealed by Palmer," *New York Times,* April 30, 1920.
[79] Murray, 253.

more to carry the banner of 100-percent Americanism in the 1920s than the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan of the 1920s differed from other iterations of the organization in terms of both depth and vision. Between 1922 and 1924, the Klan rapidly spread throughout the nation. Whereas in 1922, more than 80% of Klan members were based in Southern or Southwestern states, by 1924 that figure had been cut in half. Of course, the Klan had not declined in popularity in those states; rather it swiftly took root in other regions. Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois served as home to 40% of the Klan's total membership (up from 6% in 1922 and nearly equal to every Southern state combined), and every other region saw modest gains as well.[80]

The Klan's rapid proliferation was enabled by a more complex vision that, outside the South, extended beyond the persecution of African-Americans. The Klan fed into a sense of collective fear among Protestant-Americans that the nation had been "delivered into the hands of urbanites, anarchists, and immigrants."[81] An article in the *Imperial Night Hawk* from August 1923 provided more detail on the problems posed by undesirable aliens—"Paupers, diseased, and criminals predominate among those who land upon American soil. They have a very low standard of morals." Moreover, many of these aliens, immune from efforts of "Americanization," were "editing newspapers and magazines and endeavoring to dictate to the American citizen the policies of his government."[82] The Klan appealed to widely spread and enduring fears of foreign influence.

This was reflected in the composition of the organization. In Indiana, which contained a greater proportion of Klan members than any other state in the country, membership demographics largely reflected those of society as a whole. Around 20% of all native-born white

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[80] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967): 233.
[81] Leonard Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 3.
[82] *Imperial Night Hawk,* August 29, 1923.

men were members, and nearly half of these men were classified as white-collar workers.[83] Moreover, this Klan's targets were broad and often fungible. It maintained its stance against blacks, but also targeted Catholics, Jews, and Bolsheviks. Scholar Nancy MacLean offered one of the most effective concise summaries of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan: "It was at once mainstream and extreme, hostile to big business and antagonistic to industrial unions, anti-elitist and hateful of blacks and immigrants, pro-law and order and prone to extralegal violence."[84] It would be reductive to say that the Klan was merely a manifestation of residual Red Scare fears. It held some progressive stances like increasing funding for public schools and support for women's suffrage, and in some instances, it even supported progressive politicians such as Robert La Follette.[85] However, it would also be a mistake to understate the influence the Red Scare had on buttressing the Klan's appeal.

While the Klan was at times nominally wary of concentrated economic power, it did little to act on this fear. On the contrary, it often supported placing powerful businessmen in office, mirroring the political ethos of the era.[86] However, the Klan was not selective in identifying enemies, but anti-radicalism was a persistent theme while the organization enjoyed its popular zenith. The Klan warned of the mounting threat posed by "'the Anarchist and Bolshevik forces . . . encroaching daily upon the basic principles of Americanism.'"[87] Pinpointing a precise ideology of the 1920s Klan is challenging but defending "Americanism" was perhaps the most consistent and universal Klan tenet. A December 1924 edition of the *Wisconsin Kourior* warned against the

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[83] Moore, 46-63.
[84] Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[85] Follette condemned the Klan in the 1924. Klan support of progressives often stemmed from their support of prohibition, a movement the organization was vigorously supportive of. Its support of La Follette was due to his belief in isolationist policies.
[86] Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition,* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017), 42.
[87] Ibid., 64.

perils of third party tickets, stating that defeating them would prevent the establishment of a European style bloc system in US legislatures—"While this will be bad news to the La Follettes, the socialists . . . real patriotic Americans will see in the disapproval of these isms much hope for the continued safety and welfare of these United States."[88] Here, the foreign and negative structure is clearly contrasted with the positive, American political setup. And maintaining this American system was tantamount to ensuring the safety of the nation itself.

The Ku Klux Klan used its status as a bulwark for Americanism to rapidly expand its appeal throughout the nation. In Wisconsin, Reverend I.M. Hargut vouched for the organization, repudiating criticisms made by the mainstream press—"If you were to believe all in the newspapers about them, you would conclude they are all IWWs, bolsheviks, and criminals." To the contrary, the Klan was "strictly an American institution, and believes in America being run by Americans . . . The KKK believes in American being run by genuine Americans at heart . . . We do not want Bolsheviks, traitors, and criminals running our country."[89] The KKK's appeal lay in its intrinsically American qualities, contrasted sharply against bolshevism and other "criminal" ideologies. This was further reflected in Klan rhetoric regarding public schools. An article appearing in a March 1923 edition of *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly* expressed dismay at the New York state legislature's repeal of a law requiring teachers to be native-born. The paper introduced this news with a sensational lede: "Positions in the New York state public schools now are open to communists, bolshevists, Catholics, Soviets and what not."[90] But for the Klan to exert meaningful influence, its rhetoric would have to be backed by action.

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[88] "Beware of Third Parties," *Wisconsin Kourior,* December 5, 1924.
[89] "Record Breaking Crowd Hears Wisconsin Minister Deliver a Sermon on the Ku Klux Klan, *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*, April 21, 1923. This paper was one of many Klan-run or Klan-friendly newspapers active during this time period.
[90] "New York Legislature Repeals Law Requiring Teachers in the Public Schools to be Americans," *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*, March 10, 1923.

Vigilantism would prove to be a key component of Klan activities throughout the decade. In Indiana, a town sheriff worked with a civilian "booze squad," dependent at least in part on manpower supplied by the local Klan chapter to arrest Prohibition offenders. Moral transgressions also drew the attention of Klan "Vigilance Committees." Women, for instance, were occasionally attacked for being "immodestly dressed."[91] In Steubenville, Ohio, Klan lawyer Clarence Benadum, and ten Klan detectives organized an investigation and raid on several houses of "ill fame." In sum, twenty houses were raided, resulting in five women being ordered by the local Klan to leave the city.[92] Like Ole Hanson and Mitchell Palmer before them, the Klan also tied organized labor organizations like the IWW to insidious foreign ideas. In a May 1923 issue of *The Imperial Nighthawk,* one columnist wrote that in California "the IWWs are threatening armed revolution and sabotage against the lumber companies, while in St. Joseph, Michigan, in trials of communists, it is proved that the Russian Soviet government still continues its attempt to forment (sic) revolution in America."[93] Another article in the *Imperial Night Hawk* stated, "we must discourage, by stern and swift rebuke, all efforts to create a class consciousness among our people." The Klan showed little tolerance for what they deemed to be revolutionary labor activity.

Though often broadly defined, the Ku Klux Klan was straightforward about its goals. Among these was establishing a "closer relationship between Capital and American Labor," while "preventing unwarranted strikes by foreign labor agitators."[94] This of course meant a relationship between big business and unions in which organized labor would remain pliable and subservient. Seeing the labor strike as a weapon wielded by insidious foreign revolutionaries, the

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[91] Gordon, 99.
[92] "Vice Raid Led by Ku Klux Klan," *The Lima News,* May 24, 1923.
[93] *Imperial Night Hawk,* May 9, 1923.
[94] "The Most Sublime Heritage in History," *Wisconsin Kourior,* December 12, 1924.

Klan naturally came into conflict with unions on numerous occasions throughout the early 1920s. In Nebraska, the Klan targeted the Agricultural Workers Organization, a wheat harvesters union and IWW auxiliary. In the Pacific Northwest, heavy IWW activity prompted frequent Klan reprisals which drove the Wobblies out of several locations in the region.[95] One of the most significant clashes between the Klan and organized labor occurred in Greenville, Maine in early 1924. Here, the IWW organized a strike among employees of the local lumber companies. The Klan responded by threatening and physically attacking the labor unions. Following a weekend clash in early February, around forty members of the Klan marched to the Lake House (a local boarding house) where several IWW leaders were staying and ordered them to "leave town at one or they would use force and put them out."[96] The IWW, however, would not be moved, prompting the Klan to throw its weight behind the lumber companies, who were eventually successful in compelling the state to file conspiracy charges against the workers. Ultimately the Klan, working in tandem with local business interests, was able to exert enough pressure on effectively defeat labor efforts in the area.[97]

The Klan's list of enemies was exhaustive but underpinned by alien qualities. It feared immigrants like those from Eastern Europe due to perceived traits which made them "unassimilable." The Catholic Church was also targeted for its "foreign" qualities. Klansmen feared that it answered first to Rome, not the United States. Especially concerning to the Klan was the Church's "wholly Italian" hierarchy and its frequent utilization of foreign languages in mass.[98]

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[95] Gordon, 99.
[96] "K.K.K. And I.W.W. Wage Drawn Battle in Greenville," *Portland Press Herald*, February 4, 1924.

[97] Gordon, 105-106.
[98] Gordon, 48.

The Klan's rhetoric against "bolsheviks" and "foreign labor agitators" was straight from the Red Scare. When the Klan opposed big business interests, it was usually due to the presence of an undesirable foreign element in that business's employ. An article in the *Imperial Night Hawk* neatly identified the salient threats to 'Americanism:' "There are two great influences in this country opposed to checking this stream of European 'riff-raff' and in favor of . . . flooding this country with the very scum of the earth. These influences are the Roman Catholic Church and big employers of pauper labor."[99]

The rhetoric of the Red Scare clearly proved more enduring than its associated hysterics. Like the Red Scare hysteria, the Klan's appeal proved ephemeral everywhere but the deep South. But this was not due to an erosion in the appeal of its ideologies. Rather, it was largely a product of its rapidly crumbling moral authority. In Oregon, dentist and prominent local Klan figure Ellis O. Willson was convicted for raping his secretary and killing her while performing an abortion after she became pregnant.

Imperial Night Hawk editor Philip Fox was convicted of murdering William S. Coburn. Klan-backed Indiana Governor Ed Jackson was indicted for bribery. Finally, and perhaps most famously, Indiana Klan Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson was convicted of kidnapping, raping, and murdering his secretary, a scandal which received widespread coverage from the national press.[100] The Klan's influence rapidly waned, but the ideologies it espoused persisted politically, culturally, and socially throughout the decade.

As Red Scare hysteria subsided, and the Ku Klux Klan gained a foothold throughout the nation, nativist and anti-labor policies gained traction at the highest levels of government. Under

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[99] *Imperial Night Hawk,* May 30, 1923.
[100] Gordon, 191-193. In addition to the aforementioned crimes, numerous bite marks were also found on the victim's body. Perhaps more disturbingly, evidence suggests that this was not the first victim of Stephenson's biting habits.

Warren G. Harding, and subsequently Calvin Coolidge, immigration restrictions were passed, and focus was shifted to "Americanizing" immigrants already in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924, passed under Coolidge, established a national origins quota which limited the number of incoming immigrants from a given to two percent of the total number of native residents in 1920 "whose origin by birth or ancestry" could be traced to that nation.[101] However, this law excluded from its definition of "inhabitants" New World immigrants and their descendants; Asians and their descendants, "slave immigrants," and the descendants of "American aborigines."[102] The Immigration Act of 1924 plainly appealed to nativist sentiments. But Coolidge was, in many ways, merely continuing the legacy of his predecessor.

Under Harding, government regulations were rolled back, resulting in federal and state minimum wage laws being struck down and the reduction of government interference in the free market.[103] Highlighting just how committed Harding was to business interests was his appointment of Andrew Mellon as Secretary of the Treasury. Mellon advanced a program which slashed tax rates for large corporations and the nation's richest individuals. Between 1921-1926, income tax rates on those who earned one million dollars annually were slashed by two-thirds.[104] In addition to cutting taxes, the Mellon-supported Revenue Act of 1921 also resulted in a generous allocation of tax refunds to America's largest corporations. Over the course of the decade, these refunds would total nearly four billion dollars.[105] The net result was the realization of Harding's desire of "less government in business and more business in government."[106]

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[101] Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 55.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ronald A. Goldberg, *America in the Twenties,* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 38-41.
[104] Shannon, 38.
[105] John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy: 1921-1933,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 53.
[106] Goldberg, 125.

Advancing the interests of big business would come at the expense of organized labor, and Harding targeted labor organizations in each of his Annual Messages. In his first message, Harding asserted that labor organizations should not be allowed to "exact unfair terms of employment or subject the public to actual distresses in order to enforce its terms." In acting as mediator between organized capital and organized labor, it was labor's behavior that Harding sought to correct. More specifically, labor would have to find alternatives to "those forms of warfare which we recognize under the names of strikes, lockouts . . . and the like."[107] In his second address, Harding reiterated familiar Red Scare rhetoric, not only stating that the coal and railway strikes "had no excuse for their beginning" but also assigning them cause for the post-war recession.[108]

When Harding passed suddenly in August 1923, he departed a beloved president despite a number of scandals which had rocked his administration. Calvin Coolidge would do little to alter course. Coolidge, like many Americans, held a deep-seated fear of bolshevism and its potential to spread throughout the nation. In a June 1921 issue of *The Delineator* (a full year after the Red Scare's conclusion), Coolidge wrote an article warning of the spread of bolshevism at women's colleges. "There is evidence" wrote Coolidge, "which is circumstantial, but of considerable strength, that they are the object of adroit attacks by radical propagandists . . . decidedly hostile to our American form of government." Of particular interest to Coolidge was a campus publication entitled *The Socialist Review* whose editorial policy stated "Here people who derive their faith in a fraternal world from the teachings of Jesus shall speak their mind side by side with *comrades who hold the Christian creeds to be enemies of process and organized*

[107] Warren G. Harding, "First Annual Message," December 6, 1921.
[108] Warren G. Harding, "Second Annual Message," December 8, 1922.

Christianity a vicious instrument of exploitation. (emphasis his)."[109] What many readers would interpret as being emblematic of an environment supporting the free-flowing exchange of ideas (as one would expect any college to provide), Coolidge saw as an insidious plot to plant the seeds of bolshevism into the minds of impressionable students. This mindset, plainly borne of the Red Scare, would continue to color Coolidge's worldview after he assumed the presidency.

Harding had not survived his first term, but his pro-business, anti-labor policy paradigm would live on under Calvin Coolidge. Coolidge likened factories to places "of worship" and was generally regarded by big business as the "ideal" president.[110] Coolidge continued to advance Harding's laissez-faire policies, retaining Andrew Mellon and further reducing government influence on business affairs. The Revenue Act of 1926 eliminated the gift tax, halved the estate tax, and reduced the maximum surtax on high incomes from 65 percent to 20 percent.[111] Coolidge further reduced the Federal Trade Commission's capacity to monitor business practices, and effectively allowed business groups to set their own rules of competition for the FTC to verify.[112] Predictably, Coolidge also followed Harding in laying blame on unions for the discord in labor-capital relations.

President Coolidge's Annual Messages conveyed a familiar message to unions. In his second message, Coolidge declared that the nation had a "right to uninterrupted service of transportation" and that there was "danger that the Nation may suffer great injury through the interruption of operations because of labor disputes."[113] In the following year's address, Coolidge asserted that strikes held "many of the aspects of war in the modern world . . . It tends

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[109] Calvin Coolidge, "Enemies of the Republic: Are the Reds Stalking Our Campus Women?" *The Delineator,* June 1921.
[110] Goldberg, 48-57.
[111] Leuchtenburg, 98.
[112] Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941,* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 54.
[113] Calvin Coolidge, "Second Annual Message," December 3, 1924.

to embitter and divide the community into warring classes and thus weakens the unity and power of our national life."[114] Likening labor strikes to acts of war is especially remarkable. Like Harding before him, Coolidge framed labor strikes not merely as threats to organized capital, but as threats to the health of the nation as a whole. In this sense, the interests of big business and of the nation were conflated and redefined in inextricable terms. Any challenge to the stability of organized capital was a threat to the American people as well. Naturally, this political environment would prove quite inhospitable to organized labor.

The progression of the 1920s would show that the underlying fears which prompted the Red Scare were far more durable than the histrionics the Scare produced. The Red Scare had served to fuse together organized labor and revolutionary communism. Consequently, when labor became overly disruptive, Red Scare-like revolutionary fears among the American public and press would resurface.

The summer of 1922 would bear witness to one such occasion. In 1920, John L. Lewis had assumed leadership of the United Mine Workers of America, which by 1922 was the largest union in the country. World War I had brought a substantial increase in coal demand, but this had bottomed out following the war's conclusion. As a result, miners saw a sharp decline in demand for their labor in the early 1920s. In many cases, miners could expect to work a maximum of four days a week, and 2-day workweeks were not uncommon. Seeking a steady work schedule, the United Mine Workers organized a strike which began on April 1, 1922. It did not take long for violence to erupt. In June 1922, a mine operator in Herrin, Illinois responded to a sudden increase in the price of coal by violating the initial agreement to observe the strike by hiring scab workers to fill in vacant positions. Additionally, guards armed with machine guns

[114] Calvin Coolidge, "Third Annual Message," December 1925.

were hired to protect the scab workers. Tempers soon flared, and on June 21 several striking workers opened fire on the strikebreakers and their armed protection. The guards returned fire, killing three striking workers, and a siege soon ensued. The following day, the strikebreakers and guards opted to surrender, but this proved unsatisfactory to the enraged strikers. In the subsequent "Herrin Massacre," 19 strikebreakers were murdered in cold-blood.[115]

Reaction from the press was understandably vicious. In one editorial, *The New York Times* likened the strikers to Turkish soldiers who had committed atrocities at Smyrna. A June 24 editorial described the strikers as a "mob, composed mainly of 'Americans,' [which] proceeded to punish the 'outlaws' with a gracious inventiveness worthy of Apache artists of cruelty in their prime."[116] The latter suggests that, through their actions, the strikers had forfeited their status as Americans. New York Governor Nathan Miller viewed the significance of the massacre in broader terms, stating "in strikes reckless leaders and talk are always fermenting violence . . . The worst enemies of labor . . . are the men who encourage or practice violence."[117] That the Herrin Massacre represented a gross crime against humanity is indisputable. But over time it assumed a greater significance. More than an isolated incident produced by a confluence of combustible circumstances, the Herrin Massacre emblemized the perils of unchecked labor organization. "The Herrin Massacre shows what terrible results come from the weakness of State authorities," asserted Governor Miller in the event's aftermath.[118] Read in this manner, the massacre was an inevitability brought on by allowing full autonomy to organized labor. Failure

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[115] Hicks, 68-70.
[116] "To Set Herrin Right," *New York Times*, September 25, 1922. "The Massacre of 'Scabs,'" *New York Times,* June 24, 1922.
[117] "Governor Miller on Labor," *New York Times*, October 20, 1922
[118] Ibid.

to properly monitor the strikers enabled the strike to progress on its natural continuum from work stoppage to violent, revolutionary action.

As the 1920s progressed, organized labor and big business became increasingly polarized. Labor membership declined rapidly. The United Mine Workers, one of the most influential unions in the country with 500,000 members in 1920s, saw its membership slip to 75,000 by 1928. The IWW had practically ceased to exist. Total union membership declined from 5.1 million in 1920 to just 3.4 million by 1929.[119] Stigmatization of labor unions was directly tied to fears which underpinned the Red Scare. Organized labor action was effectively recast as a catalyst for revolutionary communism. With the onset of the Great Depression, organized capital ceased, in the minds of the American public, to occupy the rarefied air it enjoyed in the 1920s. But the philosophy of 100-percent Americanism stemming from nativist fears of revolutionary communism persisted. And in the early 1930s, a new nativist movement born from the ashes of the Ku Klux Klan would emerge in the Midwest.

[119] Goldberg, 134.

CHAPTER 2: A NEW INVISIBLE EMPIRE

By the end of the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan had regressed to a regional movement with little influence outside the South. However, the underlying fears, hatreds, and tensions that enabled the Klan's rapid proliferation remained. As the United States descended into the Great Depression, numerous groups and organizations would emerge to fill this vacuum. One of these, the Black Legion, emerged as a direct outgrowth of the Klan. Founded in the small industrial hub of Bellaire, in south-eastern Ohio, the Black Legion soon spread to the western portion of the state as well as southern Michigan. The Black Legion would never obtain the kind of national prominence enjoyed by its forebear, but from 1932 to 1936 it held substantial influence in numerous towns running along the Dixie Highway corridor from Lima, Ohio to Detroit. Under the leadership of Lima resident Virgil Effinger[120] who assumed command of the organization in 1932, the Legion set its sights on familiar enemies of Americanism-immigrants, Catholics, organized labor, and communists. Though its structural and administrative deficiencies limited its effectiveness and growth potential, the Black Legion's brief popularity and influence provide an illuminating example of the potency of the political and social legacies of the 1920s.

As nativism evolved in the interwar era, the Black Legion would come to represent a fusion of old and new nativist fears. The Legion retained the anti-Catholic and anti-Black prejudices of the KKK. But it would also take up the mantle of 100-percent Americanism. Despite leader Virgil Effinger's desire for a fascist dictatorship, the Black Legion typically presented itself as a guardian of American values. The organization recruited by appealing to

[120] Effinger would remain the leader of the organization until its collapse following the murder of Charles Poole in 1936. Though the FBI strongly suspected Effinger to be the leader of the organization, he was never convicted and never admitted to any involvement with the Black Legion. Testimony from arrested Legionnaires following Poole's slaying, as well as intelligence gathered by the FBI through interviews with Black Legion members throughout the 1930s leaves little doubt however, that Effinger commanded the Black Legion during these years.

fears of encroaching foreign "isms," most especially communism. While the revolutionary nature of Effinger's grand vision was clearly reminiscent of the fascist movements spreading throughout Europe at the time, at an operational level the Black Legion retained the characteristics of a nativist organization. The Black Legion targeted communist establishments and worked with organized capital to root out "radical" labor agitators in the name of protecting an American system it saw as inextricable from free market principles.

Under William Shepard, the Black Legion sought to distinguish itself from the KKK, but these differences were largely cosmetic. Ideologically, the Legion in many ways represented a continuation of the 1920s Klan. The organization's leaders—first Shepard, and later Effinger in Ohio and Isaac White in Michigan—gave shape to the organization by implanting a true political vision. But this too had limitations. The Black Legion evolved not as a revolutionary fascist organization, as Effinger intended, but as a traditional nativist organization. It most effectively resonated among prospective members as a bulwark against revolutionary communism and "militant" organized labor groups. Ultimately, this discord between its leaders' visions, and its members desires remained unresolved and gave birth to an inertia which characterized the organization's behavior and stunted its growth. The murder which would prove the Legion's undoing—that of WPA worker Charles Poole—effectively encapsulated the Legion's values as an organization as well as its limitations. Poole was targeted not for ideological reasons, but because he had been accused (falsely as it would turn out) of striking his wife. For all its revolutionary bombast, the crime which would make the Legion famous and prompt the eventual arrest of its leader Effinger amounted to little more than vigilante justice. Still, for all its limitations, the Black Legion would prove to be among the most popular right-wing extremist movements of the era. The Black Legion was able to, with some success, tap into the same

nativist vein that enabled the Klan of the previous decade to enjoy unprecedented levels of popularity. But though the Legion retained the racist and anti-Catholic qualities of its predecessor, its primary focus shifted to communism and organized labor, targets which increasingly come to characterize Great Depression-era nativism.

Origins and Leadership

The Black Legion was established in 1925 in the small industrial city of Bellaire, Ohio. The organization, initially called the "Klan Guard," was founded by William Shepard, a local physician and former KKK Grand Cyclops.[121] Shepard's new outfit was an immediate hit with the locals. Shepard soon found his group expelled from the Klan, but this did little to quell the Legion's popularity.[122] In devising his new organization, Shepard sought to avoid what he had deemed missteps by the Klan. In his mind, the Klan blundered by becoming too conventional. Daytime parades, appearances at regular social functions, and other mundane involvements had sapped the organization of its mystique. Shepard believed he had the formula that would shield the Legion from experiencing the same decline that afflicted the KKK: "You have to have mystery in a fraternal thing to keep it alive; the folks eat it up."[123] The ideological foundations of the Klan remained firm, but the organization itself had lost its edge. Once the most powerful grassroots political movement in the country, the Klan was now a shell of its former self. Highly publicized scandals toppled key leaders and sapped the Klan of its moral authority. In the media, the organization was openly derided, its leaders mocked and its grandiloquent titles likened to something "Lewis Carroll might have invented."[124] While Shepard's Legion sprung forth from

[121] Amann, "Vigilante Fascism", 493. A 'Grand Cyclops' was responsible for leading the local Klavern, or chapter, of the KKK.
[122] Ibid., 494
[123] Shepard qtd. in Ibid., 496
[124] "A Jovial Cyclops," *New York Times,* October 22, 1926.

the 1920s KKK, in many ways it was a call back to much older nativist organizations like the Know-Nothings. The Black Legion would not operate in plain view, but in the shadows where it could terrify and intimidate its enemies. While the ideological foundation would be similar, Shepard's Legion would break significantly from the Klan in terms of traditions and aesthetics.

In distancing the organization from the Klan, Shepard came to see fear and intimidation as the primary means through which the new Black Legion would exert its influence. To begin with, this meant establishing a more memorable initiation ceremony.[125] Unlike the Klan's straightforward and routine pledge of allegiance, the Black Legion's initiation ceremony would seek to invoke fear and awe in its initiates.[126] Always taking place at midnight, initiation ceremonies would begin with prospective members being asked preliminary questions to determine their eligibility. Next, initiates pledged to preserve the Legion's secrecy until death, even if it required perjuring themselves. Initiates were also required to vote as commanded in local, state, and national elections and adopt the Legion's nativist positions. Additionally, they were required to arm themselves to fulfill the organization's objective, which was "'to tear down, lay waste, despoil and kill our enemies.'"[127] During a 1935 induction ceremony outside of Lima, some three dozen initiates pledged allegiance to the organization with "their hands over their hearts and their left hands on Bibles, while members held loaded pistols to initiates' heads."[128]

Once in the organization, secrecy remained the Legion's guiding principle. Members could communicate through a system of secret passwords. For instance, when two members greeted each other in public, one would initiate the conversation by saying "until death;" to

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[125] Peter H. Amann, "A 'Dog in the Nighttime' Problem: American Fascism in the 1930s", *The History Teacher,* 19 (4), (1986): 566.
[126] Annan, "Vigilante Fascism," 496.
[127] "Caliban in America," *The Nation*, June 10, 1936, 728. The article quotes a priest present at an initiation ceremony.
[128] *The Lima News,* May 30, 1954.

which the response would be "under the star of the guard." For nighttime meetings, members signaled to each other using flashlights, automobile headlights, or matches. Three flashes signaled that a Legionnaire was attempting contact. Most notable was the codeword "LIXTO"[129] which functioned as a sort of clarion call for Black Legion members. When sent, "LIXTO" would precede the name of a location and communicated to the recipient that he was to head to that location immediately.[130]

While Dr. Shepard clearly put much thought into the development of the Legion's ethos, a comparative lack of thought was put into its political vision. Under Shepard, the Black Legion did little to grow beyond its night riding origins. While Shepard was certainly critical of the Klan in some respects, the Black Legion's tactics were not remarkably original. Similar to their KKK forebears, Shepard's Legion was designed to buttress law enforcement efforts through the implementation of vigilante justice. Shepard was, at heart, a romantic seeking to invoke his idealized view of Old Dixie. Evidence of Legion activities under Shepard's leadership is scarce, but existing documentation suggests the Legion did little aside from carrying on the Klan's night riding tradition. By the late 1920s, the Klan had ceased to exist in Bellaire, yet cross burnings remained commonplace, possibly carried out by Legion members. Standard actions included morality policing, such as expelling a black man from town after he was seen getting too close with a white woman, threatening to hang two women and a man seen spending time together, and flogging or tarring other similar offenders.[131]

Within the Bellaire community, Shepard was a complex figure. The doctor was viewed as a "big wind jammer," according to a Bellaire resident interviewed by FBI agent W.L. Buchanan,

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[129] The exact meaning of this term is unknown.
[130] Kenneth Robert Dvorak, "Terror in Detroit: The Rise and Fall of Michigan's Black Legion" PhD Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2000, 111-112.
[131] Dvorak, 106. Peter Amann, "Vigilante Fascism," 500. Amann notes the sexual nature of many of these offenses.

and additionally described as "harmless" and "not a leader among men."[132] However, he was also a respected physician whose diagnostic skill was sought out by much larger Columbus-based medical practices. He was known as a "doctor of the poor" who regularly failed to bill his patients. But he was also rumored to perform backroom abortions in exchange for sexual favors. Virulently anti-Semitic, he was most curiously awarded Citizen of the Year honors by the Bellaire chapter of B'nai B'rith.[133] Shepard was by most accounts equal part eccentric, comedian, saint, and sinner.[134] He was also, however, filled with familiar hatreds. Buchanan learned that Shepard had voiced his hatred for "Catholics and all foreigners" and that they "should be run out of this country." Shepard additionally expressed a desire to bomb the First National Bank in Bellaire because the president had been "lending money to foreigners."[135] While Shepard's Black Legion was limited by its leader's lack of political skill and ambition, its ideological foundation was firmly rooted in Bellaire. The Legion's next leader would take greater steps to see its political vision fully realized.

In 1932, leadership of the Black Legion changed hands. Lima-based electrician and World War I veteran Virgil Effinger succeeded Shepard, and quickly moved to politicize the organization. Effinger previously held a leadership role in the Klan (which is likely how he found out about the Black Legion), and prior to his ascent atop the Legion hierarchy, had been expelled from the Brotherhood of Electricians due to his far-right political views.[136] Effinger would serve as the head of a new guard for the organization, and it was under his stead that the Black Legion would begin expanding in earnest and growing a true political identity.

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[132] FBI Black Legion File 62-933, Cincinnati, Ohio office, agent W.L. Buchanan, July 8, 1935.
[133] Jewish organization comparable to the Knights of Columbus
[134] Amann, "Vigilante Fascism," 494-495.
[135] FBI Black Legion File 62-933, July 8, 1935.
[136] Amann, "Vigilante Fascism," 496.

After taking root in Lima, the Legion soon expanded north, becoming particularly active in southern Michigan. The earliest known Black Legion activity in this area began in 1932 when former Detroit police officer Isaac "Peg-Leg" White began recruiting men to join his "Black Shirts" (soon after he would conform to the title of "Black Legion"). White, a bald, middle-aged man with his left leg amputated below the knee, had worked as a Detroit policeman until 1916 when he was gravely wounded on the job. Living off his pension benefits in the interceding years, in 1931 he met with Virgil Effinger in Dayton, Ohio. Together, the two crafted a recruiting plan which would enable to the Legion to spread beyond northwest Ohio. Focusing on major regional industrial hubs which held a strong KKK presence a decade earlier, the two sought out men with weapons and military training.[137] While exact membership remains unknown, Black Legion historian Peter Amann estimated a range of 60,000-100,000 members, making the Black Legion one of the largest extremist movements of the era.[138]

Political Foundations

Under Effinger's direction, the Black Legion initially maintained its dark, fraternal mystique and continued night riding operations. In 1932, Effinger sent an anonymous letter to the Allen County Sheriff (curiously, while campaigning for his job) offering "500 vigilantes . . . to war on all questionable joints, slot machines, gangsters and so- called big-time booze-handlers."[139] However, Effinger soon broadened the organization's vision. The Black Legion's new leader found familiar bogeymen in communism, immigrants, and organized labor, and Effinger worked to refashion the Legion into a bulwark against these persistent threats to Americanism. In Lima, the Legion developed a more focused method for combating the ever-

[137] Dvorak, 126-134.
[138] Peter Amann, "Vigilante Fascism: The Black Legion as an American Hybrid," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 25 (3), 1983. 507-508.
[139]Peter Amann, "A Dog in the Nighttime," Shepard quoted on 510.

encroaching threats of immigration and communism. Starting in 1933, the organization began raiding communist bookstores, recreation centers, and other leftist hubs of activity.[140]

As Effinger continued to mobilize the Black Legion, membership grew rapidly. While the exact nature of Black Legion recruiting, and the extent to which its members were truly dedicated to the organization is subject to debate (and will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter), it is clear that the Legion was quite successful in finding members. John Martin, an investigator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, found that approximately 80% of FERA employees in Lima were members of the Black Legion who answered directly to Effinger.[141] This enabled Effinger to exert significant control in ensuring that relief jobs were granted to the "proper" residents of the city.

While exact membership totals are difficult to come by, Congressional testimony several years following the organization's collapse suggested that between 5,000-6,000 Allen County residents were Black Legionnaires.[142] For Effinger, the real challenge would be mobilizing the Legion in order to make his political vision a reality.

Ultimately, Effinger hoped to use the Black Legion to achieve his grandiose ambitions. In an interview with Harry Colburn, the chief investigator for the prosecuting attorney's office in Cincinnati, Effinger revealed a plan to eradicate America's Jewish population. Effinger possessed a "metal tube" which he claimed was invented and manufactured at a government-run poison gas factory in Maryland. The device included a "time clock arrangement" which would enable operators to control exactly when the gas was released. Effinger intended to wait until a national Jewish celebration, at which point "you can . . . pretty well exterminate the Jews at one

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[140] Ibid 513.
[141] Letter from J.F. Cordrey to C.E. Smith, February 23, 1935. FBI File 62-3, C.E. Smith.
[142] *The Lima News,* May 30, 1954. Testimony took place in 1947 and concerned an accusation that Lima-based congressman Robert Jones had been initiated into the Black Legion in the 1930s.

click. It will only take a few hundred loyal members."[143] Effinger's ultimate goal was to replace the American government with a fascist dictatorship. He cited Mussolini's relatively small following as a blue print for the Legion to follow. Effinger believed that by establishing connections in the military via infiltration, he could seize control in Washington relatively easily.[144] These goals presented obvious problems, particularly in terms of logistics. Despite Effinger's self-assuredness, he would prove incapable in the long-term of shepherding the necessary resources to bring his vision to light. However, the ideological components he impressed upon the Legion would prove fruitful for recruiting and motivating new Legionnaires.

Arthur F. Lupp, a prominent figure in Michigan's Black Legion, provided further illumination on the underlying motivating factors that lay behind participation in the organization. Lupp, a milk inspector for the Michigan State Board of Health, came to prosecutor Duncan McCrea's office in late May 1936 and subsequently fielded questions from reporters. For a time, Lupp remained tight-lipped, but soon began ranting about the Legion's true purpose:

> During the depression . . . men were wandering hither and yon. These persons were not fly-by-nights, but good American citizens who had lost their purpose in life. Then is when this organization was seen as a necessity. It is made of good people in all walks of life—lawyers, doctors, professional men and working men alike. These were brought to their senses when communism and other isms creeped into the United States of America from foreign countries. Members of the legion became aware that they owed a duty to their country. . . They are dedicated to the service of their country and they will remain true to the red, white and blue."[145]

These sentiments were reiterated in a letter sent by an anonymous Toledo-based Black Legion supporter to the FBI in January 1937. Here, the author contrasts the Black Legion with the Knights of Columbus, whose ostensibly anti-Protestant practices he believed to be the true

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[143] Statement of Harry Colburn, taken in the office of the Chief Prosecuting Attorney, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 6, 1936.
[144] Ibid
[145] *Detroit Free Press,* May 26, 1936.

threat to America. The author further argued that the investigation itself of the Black Legion in Toledo, Ohio was borne of anti-American practices. He accused a local resident, Francis Murphy, of instigating the investigation, and further states that Murphy "was teaching communism" at a local W.P.A. recreation center.[146] The final paragraph serves as a defense of a local resident, one Mr. G. Lyman. Lyman had confessed three months prior to serving as a Brigadier General in the Black Legion and stood accused of supplying pistols to local Legionnaires (a charge he denied).[147] To this anonymous resident however, Mr. Lyman was an American hero, "one of the most Patriotic Men in America today." The letter concludes with a plea for Hoover not to be "led by the ALIEN Minded People who are against his Great American Principles."[148] The themes of this letter are certainly familiar; the Black Legion was an organization dedicated to the preservation of Americanism. Its organizers were not terrorists, but patriots. And its detractors served alien interests. The Black Legion would prove effective at taking advantage of this nativist mindset in their recruiting efforts.

Whether in Michigan or Ohio, motivations for joining appear to have been consistent regardless of locale. In August 1935, Michigan State Police arrested three Black Legionnaires as they were leaving a meeting. One of these men, Andrew Martin Jr., asserted upon questioning that he was an American citizen "upholding the Constitution of the U.S.; that he had taken the secret oath in the Black Legion . . . [and] that their main objective was to combat communism, which was 'sweeping the country.'" To Martin, it was evident that "within the last two or three years communism has become rampant throughout the U.S. and it was again time for the red

[146] Anonymous to J. Edgar Hoover, January 19, 1937.
[147] *Toledo News Bee, "* 'Buck' Dear Admits Being 'General' ; Denies Giving Guns to Black Legion Members," October 9, 1936.
[148] Anonymous to Hoover.

blood of American patriots to take things into their own hands."[149] First-hand accounts of Legionnaires explaining their motivations for joining are difficult to come by, but those that do exist demonstrate that the specter of communism was alive and well in the 1930s, and no one was more affected it by it than Effinger himself.

In April 1936, the FBI sent agent N.E. Manson to interview Effinger, who by this point was strongly believed to be at the head of the Black Legion. Effinger denied any association with the organization, but could not help elucidating on its raison d'être, informing Manson that "'this country is swiftly and more or less secretly being overcome by communism; that communism is a destructive theory of government . . . and that through its influence the homes of citizens of this great country are being undermined and broken down until there is no respect for the law.'"[150] Effinger plainly put on a façade during the interview, adamantly denying all ties to the secret Legion, but in emphasizing his "red-blooded" Americanism, he tellingly contrasted it with the "Russian Communism" that was "making great inroads in the United States." Effinger further blamed "dirty rat" communists for reporting him as the Black Legion's leader (why they would do such a thing is not elaborated on), and for carrying out attacks against local theaters and road houses.[151] Even while denying association with the Legion, Effinger's vision for it was made quite clear, and this was reflected in the oath, carried over from Shepard's Legion, that new recruits were required to repeat as part of initiation ceremony, which concluded with a vow --"in the name of God and the Devil . . . to devote my life to the obedience of my superiors . . . and to exert every means in my power for the extermination of the anarchist, communist, Roman

[149] FBI Black Legion File 62-779, Detroit, Michigan office, agent N.E. Manson, August 31, 1935.

[150] FBI Black Legion File 62-3, Cleveland, Ohio office, N.E. Manson, April 14, 1936.
[151] Ibid.

hierarchy, and their abettors."[152] The Black Legion was to be a citizen vanguard against communism and other foreign 'isms,' and it would take whatever steps Effinger deemed necessary to protect against them.

Ideology and Political Action

With Effinger running operations in Ohio, and White in Michigan, Black Legion actions began to take on a decidedly more political flavor. Most notably, the organization placed communism square in its crosshairs. But to the Legion, communism was not simply a political ideology; it was a devious menace which had fully infiltrated leftist political organizations and labor unions.[153] In Michigan, the murder of American Federation of Labor worker John Bielak marked one of the Black Legion's most notable attempts to check communism's rampant spread. In the months leading up to his murder, Bielak, an employee for the Hudson Motor Company, had led a successful work stoppage for a wage increase in the company's metal finishing plant. In response, the Hudson Company attempted to fire Bielak. However, the Hudson local, a powerful Detroit-based automobile union, struck in response to his termination and forced his reinstatement soon after. These developments did not go unnoticed by the Black Legion.

In 1934, three Black Legionnaires—Andrew Martin, Isaac White, and Roy Hepner—arrived at the Hudson Company with the names of five men (including Bielak) they alleged to be members of the Communist Party. These men, claimed the Legionnaires, were "agitating for the union" and "sabotaging the work."[154] Ostensibly unsatisfied with the company's response to this revelation, the Legionnaires soon took matters into their own hands. On the night of March 15, 1934, John Bielak was forced into a car with his Black Legion assailants, who proceeded to beat

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[152] Ibid.
[153] George Morris, *The Black Legion Rides,* (New York City: Workers Library Publishers, 1936). 11.
[154] Forrest Davis, "Labor Spies and the Black Legion", *New Republic*, 87, (1936): 170.

him, shoot him five times, and throw him out onto the road.[155] Tellingly, Bielak's body was discovered with his head resting on a membership application card for the Automobile Workers Union. Fifty other cards were found in his pockets. To Bielak's widow, the motive behind his murder was clear—"I feel sure it amounts to this: that John was too active in that labor group which the Black Legion thought of in terms of communism." [156] The murder of John Bielak was significant not only for how it illuminated Black Legion practices, but also its thought processes. To the Legion, the actions of organized labor were indistinguishable from the insidious spread of communist ideals across the country.

The Black Legion's offensive against the dual forces of organized labor and communism was widespread. In 1934, onion field workers went on strike just outside of Lima. The strike leader, Okey O'Dell, was kidnapped by a group of Legionnaires consisting of an estimated 400 members. The vigilantes appeared at the deputy sheriff's headquarters where O'Dell was being held following his arrest, and told the deputies to "get out, we will take care of things."[157] The group dragged O'Dell from the barracks and threatened to lynch him. A reporter documenting the situation was told to "Get out of town before we lynch you."[158] O'Dell survived this ordeal, but the message to the strikers was clear. The Black Legion would not tolerate any disruption or challenge to Americanist principles even as millions of Americans struggled just to survive in the throes of the Great Depression.

Testimony of former Black Legion members further revealed the organization's use of an "arson squad" which targeted the homes of individuals believed to hold communist sympathies. Four members—Frank Rice, an investigator for the Packard Motor Car Company, Clarence Frye,

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[155] Morris, 13.
[156] *Escanaba Daily Press*, June 7, 1936.
[157] "Mob Rules in Marshland as Violence Rises" *The Lima News* August 26, 1934.
[158] Ibid., 8.

a Chrysler Corp foreman and former police officer, meter reader Albert Swanson, and Roy Hepner, a painter—confessed their associations with the squad to prosecutor Duncan McCrea following the Legion's murder of Charles Poole. In 1934, the four men had worked together to set fire to a Pontiac, Michigan farm belonging to "rural communist leader" and labor organizer William Mollenhauer.[159] The squad was headed by Frye, who claimed he was forced into joining. The Legion, claimed Frye, would not only seek retribution against him, but also his eight-year-old daughter if he refused.[160] Frye's claims are certainly not inconsistent with how the Black Legion operated. However, the organization's coercive tactics also provided voluntary members with a convenient way out in the event of legal trouble. Moreover, it is unclear why the Black Legion would grant a leadership role to a member who joined under such circumstances. Another arson squad was involved in the burning of the Workers Educational Association camp near Pontiac, Michigan in 1933. This squad, composed of five members, targeted the camp because they believed it to be involved in spreading communist doctrine.[161]

The Black Legion was not simply a vessel through which businesses could enforce their interests, but the Legion often allied with the interests of big business anyway. Testimony in the aftermath of the Poole killing by Michigan representative Frank Hook referred to organizations such as the Farmers Independence Council and the Southern Association to Uphold the Constitution, both of which used funding from Du Pont and General Motors to advance conservative policies, as well as per Hook, "the most virulent type of racial prejudice."[162] To the Black Legion, Americanism was inextricable from the nation's free market system. The Legion

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[159] "Torch Squad of Klan Blamed in Several Fires," *Sandusky Register,* June 11, 1936., "'Higher Ups in Black Legion to be Known,'" *Sandusky Star Journal,* June 13, 1936., George Morris, *The Black Legion Rides*, 13.
[160] *Sandusky Register*, June 11, 1936.
[161] "Black Legion Members Admit Burning Camp Near Pontiac," *Escanaba Daily Press,* June 27, 1936.
[162] Frank Hook, Congress Session 74-2. June 15, 1936.

believed in the "creation of wealth through initiative, labor and industry, and wealth must be distributed to the people through wages . . . Wholesale and retail prices of necessities must be governed solely by supply and demand and not by government commissions, business combinations, trusts, and monopolies."[163] But the Black Legion did more than support the principles of private enterprise; they actively worked to protect them against what they saw as the constant threat of communism. In an interview with the *Detroit News* in June, 1936, White admitted to conducting labor espionage on behalf of several major Detroit businesses—"I took some to Ford's, some to Bud Wheel, in fact to all the plants that had strikes or threats of strikes . . . the personnel departments of the plants were always glad to get information about the Communists and they thanked us."[164]

The Black Legion's political maneuverings were conducted in the shadows behind front organizations. In Michigan, the Black Legion held significant influence over, if not complete control of organizations such as the Bullet Club, the Wayne County Rifle and Pistol Club, the Black Knights, the Malteca Club, and most prominently, the Wolverine Republican League (how surprising). The Wolverine Republican League featured Black Legionnaire L.J. Black as its president. John Bannerman, one of Charles Poole's executioners, served as its director, Harvey Davis, who ordered Poole's murder, served on the Entertainment Committee, and two other Legion gunman-Roy Lorance and Ervin Lee, served on the Membership Committee.[165] While the Black Legion was clearly active in the pursuit of Effinger's political vision (insofar as his constellation of hatreds could be considered a vision), the organization's political influence

[163] Report of Black Legion Activities in Oakland County, George B. Hartrick, Circuit Court Judge presiding Detroit: Interstate Brief and Record Cox, September 1, 1936. Cited in Lipsett and Raab, 158.
[164] "Plant Visit Admitted," *Detroit News,* June 2, 1936, White quoted in Dvorak, 135.
[165] Michael S. Clinansmith, "Hooded Americanism in Michigan," *Michigan History,* 55, no. 3 (1971):254.

would ultimately be constrained by its dedication to that which William Shepard had deemed its lifeblood: its commitment to secrecy.

Legion Incognito

Despite Effinger's extravagant political goals, the Black Legion struggled to develop a coherent methodology for enforcing its ideological program. However, it did not hesitate to rigidly enforce its standards for membership. While first-hand accounts of organization's initiation ceremonies are scarce due to the organization's emphasis on secrecy, existing evidence suggests they did not change much across time and space. Testimony from Lima resident William Smith following the revelation of the Legion's involvement in Charles Poole's murder demonstrates the extent to which the Black Legion was committed to a clandestine existence.

Smith, a 55-year-old farmer residing in Allen County during the Black Legion's zenith, was recruited into the organization without a clear idea of how it operated. Smith testified that he was transported by car to a secluded farm located outside Lima (a common meeting place for the organization's members) and upon arrival was greeted by roughly 200 Legionnaires and another 13 recruits. Getting cold feet, Smith attempted to back out. However, he was roughly greeted by the leader of the proceedings who informed him, "I'll break this gun over your head. Listen to me, I'm going to tell you something.'"[166] Smith tried to flee but was quickly overtaken by the Legionnaires present— "someone hit me in the back of the head and dragged me in a corn crib. Then two of the masked fellows guarded me in there until 4:30 in the morning."[167] While Smith was allowed to depart intact, before leaving he was confronted by two Legionnaires who "punched [him] in the side with revolvers and said, 'if you ever tell what took place here tonight,

[166] "Farmer Accuses Hooded Band of Beating Him at Meeting" *The Lima News,* May 27, 1936.
[167] Ibid.

or even leak out a word of anything that's happened, you'll die within 24 hours." [168] For the Black Legion, maintaining secrecy would prove to be its foremost undertaking.

William Smith's ordeal did not, however, end immediately. Smith, though plainly opposed to the organization's methods, was still a member whether he liked it or not. And as a member, he was expected to fulfill his obligations to the organization. Smith attended a meeting after his initiation, clearly out of fear of retribution if he spurned these responsibilities. This sole meeting seemed to satiate what little appetite he had left for his Black Legion membership however, and he refused to attend another. The Legion was quick to act. Soon after Smith's refusal to attend the next meeting, several legionnaires arrived at his house and forced him into a car, upon which he was driven to a separate location and tied up. At this point, per Smith, "somebody said 'what's the verdict—guilty or not guilty?' They yelled 'guilty'—and somebody said 'six lashes.' They pulled my shirt off. They gave me six lashes."[169]

An account similar to Smith's provides a clearer picture of how the Black Legion operated. In a letter addressed to the "special agent in charge of investigating the Black Legion in Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania," an anonymous figure elaborated on his experiences with the Legion and claimed to be searching for a way out. This individual is not named in any of the primary literature, but in this letter, he states that he worked as a journalist for the Greenfield *Daily Republican*, and joined the Black Legion in Wayne County, Ohio. Like Smith, he was driven out to a secluded meeting place and greeted by several hooded figures brandishing revolvers. He was then forced to kneel and take the Black Legion oath with a gun pressed to the back of his head. Also, like Smith, he quickly began searching for a way out of the

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[168] Ibid.
[169] *Indianapolis Times,* May 28, 1936.

organization.[170] However, he was not coerced into the meeting. Rather, he was approached by a couple of acquaintances who were members and given a recruiting pitch. This organization, he was told, was 'secret, patriotic . . . opposed to communism, fascism, and other foreign experiments and standing for white supremacy, the constitution, and opposition to permitting negroes, Jews . . . and any but native born American citizens who had proved their loyalty from holding or controlling office.[171] He agreed to attend a meeting after a year of steady pressure and quickly decided the organization was not for him. But it is notable that the Black Legion, though coercive towards initiates, still appealed to prospective members by emphasizing its protective stance against communism and other foreign influences.

The Decline of the Black Legion

The Black Legion's secretive nature makes it difficult for historians to form a full picture of the organization. However, primary documents offer illuminating vignettes which provide useful clues. One such episode was provided by Lima Post Office Inspector J.F. Cordrey who shared a letter sent to him by Effinger with FBI agent C.E. Smith in the spring of 1935. In this letter, Effinger "exposed" five men he claimed to be communists, naming four specifically. But Cordrey observed that at least three of these men were former members of the Legion, and all of them were actively attempting to expose the organization's activities.[172] This seems to highlight both the appeal of the organization, and the flaws in Effinger's coercive? leadership methods. Effinger attempted to catalyze action by linking his targets to communist ideologies. However, Effinger's true purpose here was to simply protect the organization's secrecy. Increasingly under

[170] Letter from anonymous journalist to FBI Special Agent in Charge of Black Legion Investigation, May 25, 1936. FBI Black Legion collection.
[171] Ibid. Given the nature of this project, the inclusion of 'fascism' here is noteworthy. Within this context, the group's opposition is clearly derived from fascism's foreign origin as opposed to any ideological objections. Communism, with its similarly foreign origins, would function in a much more central role due to its influence (both real and imagined) within organized labor and society collectively.
[172] FBI Black Legion File 62-3, Cleveland, Ohio office, agent C.E. Smith, May 24, 1935.

Effinger's leadership, the Legion's secretive nature became less of a defining feature, and more of a defining purpose.

The Black Legion's drifting purpose was further illustrated by complaints filed by former members. During the course of his investigation, agent C.E. Smith requested J.F. Cordrey and another man (name redacted) join him in his office for an interview. This second figure, a former member of the Legion, expounded on the organization's appeal, stating that when he joined three years prior, he had been told that "the order was to be a patriotic one and against all sorts of communism and other 'isms,' but at the present time it was distinctly revolutionary . . . the heads of the organization were attempting to use it to gain control of various government agencies."[173] Subsequent interviews with two other former members further corroborated this. Both men joined in 1933 and stated their impetus for doing so was to "combat the various isms that were then gaining a foothold in the country, but [they] had been forced to withdraw when they had been ordered to commit several felonious acts." These acts included arson perpetrated against the "Peacock Inn," a Lima roadhouse.[174] The Black Legion's failure to fully expand beyond its night-riding roots was evident in many of its actions during the final years under Effinger's leadership. Perhaps no example better exemplifies this than the Black Legion's political downfall in Highland Park.

Located less than ten miles from Detroit, Highland Park fell within the Black Legion's sphere of influence. In 1933, Highland Park mayor N. Ray Markland, and several city officials were initiated into the Black Legion. Like the Klan a decade prior, the Black Legion had positioned itself to direct policy using fully legitimate political channels. Unlike the Klan however, the Black Legion's existence remained a mystery to local residents. This meant that, in

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[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.

addition to limiting the amount of political influence it could exercise, the organization also could not use force to protect its newfound political platform. In 1934 these problems became acute when local newspaper publisher Arthur Kingsley ran against Markland in the mayoral election. The Legion, determined to ensure Markland's reelection, sent hit teams after Kingsley. However, these would-be assassins could not find an opportune moment to pull the trigger, and Kingsley, all the while unaware that his life was in peril, survived to oust Markland from office on election day.[175] The Black Legion's rise and fall in Highland Park took place without a single individual outside the organization noticing.

The Black Legion encountered similar difficulties in Ecorse, a small Michigan town of around 20,000 people. In 1935, the Legion initiated an intimidation campaign by sending death threats to and bombing the house of Mayor William Voisine, whose Catholic background drew the organization's ire.[176] Shortly thereafter they dispatched an assassination team consisting of Dayton Dean, Charles Rouse, and Harvey Davis, to target Clarence Oliver, an African-American who worked for Voisine's campaign. However, the team could not locate Oliver. Davis, determined to achieve something of substance, ordered Dean and Rouse to "drive around and find a negro—anyone so long as he's black." Dean and Rouse did so, eventually locating and shooting (non-fatally) Edward Armour, a thirty-three-year-old factory worker.[177] Meanwhile, Voisine sought police protection and distributed a false report that he was leaving town to visit his wife's parents. He stayed overnight in police headquarters until fully assured the threat had passed.[178] The Black Legion's political aspirations had once again been marked by idle or random violence to compensate for ineffectualness.

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[175] Peter Amann, "Vigilante Fascism," 514.
[176] Ibid., 520
[177] "2nd 'Unprovoked' Attack on Negro Revealed by Dean," *Wilson Daily Times,* July 27, 1936.
[178] Will Lissner, "Black Legion Foe Gets Death Threat," *New York Times,* June 8, 1936.

Under Effinger, the Black Legion took increased steps to follow through on its anti-foreign ideals. However, in practice the organization often struggled to escape its night-riding roots. This meant that, in addition to protecting American communities from the dangers of foreign 'isms,' the group would also target anyone it viewed as failing to uphold moral standards. At times, this resulted in incidents such as one which occurred in Portage, Wisconsin in February 1937 as the Legion was in its death throes. Here, the small local chapter of the Legion took issue with the way in which a local shopkeeper, Herman Behnke, was operating his store. To correct the matter, the Legionnaires sent a threatening letter which listed all the ways Behnke had "failed to be a good citizen."[179] The letter concluded with a list of grievances that Benhke was directed to fix. These offenses included permitting "noxious" weeds to grow on the premises, failing to shovel the sidewalk after snowstorms, and digging an "unsightly hole in the front of the premises." Behnke was further advised to "remember dynamite is cheap."[180] The Portage chapter's campaign against slippery sidewalks does not emblemize the full extent of Legion activities (nor did Portage fall within the Legion's primary sphere of influence), but it does illustrate how the organization struggled to implement its broader vision beyond its local roots.

An additional example can be found in the murder of Charles Poole, a crime which ultimately led to the Black Legion's disintegration. Charles Poole, a Catholic, was an unemployed WPA worker with a Protestant, and pregnant, wife, Rebecca. Rebecca also happened to be related to a Legionnaire who was close friends with Harvey Davis. This, paired with his Catholic faith made Poole an obvious target for a Black Legion operation. On May 12, 1936, the Legion took action. A hit team was dispatched by Harvey Davis, and soon located,

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[179] Black Legion Division number 7 to Herman Behnke, February 28, 1937.
[180] Ibid.

kidnapped, and executed Poole, leaving his body in a ditch outside of Dearborn.[181] The body was soon discovered and investigators quickly traced the shooting back to Legion hitman Dayton Dean, who would become a font of information regarding the organization's activities. Dean testified that, in addition to merely following orders, his team had been told that "Poole had kicked and beaten his wife," and that "Mrs. Poole's baby . . . would not be born alive because of the brutality of her husband."[182] This case further reveals the extent to which vigilante justice served as a primary motivator for Black Legion action. While the ideological components Effinger impressed upon the organization and its members were important, the Legion could never yield the requisite resources to fully carry out its political vision. Thrill killings, like that of Edward Armour, vigilante justice, and internal punishments to protect the organization's secrecy remained the primary impetus for Black Legion operations.

Conclusion

The Black Legion proved unsuccessful in fully executing Effinger's political vision. However, the appeal of this vision is not what enabled the organization's expansion. Instead it was the Legion's nativist qualities—its fervent opposition to revolutionary communism and organized labor—that facilitated its recruitment efforts. That the Legion was able to gain such a powerful foothold in Ohio and southern Michigan despite its highly secretive and violent nature speaks to how strong the nativist current was at the time. But equally important was the evolving nature of the Black Legion's strand of nativism. While it remained anti-Catholic and anti-Black, it was most especially opposed to foreign "isms." Though the Black Legion did not collaborate with the subsequent subjects of this thesis, its emphasis on the dangers of communism and "militant" labor granted it a common underlying ideology. In focusing so heavily on

[181] Amann, "Vigilante Fascism," 520.
[182] Dean quoted in *The Daily Globe*, May 27, 1936.

communism, the Black Legion came to embody a new form of nativism. While the Legion itself remained traditionally nativist in composition—with membership limited to white, Protestant males—this new ideology-centered nativism altered the meaning of 100-percent Americanism, and enabled individuals who had previously found themselves the targets of nativist ire to assume the Americanist mantle. One of these figures, Father Charles Coughlin, would become the decade's most powerful voice for nativist sentiment.

CHAPTER 3: WANT IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY: CHARLES COUGHLIN AND THE NEW FACE OF AMERICAN NATIVISM IN THE 1930S

In 1926, 34-year-old Father Charles Coughlin was granted a loan by the Archdiocese of Detroit and assigned to construct and oversee his second parish-the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan. Though inexperienced, Coughlin's first parish based in the tiny farming community of North Branch had been a rousing success. However, Royal Oak, with its strong Ku Klux Klan presence and meager Catholic population, would provide a daunting challenge.[183] Coughlin's weekly loan obligations were more than double his Sunday collections and he was struggling to co-exist with the fervently anti-Catholic Klan.[184] By mid-summer the Father was drowning in debt. But the 1920s were a time of great technological change, and Coughlin was no luddite. Soon he would turn to the radio to cure his ailments.[185]

With Coughlin's parish stagnating in tiny Royal Oak, the priest turned to Leo Fitzpatrick, the operator of Detroit's WJR broadcast station and a devout Catholic. Fitzpatrick encouraged Coughlin to broadcast his sermons over the radio, offering him free air time for the first few weeks. On October 17, 1926 Charles Coughlin gave his first radio sermon. Soon after, the station received a handful of complimentary letters. Within a few months, it would be receiving thousands of letters weekly.[186] However, what started as a medium for Coughlin to provide simple parables and glimpses into the life of Christ soon turned into a vessel for political tirades against the priest's long list of enemies. Coughlin targeted capitalists, communists, fascists, and

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[183] Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression*, (New York: Random House, 1982), 89.
[184] Alan Brinkley cites a (probably apocryphal) story in which Coughlin received a phone call in the middle of the night summoning him to the lawn of his freshly constructed church where the local Klan had planted a burning cross. Regardless of the story's veracity, that the Klan proved a significant obstacle to Coughlin's parish is undeniable.
[185] Brinkley, 82.
[186] Ibid., 88-92.

Jews alike, assigning them blame for the nation's struggles during the Great Depression. In turn, this led to many critics labeling Coughlin a fascist by the end of the 1930s. However, the increasingly inflammatory nature of Coughlin's rhetoric belied its consistently nativist foundation. Coughlin would adopt nativism in a modified form. In the aftermath of the Red Scare, foreign persons were no longer considered by nativists as the preeminent threat to American values. Instead foreign ideas, most especially, but certainly not limited to communism (as the following chapter on the Bund will illustrate), evoked the greatest fear among nativists. Desirability of alien residents correlated with their perceived susceptibility to communist influence. This shift in focus within nativist thought opened the door for men like Coughlin (himself a target of nativist ire during the twenties due to his Catholic background) to appropriate nativist rhetoric. And from his early condemnations of capitalism, and his endorsement and subsequent falling out with President Franklin Roosevelt, to his Nazi apologia and increasingly virulent anti-Semitism, the priest remained fixated on what he saw to be the root causes which invited unassimilable alien ideas to American shores. Coughlin came to espouse a new form of nativism which emphasized the perils of foreign ideology over foreigners themselves. To Coughlin, it was revolutionary communism that stood as the preeminent threat to American institutions, and it was this fear that would function as the fulcrum for the priest's diatribes against greedy capitalists, American politicians, Jews, and any other figures which drew his ire during the 1930s.

Foundations

With the addition of WMAW in Chicago and WLW in Cincinnati, by 1929 Coughlin's radio network spanned much of the Midwest, reaching a potential audience of 40 million

people.[187] That same year, the American Communist Party established more than one hundred Unemployed Councils around the United States as the nation was gripped by the Great Depression.[188] Within months the themes of Coughlin's sermons had shifted dramatically. No longer solely concerned with spreading the gospel, the priest instead turned to the perils of encroaching bolshevism. In a mid-January 1930 sermon entitled "Christ or the Red Serpent," Coughlin enlightened listeners on the "news from Russia," stating that "by government decree the mistletoe and holly of Christmas have been abolished" and further warned that the US was presently imperiled by this "purple poison of bolshevism."[189] Fortunately for Coughlin's listeners, the priest claimed that he not only recognized the problem; he recognized its root causes and how to fix them.

A week later, Coughlin articulated the core thesis which would underpin many of his sermons over the course of the next decade. Communism did not emerge in a vacuum; rather it began due to the greed of the "leaders of industrialism." To stop the spread of communism then, these leaders must "better the working conditions their laborers, devise ways and means of keeping the laborer steadily employed . . . Let not the workingman be able to say that he is driven into the ranks of socialism by the inordinate and grasping greed of the manufacturer."[190] The new political lean of Coughlin's broadcasts soon brought him attention from Washington.

By the summer of 1930, Charles Coughlin's sermons were reaching an ever-expanding audience-one that included New York congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr. Fish served as the head of the Special Committee to Investigate Communist Activities in the United States, or for brevity's

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[187] Ibid 92.
[188] JoEllen McNergney Vinyard, *Right in America's Grassroots: From the KKK to the Michigan Militia,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011) 119.

[189] Charles Coughlin, "Christ or the Red Serpent," Radio broadcast January 12, 1930.
[190] Coughlin, "Christ or the Red Fog," Radio broadcast January 19, 1930.

sake, the Fish Committee.[191] The Fish Committee was dedicated to identifying the causes for labor unrest spreading throughout the nation in the opening months of the Great Depression. Of particular concern was the organization of radical groups believed to be disseminating Communist propaganda in urban centers nationwide.

It was on this matter that Coughlin was called to testify before the Fish Committee as it held hearings in Detroit in July. Here, Coughlin was clear about the dangers communism posed to America. When asked about the potential for nationwide communistic growth, Coughlin replied "we have approximately 500,000 communistically minded people in this country at least . . . Unrest is on the increase. I think by 1933, unless something is done, you will see a revolution in this country."[192] Prompted further, Coughlin reiterated the role capital was playing in communism's spread by attacking one of the great pillars of American industry-"there is a movement . . . to take down our Stars and Stripes and put up an international flag . . . and that movement is headed by Mr. Henry Ford."[193] Fish, expecting a purely pro-American, anti-communist narrative, interrupted the priest repeatedly and attempted to direct the conversation away from organized capital's failures.[194] Coughlin was blazing no trails by regurgitating Red Scare rhetoric, but his willingness to assign blame to the nation's most powerful symbols of wealth enabled him to craft a nativist message uniquely suited for the Depression era.

The ensuing months would see the priest's popularity grow further still. In the spring of 1931, a children's picnic held on the grounds of the Shrine of the Little Flower drew 20,000 people. That fall, a new collection of radio stations began broadcasting his sermons. Coughlin

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[191] Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) 32.
[192] Coughlin testimony quoted in Warren, 33.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Brinkley, 102.

could now be heard anywhere from Portland, Maine to St. Louis, Missouri.[195] And as his popularity grew, he reiterated the same arguments.

In a January 1931 sermon, Coughlin further elaborated on the relationship between communism and capitalism. "The thoughtful American is convinced that the most dangerous communist is the wolf in the sheep's clothing of conservatism who is bent upon preserving the policies of greed, of oppression and of Christlessness.[196] While emphasizing the growing peril of communism, Coughlin was deliberate in avoiding the kind of dehumanization endemic to earlier iterations of anti-communist hysteria. Instead, communists were "merely men as you and I, but soured and leaderless, generated by the protected injustice which withholds from them their bread and butter."[197] That communism was a moral evil Coughlin did not deny. But Coughlin's analysis extended beyond Red Scare histrionics to examine the root causes of communism's spread; and his answers resonated in an era of rampant poverty and unemployment.

As Coughlin's popularity expanded, so too did his political connections. Now a celebrity in Michigan, Coughlin quickly developed a friendship with Frank Murphy, Detroit's new Democratic mayor. But Coughlin's foray into politics began in earnest with an ardent defense of scandal-ridden New York mayor Jimmy Walker. Walker's regime had, in 1931, become inundated with corruption and local reformers had begun to mobilize against him. But Walker was revered by the city's Irish-Catholic population who interpreted these attacks as little more than the latest iterations of a long legacy of anti-Catholicism within the city. Walker, however, took this a step further, claiming the reformers were acting as instruments of a communist plot to expel him from office, and he soon turned to the powerful voice of Charles Coughlin as a

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[195] Ibid., 101.
[196] Coughlin, "Why Radicalism?" January 25, 1931.
[197] Ibid.

rampart against these nefarious radicals. Coughlin, never one to turn down an opportunity to proselytize, arrived in New York and provided a fiery defense for his new ally. The priest reiterated Walker's charges, and further claimed that the communists likely perceived Walker as a direct threat to their plans.[198] The speech wound up doing little to help Walker, who was soon removed from office, but it helped establish Coughlin as an active player in America's political scene. Soon, he would set foot in a much larger political arena.

Roosevelt or Ruin

With an aversion to capitalistic excesses underpinning his political philosophies, it should be of little surprise that Coughlin was soon drawn to Franklin Roosevelt's reform-centric platform in the early days of the Great Depression. Coughlin believed Roosevelt would "have the courage to uncloak the hypocritical human factors who have debased our system,"[199] a revelatory statement not only for the faith it demonstrated in Roosevelt, but also its foreshadowing of the conspiracy-laden rhetoric which would dominate the priest's later sermons.

In 1932 Frank Murphy, now good friends with Coughlin, introduced the priest to Roosevelt. Coughlin was immediately smitten and pledged his support to Roosevelt's campaign. In the months leading up to the 1932 presidential election, Coughlin's broadcasts were marked by vicious denunciations of incumbent Herbert Hoover and glowing endorsements for challenger Franklin Roosevelt.[200] To Coughlin, Roosevelt stood in stark contrast to Hoover, whom the priest castigated as "the banker's friend, the Holy Ghost of the rich, the protective angel of Wall Street."[201] But Coughlin's attacks against the ills of capitalism were always underscored by his

[198] Brinkley, 101-102.
[199] Charles Coughlin, radio address November 30, 1930.
[200] Brinkley 102-107
[201] Warren, Coughlin quoted on page 39

fears of communism, and in February 1933 with Roosevelt soon set to take office, Coughlin again turned back to this subject.

Communist leaders, in Coughlin's view, were especially dangerous because they were zealously committed to their cause. "Trotsky, Lenin, Bela Kun," spoke Coughlin, and others like them were "men from every nation who long since had devoted themselves to the anarchy, the atheism, and the treachery preached by the German Hebrew Karl Marx."[202] If the deficiencies intrinsic to America's capitalist system were not resolved, the growth of communism was inevitable. By the end of 1933, Coughlin was well on his way to formulating the central tenets of his National Union for Social Justice. At its core was the priest's belief that the failures of capitalism and the spread of communism were intertwined-"For three years we have had an opportunity to think as we saw starvation in the midst of plenty. For three years we have realized that the policies of the past two hundred years are inadequate to serve the sturdy youth full grown in democracy."[203]

Coughlin further elucidated on the inter-connectedness of capitalism and communism in a radio sermon on February 18, 1934. Here, Coughlin pronounced capitalism a system "seriously crippled by the wounds it received during the World War" and reiterated his assertion that "bloody revolution" was the only outcome that could result from its continued support.[204] But Coughlin would take this a step further. Not only was capitalism a broken system which would invariably result in a communist uprising; communism and capitalism were two sides of the same ideological coin. Coughlin explained—"modern capitalism and Marxian socialism are Siamese twins . . . The exponents both of modern capitalism and of some brands of socialism

[202] Coughlin, radio address February 19, 1933.
[203] Ibid, "The New Year," December 31, 1933.
[204] Ibid, "Plenty for All," radio broadcast February 18, 1934.

both agree that private ownership is inimical to the welfare of the people. Capitalism steadily concentrates all wealth and control of credit in the hands of a few; socialism proposes to crystallize all wealth in the hands of the State."[205]

Moreover, both systems were flawed in how they approached unemployment. Coughlin correctly understood the challenge posed by machinery to the industrial worker. As technology improved, production became more efficient, reducing the laborer's role in the process. But socialism and capitalism both fundamentally misunderstood the nature of this problem—"'Speed up production, and profits,' cries the capitalist. 'Earn your bread by the sweat of your brow—the more sweat the more bread,' says the socialist of the Stalin type."[206] Though their stated goals were different, both economic philosophies essentially sought the same thing. In this sense, Coughlin distinguished himself from the nativists of the 1920s by extricating capitalism from concepts of 100-percent Americanism. Nevertheless, Coughlin's aims were no different, and he made his concerns quite clear in the following week's broadcast—"It is my hope that if you ladies and gentlemen must forego modern capitalism, which is bound ultimately to starve you and your children to death, you will avoid becoming communists."[207] If capitalism's failure and communism's subsequent rise were inevitable, then an alternative course would have to be found.

The correct path, Coughlin believed, was one derived from Christianity. Coughlin saw reduced labor requirements not as a problem, but as the solution, with leisure time now plentiful enough for Americans to "perfect the mind and the soul."[208] The paradox which neither communism nor capitalism could resolve was the existence of want in the "midst of plenty."

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., "United States Incorporated," radio broadcast February 25, 1934.
[208] Ibid., "Plenty for All."

Both systems were "designed for production," when what the materiel-rich twentieth century necessitated was a "system that understands distribution."[209] During this period, Coughlin maintained his support for Roosevelt's presidency, but as the New Deal reached its implementation stage, the priest's own vision for America was beginning to crystallize.

Roosevelt and Ruin: The National Union for Social Justice

Coughlin's popularity had continued to grow throughout the 1930s. By the middle of the decade, an average Sunday audience spanned approximately ten million people according to most radio experts, and this was a conservative estimate. By 1934 he received around 10,000 letters a day, and his most popular broadcasts could generate up to one million letters in a single week.[210] But even as Coughlin's popularity expanded, it was becoming apparent his influence on President Roosevelt's decision-making was limited.

By mid-1934, rifts were beginning to appear between FDR and Father Coughlin's visions for America. Despite Coughlin's impassioned pleas, it was clear by this point that Roosevelt had no interest in remonetizing silver, as Coughlin desired, and the New Deal had hitherto failed to deliver the level of reform the priest was seeking.[211] In April 1934, the Roosevelt administration fired a shot across Coughlin's bow when Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. released a list of individuals who possessed substantial silver holdings. On this list was Coughlin's personal secretary, Amy Collins, whose investment of $20,000 in Radio League of the Little Flower funds had placed her atop the list of Michigan's silver holders.[212] For Coughlin, whose priesthood granted him a rare air of moral authority, this marked a nadir in his career as a broadcaster up to

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[209] Ibid, "United States Incorporated."
[210] Brinkley, 119.
[211] Ibid., 124-125.
[212] Mary Christine Athans, "The Fahey-Coughlin Connection: Father Denis Fahey, Father Charles E. Coughlin, and Religious Anti-Semitism in the United States, 1938-1954," (Dissertation, Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology, 1982), 150.

that point. While he maintained steady listenership, this scandal suggested for the first time that his rhetoric may have been backed by ulterior motives. As it became increasingly clear that FDR had little interest in a political alliance with the radio priest, Coughlin set forth on constructing his own political program for America.

In November 1934, Coughlin formally established the National Union for Social Justice, which would challenge both "the greedy system of an outworn capitalism" and the "slave whip of communism."[213] The NUSJ's core principles emphasized private ownership, a "just, living annual wage" for labor, a central bank which would control the cost of living and value of money, and the right for labor to organize.[214] Significantly, Coughlin also emphasized that these reforms would be implemented in a constitutional manner, without resorting to the dictatorial methods of communism or fascism.[215] Coughlin sought reform, but he did so out of a desire to protect against the emergence of foreign "isms." With his political apparatus in place, Coughlin would directly challenge Roosevelt for the first time in January 1935.

As 1935 began, the central issue facing the United States was its prospective entry into the World Court. On January 16, Roosevelt submitted to Congress a proposal for American entry. Its passage was generally regarded as a formality until Charles Coughlin decided to intervene. On January 27, Coughlin gave a sermon urging his listeners to send telegrams to their Senators telling them to vote 'no' on US entry to the Court.[216] In making his case, Coughlin provided clear differentiation between "Americanism" and international influence—"Keep America safe for Americans and not the hunting ground of international plutocrats!"[217] Coughlin

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[213] Vinyard, 142.
[214] Warren, 62-63. Though Coughlin supported unions, there were important caveats to this that will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.
[215] Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal,* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 96-97.
[216] Warren, 63.
[217] Coughlin, "The Menace of the World Court," radio broadcast January 27, 1935.

continued, stating that if the United States entered the World Court, it would lead to "the destruction of the American way of life."[218] Coughlin's sermon worked. By the time the Senate was set to vote on the proposal, over 40,000 telegrams had been delivered opposing U.S. entry into the World Court. The vote failed.[219]

That May, Coughlin again took the offensive against Roosevelt. The priest arrived in New York and gave a fiery speech before a crowd of 23,000 in Madison Square Garden in which he lambasted the president for tolerating the $19 a month wage scale for relief workers. Coughlin advocated increasing these wages to $50 a month, stating "we dare not risk paying unjust wages, for that policy is the breeder of communism. There is an American standard of living." The crowd erupted in cheers of "deafening intensity" that lasted for a full minute.[220] By August, Coughlin had made the connection between Roosevelt and communism explicit. In a letter to Frank Murphy, Coughlin wrote that FDR had "broken every promise that he has made . . . he seeks means and methods closely allied with socialism and communism."[221] Far from the bulwark against communism Coughlin initially believed him to be, Roosevelt was now seemingly abetting its spread.

As the year continued, the perils of communism continued to mark a central theme of Coughlin's sermons. In November he reiterated his argument that communism was a product of capitalism's failures. Capitalism, observed Coughlin, committed the fundamental error of compensating the laborer on the basis of time as opposed to production, a flaw which became acute as the machinery of the 20th century greatly improved workplace efficiency. Communism

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Warren, 64.
[220] Coughlin quoted in the *New York Times*, "23,000 Here Cheer Attack on the President," May 23, 1935.
[221] Coughlin to Murphy, August 30, 1935, quoted in Warren, 67.

then, was a "logical outgrowth of an illogical system of economics."[222] The inequities fostered by capitalism "easily bred within the minds of disillusioned people the festering radicalism of red communism."[223] Coughlin concluded his argument succinctly: "Want in the midst of plenty proves to every thinking person that our economic system of capitalism . . . is at fault. Communism will surely gain the ascendency unless Christian social justice saves the day."[224] To Coughlin, the problem was clear. Equally clear was that President Roosevelt did not share the priest's views on the matter. Within months, the rift between the two would be complete.

June 1936 would mark the final nail in the coffin of the relationship between Coughlin and FDR. On June 5, Coughlin stated bluntly "the opposing lines are already drawn. The Roosevelt administration, on one hand, bent on communistic revolution: on the other, a public opinion progressively enlightened . . . on matters of monetary finance."[225] Two weeks later, in a sermon entitled "Roosevelt and Ruin," Coughlin took this even further, stating "the temple still remains the private property of the moneychangers. The golden key has been handed over to them for safekeeping—the key which now is fashioned in the shape of a double cross!"[226]

While Coughlin would walk back some of his more cutting attacks on Roosevelt in the coming months, he would still determinedly campaign against the incumbent president. In August, Coughlin again brought up the communistic nature of Roosevelt's presidency, this time focusing more on the president's broader administration. "The New Deal," proclaimed Coughlin, "is surrounded by atheists . . . Surrounded by red and pink communists and by 'frankfurters of

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[222] Coughlin, "Social Justice and Communism," November 24, 1935.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Coughlin, "Weekly Letter," *Social Justice,* June 5, 1936. *Social Justice* was a weekly periodical produced by Coughlin which featured the priest's own articles as well as the occasional guest editorialist. It launched in March 1936.
[226] Ibid, "Roosevelt or Ruin," radio broadcast June 19, 1936

destruction.'"[227] The rift between Coughlin and FDR could be explained, argued Coughlin, by growing communist influence within Roosevelt's administration. Coughlin asserted that, while purporting to help the poor and exploited classes, the New Deal was in fact a vessel to proliferate communism throughout the nation.

A month later in a speech before a crowd of 22,000 at Ebbetts Field, Coughlin excoriated the National Recovery Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and several other New Deal programs, and a few days later, stated that if the communist tendencies of the Roosevelt administration were not halted, "the red flag of communism will be raised in this country by 1940."[228] Coughlin's efforts were ultimately for naught. FDR won his second term, further demonstrating the limits of Coughlin's influence. But the priest still commanded a large listening audience, and his hatred of communism would only grow more acute in the following years.

Coughlin and Organized Labor

Nativists have long feared unions as instruments of radicalism, a sentiment which became especially acute during the Red Scare. In this sense, Charles Coughlin represented a significant break from established nativistic paradigms. From the very beginning Coughlin championed the laborer's cause. The iniquities of modern capitalism were at the very heart of his central argument and as a natural corollary, he viewed the protection of workers' rights as essential. However, while Coughlin advocated for the workers' right to organize, in this he emphasized moderation. The limitations of Coughlin's support for unions offer another avenue in which his underlying nativist fears manifested.

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[227] Coughlin quoted in the *New York Times,* August 3, 1936
[228] *New York Times,* September 15, 1936 and September 17, 1936, cited in Tull, 166.

As Coughlin formulated his idea for the National Union for Social Justice, the significance of labor unions was at the forefront of his thinking. In a March 1934 sermon, Coughlin restated what was by this point his quite familiar assertion that capitalism had reached a stage of critical failure. Capital had failed to understand that its very existence depended upon the fair distribution of purchasing power and profitable private ownership to the laborer. But, asserted Coughlin, labor was guilty of its own unjust claims. And through these claims, produced by the evils of capitalism, "the cause of the harassed workingman was espoused by the radical, by the communist."[229] Communism stood in diametric opposition to capitalism, but represented an equivalent evil—"these devotees of the red flag and of the pink pennant set up . . . the immoral principle that all products and profits . . . belong by every right to the workingman."[230] Always careful to emphasize capital's role in labor agitation, the priest then turned to specific Union actions he viewed as especially damaging.

While Unions were a necessary rampart against the inherent flaws of capitalism, Coughlin found glaring flaws in the policies of unions like the American Federation of Labor. It was the AFL, and organizations like it, that prevented non-union men from working alongside union workers; that dictated salaries along lines that eschewed personal ability and enforced these policies through the threat of the strike. "That is industrial bigotry when four million organized men . . . take it upon themselves to dictate these fallacies and errors to the . . . 40 million laborers of all kinds who are resident within this nation and who do not belong to their unions."[231] Coughlin's fears of the destabilizing potential of the strike would color both his rhetoric and his actions regarding unions for the remainder of his career.

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[229] Coughlin, "Capital and Labor," radio broadcast March 25, 1934.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.

By the end of 1934, Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice was in place, and the priest had firmly labeled himself a friend of the worker. Still, he saw the strike as a clear and present danger to Americanism. In December 1934, Coughlin devised his seven principles by which the NUSJ would counter the injustices of capitalism. The first six were largely a regurgitation of idea already elaborated upon in previous sermons. The final principle however, made Coughlin's views on labor action clear—"The National Union for Social Justice contends that strikes and lockouts are absolutely unnecessary . . . For it is our observation that both strikes and lockouts have occasioned more harm to the common good of the nation than any benefit which has been derived."[232]

In early 1935 Coughlin opted to directly involve himself in union affairs. The priest became a highly influential figure in the Automotive Industrial Workers Association, a new (and vulnerable) organization that pulled most of its members from the Chrysler Corporation's Dodge division. Coughlin's stature within the AIWA grew to such heights that many referred to it as "Coughlin's Union."[233] However, members found Coughlin's influence to be a significant constraint on union action. In speeches before the AIWA, Coughlin frequently felt compelled to remind attendees that "I do not come before you to wave the red flag . . . I still believe in the doctrine of private initiative."[234] And when the AIWA called its first major strike, Coughlin refused to offer his support, even after strikebreakers and company police killed four striking workers. In the words of one union member, "Father Coughlin just let us down cold. He did not

[232]Coughlin, December 2, 1934, quoted in Tull.
[233] Brinkley, 141.
[234] Coughlin quoted in Brinkley, 142.

do a thing for us."[235] As Coughlin grew increasingly reactionary, his patience for labor action would continue to deteriorate.

Following his failure to unseat Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 election, Coughlin again turned his focus to organized labor. Now, in early 1937, it was the newly organized Congress of Industrial Organizations and its leader John L. Lewis that bore the brunt of Coughlin's ire. The CIO, compared to the American Federation of Labor, was more prone to striking in order to effect action, a fact that was not lost on Coughlin. When a CIO-sponsored labor strike was carrying on into the opening months of 1937, the priest sought a swift and decisive conclusion. He called on his old friend Frank Murphy to deploy the National Guard to break the strike and when Murphy declined to do so, Coughlin was quick to criticize the governor. Murphy's failure to act, in Coughlin's mind, represented a clear acquiescence to the forces of radicalism. The CIO came to embody every fear Coughlin held regarding unions. And in a February issue of *Social Justice*, the headline of an article authored by the priest clearly articulated as much—"John L. Lewis is Not a Communist But Communism in the U.S. Hinges on His Success."[236] As the US drew closer intervening in Europe a second time, Coughlin's nativist concerns grew increasingly acute.

By September 1939 the United States was inching closer to war with Germany, despite the fiery remonstrations of Coughlin. To the priest, the perils of foreign intervention were clear. War, declared Coughlin, was the breeder of depressions. Its ephemeral boost to industrial capacity invariably produced a postwar crash, as evidenced by the economic recession that followed the first world war. And as the economy declines, radicalism flourishes—"ah yes, there

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[235] Richard Frankensteen quoted in Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1971) 503-504.
[236] Tull, 175.

is the rub—radicalism! . . . Following the last war when patriotic, learned leaders either failed labor or were unheeded by labor, millions of workmen were prone to follow either unpatriotic or unlearned leaders. Strikes multiplied, private property was seized . . . in some instances, many of our oppressed fellow Americans grasped the blood drenched hand of communists."[237] Coughlin's concerns plainly alluded to the Red Scare twenty years prior. The United Auto Workers strike in the coming months would only reinforce his fears.

The United Auto Workers Association strike took center stage in Coughlin's sermons and editorials in the late fall of 1939. In November, the priest invited David Brann, former Secretary Treasurer of the UAWA's Detroit chapter, onto his radio program to discuss the broader ramifications of the strike. Brann shared Coughlin's concerns, stating that the union's pretext for striking was "wholly fictitious."[238] Instead, it was foreign pressure applied by communist agitators that pushed the union into striking. In Brann's view, "had it not been for the injection of the communist policy and the communist practice in this present situation, there would have been no trouble at all." Further, while these communists were few in number, they were powerful and disciplined. Brann concluded his segment with a summary of events altogether consistent with Coughlin's own views on organized labor. The majority of union members were "good, Christian Americans" who had been fooled by radical propaganda—"These communists caused the strike. These communists caused the suffering to the strikers' families."[239]

Following Brann's segment, Coughlin's familiar voice greeted listeners once more. The priest issued a more measured statement, taking care to note the workers suffering under Great Depression conditions, and reaffirming his argument that radicalism was born from the

[237] Coughlin, "Cash and Carry," September 10, 1939.
[238] David Brann, appearing on Coughlin's radio broadcast, November 12, 1939.
[239] Ibid.

shortcomings of capitalism. But Coughlin's message varied little from Brann's in its intent. Labor, remarked Coughlin, lacked the proper patience in dealing with business leaders. Instead, it turned to radical action, leaving even non-union employees subject to being "starved, whipped into submission by labor leaders and filled with socialistic or communistic thoughts by certain individuals who secretly pass the word around to seize the factories, overthrow the government and institute a proletarian dictatorship."[240] The strike, Coughlin impressed upon his listeners, was altogether incongruent with American values—"the Christian and the American way is not to interrupt work, not to sabotage pay envelopes, not to bring distress upon the homes."[241] In striking, workers were incubating dangerous alien ideologies which, given enough time, would destroy America from within. To prevent this, Coughlin would once again use the airwaves to incite political action.

Towards a Christian Front

Roosevelt's victory in 1936 signified to Coughlin a significant defeat for the forces of Americanism. The following spring, he began to take steps towards organizing a new social justice movement. In April, the priest used his periodical to call for the creation of "Social Justice Clubs" which would fight against the forces of "communism, fascism, and anti-Christianity wherever and whenever it is possible; to cure democracy before it withers and perishes."[242] In June, Coughlin articulated a more specific plan, advocating for the creation of thousands of "Social Justice Councils" which would form and act independent from the National Union for Social Justice.[243] While these councils largely failed to launch, a year later Coughlin established the "Million League," a similar idea which called for the implementation of

[240] Charles Coughlin, radio broadcast November 12, 1939.
[241] Ibid.
[242] *Social Justice,* April 5, 1937, quoted in Tull, 177.
[243] Tull, 179.

individual units called platoons (the militaristic denotation of which was not lost upon Coughlin's critics) which could be merged "at the proper time" to form a "great thinking army that can swing our teetering nation back to sanity and right thinking."[244] The foundation for the Christian Front had been set.

The following month Coughlin made the explicit call for a Christian Front. The communists, Coughlin noted, already had their "Popular Front" designed to "ensnare deluded Americans in a Red web." The only rational counter was to establish a Christian Front which would "PRESERVE America as one of the last frontiers of human liberty!"[245] The priest's call to action was marked by some familiar rhetoric. Coughlin once again called upon industrial capitalism to grant a fairer share to the worker, while also vowing never to "compromise with communism, fascism, Nazism, or any other movement tending to destroy representative government."[246] But of particular note was Coughlin's exclusion of Jews from this movement. While Coughlin had connected international bankers and Judaism before; the late 1930s marked a time of significant escalation in occurrences of blatant anti-Semitism in both the priest's radio broadcasts and editorials. In Coughlin's mind, communism, fascism, and Judaism were all interconnected, a viewpoint which warrants further exploration.

While Coughlin had yet to openly endorse Nazism, he increasingly sought to connect its growth to the menace of communism. Following Kristallnacht, Coughlin took to the air to explain to an outraged American public that Nazism was merely a "defense mechanism against communism," and that the "rising generation of Germans regard communism as a product not of Russia, but of a group of Jews who dominated the destines of Russia." The priest then cited a

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[244] *Social Justice,* June 13, 1938, quoted in Tull, 188.
[245] Ibid., July 25, 1938
[246] Ibid.

1917 list popular in Nazi Germany which showed that 24 of the 25 "quasi-cabinet members" of the Soviet government were "atheistic Jews."[247] But Coughlin was careful to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Jews. And he called on "religious Jews in high places—synagogue, finance, in radio and in the press" to "attack forthright the errors and the spread of communism." Otherwise, "Nazism, the effect of communism, cannot be liquidated in its persecution complex."[248] Nazism then, was not in Coughlin's mind a positive development. It was at best the lesser of two evils compared to communism. However, he saw its existence and the threat it posed to America as inextricably linked to the Bolshevik Revolution, which he viewed as the product of a powerful cabal of conspiring Jews.

A couple weeks after Coughlin's Kristallnacht broadcast, he published an issue of *Social Justice* almost exclusively dedicated to further elucidating his views on the relationship between communism, Nazism (and by extension fascism), and Judaism. In an article entitled "Background of Persecution," Coughlin explained that prior to Hitler's rise, the communist party in Germany was quite robust. Moreover, "communist persecution of National Socialists was notorious. On April 30 . . . ten hostages among them one woman, were murdered. This act was perpetrated by the direct order of the communist terrorists, Egelhover, and under the responsibility of the Jewish Soviet Commissaries."[249] Nazism, remarked Coughlin, was a product of German desire for "vengeance against the JEWS—not because they were Jews but because they had fostered communism."[250] Without communism, and its "policy of destructive exploitation and unmoral values," there would be "no anti-Semitism, no Jewish persecution."[251]

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[247] Coughlin, radio address November 20, 1938
[248] Ibid.
[249] Charles Coughlin, "Background of Persecution," *Social Justice,* December 5, 1938.
[250] Charles Coughlin, "Nazism… Spawn of Communism: May It Never Happen Here," Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

Moreover, Coughlin called on American Christians to help Jewish citizens in "shaking off communism before it is too late."[252] To Coughlin, Judaism was a threat insofar as it was connected to communism. Jews who denounced communism and embraced God and Americanism could still be valuable allies in the struggle against malevolent foreign ideals.

A subsequent article by Washington D.C. attorney, and Coughlin ally George Edward Sullivan entitled "America's Insidious Foes," called for the implementation of a "real investigation to ferret out and expose the precise identity of the occult forces behind [communism]."[253] Sullivan reiterated many of Coughlin's points, including the assertion that Nazism, and in Italy fascism, arose as a defense mechanism against the spread of communism. Yet Sullivan too fell short of condoning these movements—"All loyal Americans would, of course, fight any fascist or Nazi attempt to overthrow the American Republic just as vigorously as the communist attempts . . . The only 'ism' suited to the American Republic is Americanism."[254] And the importance of preserving Americanism meant closely monitoring for any encroaching communist ideals.

Sullivan then turned his attention to the Jewish refugee problem, employing familiar nativist rhetoric as grounds for keeping them out of the country. Sullivan was trouble by Jewish "ties" to communism and cited a 1911 issue of the *Jewish Chronicle* in which Rabbi M. Schindler lamented the influence of foreign Jews in preventing proper Jewish assimilation into the United States. To Sullivan, there was simply no way the United States could incorporate such a large volume of foreign refugees without compromising its own inimitable American identity. After all, the American Republic is already flooded with aliens beyond its present capacity to

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[252] Ibid.
[253] George Edward Sullivan, "America's Insidious Foes," Ibid.
[254] Ibid.

care for them, many of them illegally here and engaged in communist activities . . . The American Republic is . . . a life raft of civilization . . . the life raft cannot possibly carry everybody, and certainly cannot carry those who are inharmonious to the spirit and function of the American Republic.[255]

Sullivan instead believed that focus should be placed on monitoring the aliens already in our midst. Congress had since the mid-1920s ceased any meaningful investigation into communist activities and, noted Sullivan, communism had resumed its infection of vital American institutions like schools and libraries. "In effect," wrote the guest editorialist, "our youth are being kidnapped from the nation, because they are lost to the nation when their patriotism is destroyed and their minds and morals poisoned."[256] Coughlin agreed. While he had little fear of foreign military intervention, modern communications had facilitated the spread of all forms of propaganda. This in turn meant that sustaining American liberty would require "eternal vigilance." Otherwise "the mental, spiritual, and social diseases" of Russian and German origin would take root due to lax immigration laws which enabled "communist and Nazi propaganda, through the agency of international minded minorities and politicians, to sow the seeds of unchristian and un-American heresies."[257] In forging a "Christian Front," Coughlin hoped to combat the threat posed by these foreign ideologies.

In February of the following year, a German-American Bund (whom the priest was quite sympathetic to) rally in Madison Square Garden confirmed to Coughlin the correctness of his theory-"unfortunately, this first Bund rally is only the beginning of a long series of incidents, unless the causes motivating them will be removed immediately."[258] In Coughlin's view, this

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[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Coughlin, "Nazism…Spawn of Communism."
[258] Coughlin, "An American Christian Program," radio broadcast February 26, 1939.

further confirmed the need for a program to reaffirm American principles and provide an ideological defense against foreign 'isms.' This program would bind in harmony Christianity with Americanism, doing away once and for all with the social and economic iniquities intrinsic to capitalism which led to "our national misery." And once this program was enacted, "millions of American citizens, now followers either of the communist or Nazi cause, will abandon the red flag and the swastikas."[259]

Communism was to Coughlin inextricably foreign, and limiting the extent of its influence was his primary focus. In April, a congressman from New Mexico introduced a bill which called for the deportation of any alien who advocated for change in the American form of government. This bill was greeted with enthusiastic support from Coughlin who feared the ongoing inundation of refugees who "in many instances participated in the spread of communism in European nations. It would be intolerable for us to permit these aliens to raise their voices in America."[260] Coughlin was, at his core, an advocate of "100-percent Americanism." And no true American "can favor either communism or Nazism."[261] As the world went to war for the second time in as many decades, Coughlin's new Christian Front would take action to ensure that the destructive ideologies that led to it would never take root in America.

Coughlin and the Brooklyn Boys: The Christian Front in Action

By late 1939, Coughlin's Christian Front was finally taking shape. In late July Coughlin announced that the Front was spreading from New York into Philadelphia and other eastern cities, with footholds set to be established in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago by the

[259] Ibid.
[260] Coughlin, *Social Justice,* April 3, 1939, quoted in Warren, 170.
[261] Coughlin interviewed by Edward Doherty, *The Liberty,* August 12, 1939, quoted in Tull, 211-212.

end of the following month.[262] The Christian Front had a localized structure and organizations in different cities functioned as independent cells. With this decentralized structure, Coughlin's role was a passive one. Other than staying in the priest's good graces by abiding by his stated principles, these organizations did not answer to Charles Coughlin. Guided by Coughlin's increasingly fiery rhetoric, one Christian Front cell soon found itself in national headlines.

On January 15, 1940 the FBI conducted a raid (led personally by J. Edgar Hoover) on several neighborhoods in New York City, arresting 18 members of a local Christian Front organization led by Jack Cassidy and William Bishop.[263] In addition to the arrests, the FBI also seized a cache of arms which included rifles, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and homemade bombs. It was soon revealed that the organization hoped to assassinate multiple congressmen, including both New York senators, and initiate a terror campaign which would target Jewish owned business and newspapers. Additionally, utilities, bridges, docks, and other key targets would be hit, and gold was to be seized from the US Custom House and federal reserve banks.[264]

All of this would force the federal government to send in troops, which would then initiate the plan's "master stroke:" a general insurrection. The local Front believed that the American public, furious over the use of tax dollars to protect Jewish businesses, would revolt, overthrowing the Roosevelt administration and initiating an anti-communist revolution.[265] Whatever slim chances of success this plan possessed were undermined from the beginning by an FBI informant who had been placed within the group the previous summer. Regardless, the plot of the so-called "Brooklyn Boys" made national headlines and Coughlin would find himself swept up in the resulting tempest of negative press coverage.

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[262] Coughlin, *Social Justice,* July 31, 1939.
[263] Bishop was a British émigré who had fought for Franco's army in Spain prior to his arrival in the United States.
[264] Warren, 192.
[265] Ibid.

Predictably, Coughlin's initial reaction was to disavow the group. In fact, said Coughlin, this was no mere rogue Christian Front chapter, but a deliberate plan "on the part of the communists . . . to organize a fake Christian Front, solely to embarrass me."[266] That Coughlin had singled out Cassidy's Christian Front chapter for praise just a few months earlier was of no matter.[267] However, Coughlin's tune on the subject soon changed.

A week later Coughlin reversed course and situated himself on the side of the embattled Christian Front members. The plotters were no longer instruments of a communist plot, but rather victims of it. Indeed, Cassidy and Bishop's chapter had been swept up in a larger campaign to "vilify both the name and the principles of this pro-American, pro-Christian, anti-communist, and anti-Nazi group."[268] Recanting his claims from the previous week, Coughlin declared "I take my stand beside the Christian Fronters. Recognizing also that in one sense the opposition to communism is on trial."[269] This blow to the organization now only confirmed to Coughlin the need for its existence.

Coughlin and his followers believed that communism had been allowed to spread unchecked for years and it was, of course, no coincidence that their organized resistance soon came under fire for attempting to combat it. Proof of communism's treacherous duplicity could be found in instances such as the 1933 "Akron" disaster which Coughlin attributed, due to a sequence of circumstantial evidence, to an act of sabotage by a foreign construction worker.[270] Coughlin was but a rampart against communism's spread, and the Christian Front was his weapon. He wrapped up this broadcast by reminding his listeners that, while only a handful of

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[266] Coughlin quoted in the *Detroit Times*, January 15, 1940, referenced by Warren, 192.
[267] Warren, 193.
[268] Coughlin, "I Take My Stand," radio broadcast January 21, 1940
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

Russians were involved in the overthrow of the Tsarist regime in Russia, "they were aided and abetted by German and American international financialists, as well as by despotic social and economic conditions."[271] Soon after, this initial action gave way to bolshevism, and the "hatred, the red rivers of blood and millions of massacred victims which followed. Thanks be to God, the parallel does not obtain in America!"[272]

Charles Coughlin represented an unlikely candidate for nativism. A Catholic priest, his broadcasting career began with little more than religious parables about the life of Christ. When he did get political, it was often to condemn the Ku Klux Klan, which had developed into one of the most prolific nativist organizations in American history. Yet Coughlin was not immune to the same strand of communist paranoia that had afflicted nativists before him. Soon his radio sermons reflected a growing antipathy towards communists, Jews, and anything that could be deemed a threat to pure Americanism. Coughlin faded into obscurity following America's entry into World War II, his fiery isolationist stance no longer resonating with a public longing for revenge against Japan. But over the course of the previous decade, he had stood as one of the most powerful forces for American nativism.

[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE: THE GERMAN-AMERICAN BUND AND TRUE AMERICANISM

As economic depression worsened into the 1930s, political extremist movements gained influence in nations around the world. In Europe, first Italy and then Germany succumbed to fascism, and similar movements gained traction across the continent. In the United States, however, even at the Depression's peak when nearly a third of the nation's workers were unemployed, right-wing extremism retained a distinctly American nativist character. That is not to say, however, that no effort was made to spread national socialist and fascist ideologies. The most notable of these domestic fascist movements was the German-American Bund.

The onset of World War I brought with it a swift reversal in public opinion of German-Americans. Considered an ideal class of immigrants prior to the war, German-Americans found their loyalty to the United States severely questioned upon the outbreak of the conflict. The establishment of organizations like the American Protective League (1917) led to thousands of investigations into the lives of German-Americans, none of which produced anything of interest. But the volume of these investigations served to further stoke the flames of public suspicion. Following American entry in the war, President Woodrow Wilson issued a series of regulations classifying German-Americans as "alien enemies," requiring them to register with the government and confiscating their property.[273] Harassment and persecution of German-American citizens would remain rampant throughout the remainder of the war.

For many German-Americans, their treatment during the war emphasized the need to break ties with Germany and fully assimilate into American society. For some, however, the

[273] U.S. President, "Proclamation 1364—Declaring That a State of War Exists Between the United States and Germany," April 6, 1917.

scars of their experiences during the war encouraged them to embrace their German heritage.[274] In the 1920s, a small German-American solidarity movement emerged in the United States, most prominently in the northeast where German immigrants were most concentrated. Simultaneously, national socialism began to take root in Germany, and its increasing popularity was reflected among German-American movements in the United States. While the majority of German-American citizens eschewed these movements, a minority sought to promote Germany's burgeoning national socialist movement in the United States.[275] It was from these movements that the German-American Bund was born.

Founded in 1936, the German-American Bund's central purpose was the advocation of national socialism. Its founder, Fritz Kuhn, a German immigrant who had settled in Detroit in the late 1920s, envisaged the Bund as an extension of the Third Reich, and attempted to work with Hitler's regime to sow the seeds for national socialism's spread. As an organization founded by a foreigner, predominantly for foreigners, seeking to spread a foreign ideology, the Bund would seem a strange inclusion in this study. However, beset on all sides by hostile critics who viewed the organization as little more than a fifth column, the Bund was forced to modify its message in a manner increasingly characterized by the same sort of 100-percent Americanist rhetoric German-Americans found themselves the target of two decades earlier. To survive, the Bund was forced to cloak its national socialism in a message familiar to nativism. The Bund's national socialism was not revolutionary but defensive. It did not seek to overthrow American political structures, but to preserve, and where necessary due to what they perceived as corruptive alien influence, restore them. Kuhn was ultimately unsuccessful in recasting the Bund as an

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[274] Susan Canedy, "America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma: A History of the German American Bund," (Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1987), 1-18.

[275] Ibid., 37.

Americanist organization because it could not fully extricate itself from its foreign, national socialist roots. Regardless, in the years leading up to America's entry into World War II, the Bund attempted to exploit the evolving meaning of American nativism for its own purposes. As foreign "isms," especially communism, increasingly came to serve as the primary targets of nativist movements, the meaning of 100-percent Americanism had begun to evolve. Ideology was now the driving force behind nativist sentiments, opening the door for men like Father Charles Coughlin (who just several years earlier had been a target of nativist ire) to pick up the mantle of 100-percent Americanism. To the Bund, their foreign provenance no longer seemed an insurmountable obstacle to convincingly adopting nativist rhetoric as their own. And throughout the organization's turbulent four years of existence, embedding its national socialist tenets in a veneer of 100-percent Americanism would prove to be its most utilized survival tactic.

The Friends of New Germany and the Origins of the German-American Bund

Following World War I, a few small German-American organizations sprang up around the country, but none enjoyed any notable success until the Friends of New Germany. Founded in 1933 by German immigrant Heinz Spanknobel, the organization was formally endorsed by Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess and gained modest popularity among German-Americans. Between 1933-1935, membership consistently ranged from 5,000 to 6,000, and was composed of German nationals, naturalized Germans, and native-born Americans with German ancestry.[276] The Friends' national socialist roots were reflected in the fact that it was effectively a mirror image of the National Socialist German Workers Party, including the employment of a uniformed paramilitary wing, the Ordnungs-Dienst (OD). In philosophy, the Friends functioned as little more than an extension of the NSDAP. Virulent anti-Semitism and militarism underpinned the

[276] Ibid., 54-55.

organization's purpose, and its newspaper, *Deutsche Zeitung*, served as an NSDAP mouthpiece, reprinting Nazi propaganda verbatim.[277]

However, Spanknobel, and his successor Fritz Gissibl (appointed following Spanknobel's departure in October 1933) failed to account for how the broader American public would respond to their organization's efforts to spread national socialism. Almost immediately, the Friends came under fire from both the public and the press for attempting to spread an ideology increasingly seen as un-American. In a rally held in Newark, New Jersey, the OD initiated a brawl with counter protestors, a move which further alarmed the public.[278] In March 1934, the American Federation of Labor and the American Jewish Congress sponsored a mock trial in Madison Square Garden entitled "Civilization v. Hitler." With 20,000 people in attendance, the mock trial condemned Nazism and characterized Hitlerism as a "psychic epidemic." More importantly, domestic Nazi propaganda was condemned, placing the spotlight squarely on the Friends of New Germany.[279]

The following month, the Dickstein-McCormack Congressional Investigatory Committee (led by Representatives Samuel Dickstein and John McCormack) was authorized by Congress to begin an investigation into the activities of the Friends of New Germany.[280] In response, the Friends doubled down on the national socialist rhetoric. The organization sponsored a dance to celebrate Hitler's birthday, conducted a mass rally in New York in which they resolved to defend German rearmament, and perhaps most damningly from a public relations standpoint, offered their public support to Bruno Hauptmann, on trial for kidnapping and murdering the Lindbergh

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[277] Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 35.
[278] Canedy, 56.
[279] "Nazis 'Convicted' of 'World Crime,'" *New York Times,* March 8, 1934.
[280] Raymond Ogden, *The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee For the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944,* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), 31.

baby, and one of the most despised figures in America at the time. With public ire reaching a fever pitch, the NSDAP rescinded its support of the Friends of New Germany, a move which would ultimately prove fatal to Spanknobel's organization.[281]

The Friends of New Germany failed because it had, quite blatantly, attempted to advance a foreign ideology on American soil. Though Spanknobel had taken some minor steps to make the organization more palatable for average Americans, popular perception of the Friends held that it was an enterprise hostile to democracy and other pillars of Americanism. However, the collapse of the Friends of New Germany did not mean the end of national socialism in America. In April 1936, a proposal for a new German-American association would be submitted by Fritz Kuhn.

Kuhn was born in Munich, Germany in 1896. In World War I, he joined a Bavarian combat unit, serving as a machine gunner, and won the Iron Cross First Class. Following the war, he went home to a nation on the brink of total collapse, and joined the Freicorps, fighting against the leftist Spartacus League. However, he would soon depart Germany for Mexico, and in 1928 he moved again, this time to Detroit, becoming a fully naturalized citizen in 1934.[282] Kuhn was quickly drawn to the Friends of New Germany, and before its collapse, had emerged as one of the organization's rising stars. Just prior to his naturalization as an American citizen, Kuhn assumed the leadership role for the local Detroit chapter of the Friends. This, coupled with his status as a German war hero and American citizen made him a logical choice to assume the role as leader of the new German-American Bund.[283] But Kuhn understood that a purely national

[281] Canedy, 63-65.
[282] Bernstein, 13-20.
[283] Canedy, 81.

socialist organization could not survive in a social and political climate where "100-percent Americanism" still prevailed.

Fritz Kuhn's new Bund would still work to promote both Germany and national socialism, but Kuhn understood that he had to appeal to an American audience. Immediately upon assuming his new role, Kuhn set out to Americanize the Bund. This meant modifying the tenets of national socialism so that they fit more neatly under the umbrella of Americanism. The Bund, according to Kuhn, was "over here to fight Jewish Marxism and communism."[284] The Bund declared itself opposed to all "isms," including communism, Zionism, Nazism, and fascism, and emphasized that it had no financial ties to the German government.[285]

In "Awake and Act!" the Bund's statement of purpose, Kuhn declared that the organization would "above all, uphold and defend the constitution and the laws of the United States of America," and "respect and honor the Flag and Institutions of the USA and to cultivate their lofty ideals."[286] Moreover, Kuhn recognized that national socialism and American nativism shared some common enemies. The Bund remained zealously anti-Semitic and anti-communist, but now its purpose would be to "expose and depose communism, Marxism, Internationalism, . . . within the United States of America."[287] Kuhn's strategy would be to reframe communism and other movements opposed to national socialism in a context of 100-percent Americanism. The Bund's opposition to these movements stemmed from the threat they posed to existing *American* ideals and principles. The German-American Bund appropriated nativist rhetoric to disentangle itself from the Friends of New Germany and disguise its own foreign origin, composition, and

[284] Quoted in the *New York Times,* April 18, 1936, quoted on Bell, 73.
[285] Canedy, 76.
[286] Fritz Kuhn, "Awake and Act!" (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, 1936).
[287] Ibid.

ideas. Kuhn would attempt to spread national socialism by tapping into the same roots that allowed 100-percent Americanism to prosper.

Bund Structure and Composition

Fritz Kuhn quickly proved adept at selling his new organization. Though membership remained modest throughout the Bund's existence, particularly in comparison to more sweeping movements such as the KKK of the previous decade, it was noticeably more popular than the Friends of New Germany. Exact membership figures are difficult to determine. A report prepared by the Department of Justice in April 1939 cited Kuhn as placing membership figures at just over 8000. However, Kuhn testified later that year that the Bund had 20,000 members, with three to five times as many sympathizers. Most realistic estimates seem to place membership figures in the range of 6000-10,000.[288]

Though the Bund had members all over the country with centers in the Midwest, southwest, and far west, it was most prominent in the northeast United States due to a higher concentration of German immigrants. It was divided into three regions, or Gau—the East, Midwest, and West. Membership consisted predominantly of German-Americans who had recently been naturalized as American citizens. However, the Bund managed to attract some native-born Americans and German nationals as well.[289]

The Bund most closely resembled their German forebears in their employment of the Ordnungs-Dienst, its paramilitary wing. The OD was carried over from the Friends of New Germany, and unsurprisingly, would prove to be one of the Bund's most maligned elements. The OD's organization was a central defining feature of the Bund, with every chapter capable of supporting it featuring their own paramilitary wing. Membership was open to any Bund member

[288] Canedy, 86
[289] Ibid., 81-83.

at least 18 years old and of Aryan origin. Total membership is unknown, but Kuhn reportedly targeted a total force equivalent to ten percent of total Bund membership, and a report made by the Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities in Propaganda estimated, in 1939, a total force of 5000.[290] Though unarmed, OD members still received rifle practice and trained in hand to hand combat. Members carried nightsticks or similar weapons in lieu of firearms.[291] A subject of controversy from the Bund's inception, the OD proved to be a significant obstacle to Kuhn's rebranding efforts throughout the organization's existence.

The Americanism of the German-American Bund

Adopting rhetoric familiar to any Coughlinite, the Bund fused its anti-Semitic and anti-communistic philosophies and set its sights on Franklin Roosevelt's administration. In October 1936, the Bund declared that a vote for Roosevelt would be tantamount to a vote for the establishment of a communist government.[292] Two months later, the Bund organized a meeting in Chicago which incorporated representatives of Italian, German, Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian-American organizations. Each speaker addressed the need to combat "Jewish Bolshevism," with speeches spanning topics such as "How Communism Poisoned the Youth of America" and "The Jewish Menace."[293] Under Kuhn, the Bund fully embraced new nativist sentiments targeting unassimilable ideas. However, with the Friends of New Germany still fresh in the minds of many Americans, including Representative Samuel Dickstein, the Bund would not be able to escape scrutiny for long.

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[290] Ibid., 89.
[291] Ibid., 90-95.
[292] *New York Times,* October 16, 1936.
[293] Leland Bell, *In Hitler's Shadow: The Anatomy of American Nazism,* (Port Washington, N.Y: Kennikat Press, 1973), 48.

Though more "Americanized" than the Friends of New Germany ever were, the Bund still had a difficult time convincing the American public that they were not, in essence, a foreign interest group. In July 1937, Camp Nordland, located in New Jersey, opened to a host of activities and exercises which were widely interpreted by the public as acts of Nazism. Local American Legion and VFW chapters called for the camp to be investigated and the Bund to be dissolved. Soon after, Samuel Dickstein turned his attention to the Bund, issuing a series of verbal denunciations in August that were effective enough at agitating public opinion against the Bund to force Kuhn into action. Kuhn responded by writing a letter to Speaker of the House John H. Bankhead inviting him to open up an investigation into Nordland and the Bund's other camps.[294] The federal government proved willing to oblige, and in mid-August Attorney General Homer S. Cummings ordered a full investigation into the Bund's camps.

Kuhn publicly welcomed the investigation, declaring that "the aim of the German-American Bund is to unite all Germans and Americans in our country to a united front against communism." He continued, "we do show the Nazi emblem alongside of the American flag, with the biggest respect for Hitler and his movement in Germany, fighting the world's madness, communism."[295] Kuhn sought to fuse national socialism and 100-percent Americanism through a common enemy. In Kuhn's view, combatting the tide of communism underpinned both philosophies. In September, Kuhn reiterated this, stating "so long as there's a swastika, there'll be no hammer and sickle in this country."[296] If national socialism could be portrayed as a rampart against bolshevism, then in Kuhn's estimation, it would be perfectly compatible with 100-percent Americanism.

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[294] Canedy, 115-117.
[295] Kuhn quoted in the *New York Times,* August 19, 1937.
[296] Kuhn quoted in *Newsweek,* September 20, 1937.

But as long the Bund was perceived as foreign, the value of national socialism would be impossible to sell. This issue would provide a consistent central focus for the Bund's annual national conventions, in which hundreds of members participated each year. Each convention emphasized the contributions of significant German-Americans to the nation's history, such as Baron von Steuben and Peter Muhlenberg.[297] Implicit in these ceremonies was the notion that German-Americans were not only more "American" than any other class of immigrants, but inextricably linked to the identity of the nation itself. Celebrations of Americanism and Germanism intersected so as to become, in the Bund's view, indistinguishable and inseparable from each other. Similarly, the targets of national socialism were submerged within contemporary nativist rhetoric. The Bund sold its anti-Semitism by presenting Jews as insidious, unassimilable foreigners who had penetrated American labor organizations in order to foment unrest between organized labor and capital. Labor leaders like William Green, who headed the American Federation of Labor, were seen as little more than hostages coerced into carrying out the international communist agenda.[298]

One of many examples of the Bund attempting to converge Germanism and Americanism occurred on May 1, 1937, when the organization staged a gathering to celebrate National Socialist May Day. While Kuhn looked on with an outstretched arm in the vein of Hitler, the OD and the Bund's youth contingent staged a parade. Afterwards, speakers lambasted communists for agitating workers and provoking strikes, and urged Americans to join the organization to expel communist saboteurs from the nation. Between speeches, attendees were treated to renditions of the Star-Spangled Banner and the march hymns of "Frederick the Great"

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[297] Bell, 24-26.
[298] *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter,* November 20, 1936, cited in Bell, 46.

and "Sieg Hiel Kuhn."[299] By coalescing its Germanic roots with Americanist rhetoric and traditions, the Bund pitched itself as a nativist organization espousing beliefs consistent with contemporaries like Charles Coughlin. In doing so, the Bund denounced traditional nativism, or "the arrogant assumption that an unwritten clause of the Constitution grants [nativists] a patent of superiority over the Germans, though they came here for precisely the same reasons as the English, the Irish, the French, the Italians, Russians and Jews."[300] Rather "the German element has become an inseparable part of the blood bone and sinew of Americanism."[301] Interwar nativism, driven by a desire to rid the nation of foreign ideologies, was, in the Bund's view, perfectly compatible with their own mission to rid the United States of communist elements.

The events of the first few months of 1938 proved to be quite turbulent for the Bund and its supporters. On January 5, the Bund scored a significant victory when it was cleared by Attorney General Cummings. The investigation had seemingly vindicated the organization's claims that it served to advance American interests. But the following month, sensing that the Bund was complicating German-American relations, the German government publicly disavowed the organization and German nationals were barred from joining. Kuhn, attempting to salvage the Bund's relationship with Hitler's regime, visited Germany, but was rudely dismissed by one of Hitler's aides who declared him to be an "American citizen" and thus not of any interest to the German government.[302] In order to survive, the German-American Bund would have to fully embrace its veneer as a 100-percent Americanist organization.

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[299] Bell, 29-30.
[300] *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, the Free American,* February 16, 1939. "Free American" was added to the paper's title in 1938 in an effort to further 'Americanize' the organization and appeal to a wider American audience.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Canedy, 139-142.

Nativism and National Socialism: An Imperfect Marriage

His trip to Germany unsuccessful, Kuhn set about further broadening the Bund's appeal to an American audience. The swastika flag was replaced with a separate Bund flag, and the American flag was flown at all Bund gatherings. The Bund's newspaper, *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter,* added "the Free American" to its title and English articles in its weekly publication. Through these and similar measures, Kuhn hoped to buttress the Bund's appearance as an Americanist organization.[303] However, the Bund found it difficult to fully disguise a national socialist ideology seen as increasingly foreign and menacing by the American public.

Following the *Anschluss* in March 1938, the Bund organized a number of meticulously prepared and highly publicized nightly rallies on the streets of New York. The largest took place on April 20 in celebration of Hitler's birthday. However, also present at this assembly were 100 members of the American Legion.[304] During the gathering's opening speech, given by Bund Intelligence Branch head Otto Wegener who praised Hitler's seizure of Austria as a "birthday gift . . . to Greater Germany," one Legionnaire arose and shouted, "is this an American or a German meeting?" His fellow Legionnaires then joined him, donning their organization's distinctive blue overseas caps and engaging the OD in a vicious hand-to-hand maelstrom. Observers noted the OD using their blackjacks and clubs to fight off the Legionnaires, injuring several.[305] A few days later, four Bund sympathizers broke into the office of Charles Weiss, the editor of the anti-Nazi and anti-communist magazine *Uncle Sam,* severely beating him and inscribing swastika emblems on his back and chest after he refused to kiss a German flag.[306] To

[303] Ibid., 143.
[304] Bell, 65.
[305] "Seven Are Injured at Nazi Rally Here When Legionnaires Heckle Speaker," *New York Times,* April 21, 1938.
[306] Bell, 65.

outside observers, the Bund's conduct hardly seemed befitting of an organization working to preserve the nation's heritage.

Making matters worse, the Bund's legal troubles resumed in May when House Resolution 282, which authorized the formation of the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities, was passed by a vote margin of 191-41.[307] In the summer, legal assaults on the Bund began in earnest, sapping the organization of funds and costing it prestige and membership. As the investigation deepened, the Bund attempted to cast it as further evidence of a foreign Jewish plot to sabotage America. The New York State investigating committee, chaired by state Senator John McNaboe, opened hearings on the Bund in late June. The Bund's newspaper reported that Fritz Kuhn, testifying before a crowd of people "stamped with dark Hebraic features," handled himself "magnificently." The paper concluded that the Bund had withstood this "Jewish-instigated" investigation further proving its commitment to 100-percent Americanism.[308] The investigators however, were not yet satisfied.

In July, the Bund was dealt a damaging blow when former OD member Willy Brandt testified in Suffolk County (New York) Court during the trial of six directors of the Bund's Camp Siegfried, located in Long Island. Brandt stated that, as part of the organization's initiation, prospective members were required to pledge an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler and give the Nazi salute while chanting "Heil Hitler."[309] The following month, *Click Magazine* published an exposé on the Bund emphasizing the organization's militaristic qualities. Images of Bundsmen training at a firing range were accompanied by captions like "target practice gives American Nazis a chance to become adept with arms. They dare not drill with guns in public, but

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[307] Canedy, 154.
[308] *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, June 30, 1938, referenced in Bell, 68-69.
[309] "Bund Oath Quoted as Nazi Case Opens," *New York Times,* July 7, 1938.

they welcome handling them in 60 American counties . . . alien-fostered forces drill and agitate to end our democracy."[310] Dissonance between rhetoric and action was proving to be a persistent thorn in the Bund's side. While they preached 100-percent Americanism, the nation at large saw the organization as, at best, a vessel for German propaganda. At worst, it represented a foreign insurgency.

In September, the Bund held its annual National Convention in New York. The primary concern was the organization's rapidly declining appeal among the American public. Hoping to resolve this growing crisis and cement itself once and for all as a purely American organization, the Bund released an eight point "American" program which attempted to seamlessly blend national socialist and nativist sentiments into a single cohesive philosophy. The program called for Gentile-controlled labor unions free from Jewish Moscow-directed domination; gentiles in all positions of importance in government, national defense, and educational institutions; outlawing of the Communist Party in the United States and prosecution of all known communists for high treason; an immediate ban on all incoming political refugees; a "thorough cleaning of the Hollywood film industries of all alien, subversive doctrines;" and a cessation on all foreign entanglements, including membership in the League of Nations.[311]

Again, the Bund drew a clear line between itself and corrosive foreign influences. Implicit in the Bund's America First philosophy was the understanding that it too was fundamentally American. However, the Bund continued to struggle to clear itself from public perception of it as a hostile foreign enterprise. Bund meetings consistently drew angry protestors, and in October, a crowd of five thousand people gathered around a tavern in which Kuhn was

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[310] "'The Nazis in America:' They Grow Bolder Daily in Their Efforts to Tear Down Our Democracy," *Click Magazine*, 1 (no.7), August 7, 1938.
[311] Minutes of the German-American Bund National Convention, 1938, referenced in Bell, 77.

invited to speak and began yelling "kill him" and "run him out of town," while throwing bricks at the building.[312] 100-percent Americanism was proving a nearly impossible goal for the organization to reach.

In late 1938, the Bund ramped up its public relations campaign. This was largely centered on the *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, the Free American* which began publishing English articles extolling the organization's Americanist virtues. These articles consistently stuck to two themes—the compatibility of fascism/national socialism with 100-percent Americanism, and the grave threat posed by Jewish bolshevism. Emblematic were several articles which appeared in the January 19, 1939 edition of the paper. One, entitled "Red Germany Means Red World," argued that "if Germany went Red, the rest of Europe would not take long to fall beneath the bloody Soviet yoke—AND THE REMAINDER OF THE WORLD WOULD FOLLOW."[313] Germany, the paper contended, was on the frontlines of the struggle against international communism, the same entity American nativists feared.

In addition, fascism had enabled Germany to solve some of the problems foremost on the minds of nativists. In Germany, workers were far better off than their American counterparts. Employment was constant and steady, wages and purchasing power were both greater, and strikes were nonexistent. "In Germany," the article continued, "they speak of one great union—the union of capital and labor—and it is a fact."[314] That fascism was a powerful deterrent to communism's spread was evident in its ability to resolve a fundamental tension between capital and labor which had, in the eyes of nativists, plagued the United States for decades.

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[312] Bell, 82.
[313] "Red Germany Means Red World," *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, the Free American,* January 19, 1939.
[314] "Labor Conditions Here and in Germany," Ibid, February 2, 1939.

In "Bolshevism and Fascism," the paper attempted to cast the two ideologies as polar opposites. It was bolshevism and not fascism, claimed the Bund, that sought to "spread its doctrines all over the world and organizes Communist Parties in every country, working under the obedience of Moscow for the overthrow of constitutional government." Fascism, in contrast, had never "sought to proselytize and has never been accused, even by its bitterest enemies of forming any foreign group."[315] That the Bund itself was accused of being a foreign group attempting to advance fascist interests went unaddressed. But the distinction made here is an important one. Communism represented a clear threat to nativist interests because, by its very nature, it spread like a disease from nation to nation. Fascism in contrast, was inherently limited in its spread. Unlike communism, it did not seek the erasure of all other existing political systems. It only tried to "correct those parts of civilization which, in common with all sincere social reformers, it regards as defective."[316] Fascism, the Bund argued, was neither invasive, nor did it represent a significant departure from existing American social and political values.

In contrast, evidence of communism's activity in America could be found in the attempts by communist organizations to recruit "several thousand 'volunteers' to fight in the Spanish Red Army as members of the so-called Abraham Lincoln Brigade." These recruits, the paper continued, were in fact not Americans at all, but rather "ALIENS WHOM THE COMMUNISTS HAD RECRUITED IN THIS COUNTRY."[317] In addition to offering "proof" of revolutionary communist activity in the United States, the article also played to the convergent post-Red Scare fears of communism spreading among unassimilated aliens.

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[315] "Bolshevism and Fascism," Ibid, January 19, 1939.
[316] Ibid.
[317] "Writers Aid Red Recruits," Ibid, February 9, 1939.

By recasting itself in a nativist context, the Bund also attempted to embed its anti-Semitism into its 100-percent Americanist rhetoric. To achieve this, the Bund turned to old nativist fears, asserting that foreign Jews were unassimilable. Emblematic of this was a letter to the editor published in a December edition of *Deutscher Weckruf* which relayed an anecdote of two recently arrived Jewish refugees who had opened accounts with a "leading Wall Street bank." "One deposited $50,000, the other $75,000. On completing the formalities the latter said to one of the bank attaches: 'Can't you help me get a job? I don't care what it is—anything; I'll work as a dishwasher to begin with.' The banker, incredulous that a clearly wealthy Jew would dare take a valuable menial labor job away from one of millions of unemployed Americans, declined to offer aid—"The Jew had nothing to say, but it didn't seem to embarrass him in the least."[318] Another article, published two weeks later, warned that "Jews are arming and drilling regularly for war right in little old New York, the hotbed of anti-German, pro-Jewish agitation."[319] Together, these excerpts demonstrate the Bund's attempt to portray Jews as both unassimilable foreigners, and revolutionary actors.

A Rally in the Garden

In early 1939 the Bund set in motion plans for a "monster demonstration of True Americanism," set to take place on February 20 at Madison Square Garden. Officially, the demonstration was held to honor the birthday of George Washington, whom the Bund championed as the progenitor of American isolationism. The organization sent invitations to numerous congressmen, right wing leaders, veteran groups, and local officials.[320] The demonstration's 22,000 attendees were protected by more than 1700 policemen, but tensions

[318] "A Sample Refugee Immigrant," Ibid, December 1, 1938.
[319] "A Jewish Army Now Drilling in New York," Ibid, December 15, 1938.
[320] Bell, 84-85.

outside the Garden remained high.[321] In addition to police protection, the Bund had on hand approximately 3000 members of the OD to ensure the proceedings went smoothly.[322]

Speeches at this demonstration of "true Americanism" stuck to themes similar to those advanced by the *Deutscher Weckruf* over the previous several weeks. Bund National Secretary J. Wheeler-Hill gave the opening address, lamenting that "I must confess that we are utterly and completely disregarding the admonition of George Washington, TODAY." Instead, America had been corrupted by "the spread of radicalism with its inspired class hatred, racial sectionalism, political abuses, its moral erosion and subsequent disintegration of our national unit in thought . . . Who will deny the attacks that have been made upon the Constitution?"[323] Wheeler-Hill established the defensive tone of the demonstration. The Bund was not seeking revolutionary change to the American system, but rather the rightful restoration of what that system was intended to be by the nation's founders.

The next speech, by Eastern Department leader Rudolf Markmann, denied the organization's ties to national socialism. Markmann stressed that "we have never claimed to be and are not Nazis, knowing very well that Nazism . . . is reserved for Germany and has no place in our country, the United States of America!"[324] In framing national socialism as a uniquely German phenomenon, the Bund could more effectively redefine its own politics in a nativist context.

Next, Midwest Department head Georg Froboese attempted to clearly define the threat the Bund sought to protect its nation against—Jewish Bolshevism. Froboese advanced familiar

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[321] "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes," *New York Times,* February 20, 1939.
[322] Bell, 85.
[323] J. Wheeler-Hill, "Opening Address," (speech, Free America! The German-American Bund at Madison Square Garden, New York, February 20, 1939).
[324] Rudolf Markmann, "Reasons for the Bund's Existence," Ibid.

arguments, claiming that "labor has been exploited not only by Jewish-International moneyed interests, but more so it has been debased and misused by Jewish agitators." Moreover "under the radical leadership of Jewish agents, the labor movement of our country has been split into warring factions."[325] Like Coughlin, the Bund viewed Judaism and bolshevism as inextricably linked, making no effort to distinguish between the two. Bolshevism was, to the Bund, Jewish at its core. The solution then was to ensure that "our labor unions . . . be controlled by conscientious, gentile American leaders, who are absolutely free from a communist-infested and Moscow-directed domination."[326]

The argument borrowed liberally from nativist Red Scare fears, repackaging the organization's anti-Semitism in a context more palatable to 100-percent Americanists. Labor unions were still seen as dangerous vessels for revolutionary activity, a weakness which had been readily exploited by foreign communist agitators. The next logical step for the Bund to advance its anti-Semitism was to cast all Jews as fundamentally unassimilable. This task fell to National Public Relations Director G. Wilhelm Kunze, who cautioned against America's "suicidal tolerance of parasitical aliens, making something entirely different out of the nation, destroying its ethics, morals, patriotism, and religious conceptions." A Jew was, continued Kunze, "alien, in body, mind, and soul, as ANY other non-Aryan and he is a thousand times more dangerous to us than all others by reason of his parasitic nature."[327]

Finally, in the last address of the evening, Bund leader Fritz Kuhn assured attendees that the Bund

> organized as American citizens, with American ideals, and determined to protect ourselves, our homes, our wives and children against the slimy conspirators who would change this glorious republic into the inferno of a bolshevist Paradise—we,

[325] Georg Froboese, "Labor, Economics, Finance," Ibid.
[326] Ibid.
[327] G. Wilhelm Kunze, "Race, Youth," Ibid.

> I say, will not fail you when called upon to give every lawful support in our power in the fight to break the grip of the palsied hand of Jewish Communism on our schools, our universities, our very homes.[328]

With Kuhn's remarks, the Bund had clearly articulated its argument that it served to protect American institutions against malicious foreign "isms." It had, in essence, cast itself as another nativist organization. What would determine its continued survival was the public's willingness to accept this claim.

Aftermath

In what had become a recurring theme in public perception of the Bund, popular reaction to the Madison Square Garden rally focused less on rhetoric and more on appearances. Once again, the presence of the OD instilled a sense of unease among neutral observers. As an editorial in the *New York Times* noted, "the uniformed strong-arm squad maintained by the Bund itself was unnecessary, as it is totally out of keeping with the atmosphere of a public meeting in a democratic country."[329] If the Bund were truly an American organization, the OD proved the most difficult feature to reconcile with this. In the days and weeks following the demonstration, local veteran and fraternal organizations organized large anti-Bund rallies, and vitriol for Kuhn and his organization continued to grow.[330] A March issue of *Life Magazine* implored readers to permit the Bund its right to organize, but only because "their incitement to reckless anger is the only real danger to America of its alien advocates."[331]

Public disapproval did more than just damage the Bund's reputation however. New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia and District Attorney Thomas Dewey, spurred on by popular outcry,

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[328] Fritz Kuhn, "Address," Ibid.
[329] "The Bund Meeting," *New York Times,* February 22, 1939
[330] Bell, 88.
[331] "Fascism in America, Like Communism it Masquerades as Americanism," *Life Magazine,* March 6, 1939.

opened an investigation into the Bund's finances in March. In April, they found that Kuhn had stolen nearly $15000 worth of organizational funds. Kuhn's defense focused on emphasizing that the organization operated by the *führerprinzip* in which Kuhn ultimately assumed responsibility for the entire organization. Since he sat atop the Bund's organizational hierarchy, any funds were his to do with as he saw fit. But La Guardia and Dewey caught a break when they discovered that Kuhn had failed to make a $500 legal payment and forged the entry into a Bund account book. Kuhn was charged with forgery and concealing larceny, and in December he was sentenced to a 2-5-year prison sentence.[332] Meanwhile, Bund rhetoric during this period maintained a staunch stance of 100-percent Americanism. But the organization found it increasingly challenging to reconcile its Americanism with its national socialist tenets.

As public sentiment continued to turn against the Bund in the wake of their demonstration of "true Americanism," the organization struggled to separate itself from its Nazi roots. On March 2, the Bund "endorsed" Charles Coughlin, stating that it was "ready to put itself squarely behind any intelligently directed, non-partisan, non-hysterical movement opposed to Nazism…If anyone qualified will point out where Nazism in the United States may be found outside of the imagination of people with anti-German crumples."[333] In the same issue, the Bund reiterated the grave threat posed by communist infiltration in America—"if our press were free, honest editors now would be warning Christian ministers and laymen against the campaign of Jewish Communists to destroy all denominations through bribery, financial mortgage pressure and lying propaganda."[334] The Bund focused on distinguishing itself from national socialist and fascist movements while also downplaying the threat those movements posed. The real threat,

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[332] Bell, 93-95.
[333] "Father Coughlin Endorsed," *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, the Free American,* March 2, 1939.
[334] "Red Radicals in Christian Churches," Ibid.

insisted the Bund, was communism, and any attempt to draw attention away from this was simply communist obfuscation. Emblematic of this was La Guardia and Dewey's investigation into the Bund itself.

Besieged from all sides, the Bund doubled down on its anti-communist hysteria. Evidence of communist influence was everywhere, and clearly the Bund was perceived as a threat. Investigations into the Bund, "coming in the form of a deluge, seem designed to create a state of terror and apprehension which goes far to prove a plan of coordinated attack to silence the defenders of American liberty by whatever means, however ruthless, can be employed."[335]

To the Bund it was clear that communism was advancing on all fronts. Its presence could be seen in America's churches as well as its colleges, where schools were "completely controlled by a communistic element in the student body."[336] In the oval office, Franklin Roosevelt was ideologically indistinguishable from Joseph Stalin.[337] Elsewhere, "communists bore from within; seize control of labor organizations; infiltrate the WPA and the Relief administration; lobby for Marxist legislation in Washington and plot to involve America in war on the side of Soviet Russia and the imperialist powers." And all that was necessary for communists to seize total control of the country was for Americans to "sit by idly and do nothing . . . The communists WANT the American citizen to act that way…to remain aloof from current developments, to take no interest in the inroads of Marxism in America."[338] For communism, insisted the Bund, was a "brutal, ruthless enemy," that if not properly dealt with, presented a "real danger that the United States . . . may go down to defeat and become a slave nation."[339] But as the weight of

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[335] "German-American Bund Fighting Persecution: New York City Administration Playing into the hands of Hidden Terrorists," Ibid, March 16, 1939.
[336] "Communism in Hunter College?" Ibid, letter to the editor.
[337] Colonel Caesar Throttlebottom, "Timely Thoughts," Ibid, April 27, 1939.
[338] "You Can Easily Help America Go Red!" Ibid, May 11, 1939.
[339] "Enlist Now," Ibid, July 13, 1939.

public ire and official investigations bore down on the organization, it became increasingly clear that national socialism and Americanism were discrete entities, and the Bund could not serve both.

Always an obstacle to public acceptance, the Bund's Germanic and national socialist ties became untenable as Nazi aggression ramped up in Europe. While the Bund continued to sell itself as a "militant American organization opposing all isms but Americanism," its defense of Hitler's actions made it increasingly indistinguishable from a German propaganda vessel.[340] The *Deutscher Weckruf* responded to Germany's invasion of Poland by parroting the Third Reich's claim that the conflict was initiated by Polish soldiers who had crossed the German border and seized a radio station on August 31.[341] Two weeks later, the paper chided American media outlets for not accepting German claims of Polish atrocities. The media, grumbled the Bund writers, was working to "create the impression that the Germans, naturally the most kind-hearted people in the world, are alone guilty of committing atrocities, and the Poles, occupying a far lower level of civilization, are above guerrilla atrocities."[342] Despite its claim to be an American organization, the Bund could not free itself from its foreign roots.

Kuhn's arrest sent the organization into a tailspin from which it would never fully recover. But its failure was underpinned by an inability to reconcile national socialism with 100-percent Americanism. The influence of national socialism on the Bund remained transparent even as it pushed familiar nativist rhetoric on all fronts. Yet dismissing the Bund as a Nazi organization working to spread fascism and national socialism on American soil is reductive. Regardless of its true intent, the Bund was forced to adapt and modify its message for an

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[340] "U.S. Government Safe from Reich," Ibid, June 1, 1939.
[341] "Poles Committed First Act of War," Ibid, September 7, 1939.
[342] "Appalling Polish Atrocities," Ibid, September 21, 1939.

American audience. In order to weave its national socialism into a package more acceptable to the American public, the Bund appropriated rhetoric in tune with other nativists of the day like Charles Coughlin. The organization did not reject its German roots, but rather the foreign nature of those roots. “German-American,” argued the Bund, was a tautology, for Germans had been inextricably linked to pivotal moments in American history since the nation’s inception. The Bund’s failure was ultimately rooted in its failure to convincingly dispel its roots as a national socialist organization. While it espoused nativist tenets, Americans were drawn to the brutish tactics of the OD, a component of the Bund strikingly similar to the paramilitary wings of European fascist movements. Perceived as a foreign organization attempting to spread its ideology through brute force, the content of its message ceased to be relevant. Yet further examination of its message, regardless of its veracity, reveals the evolving nature of American nativism in the interwar era. As the focus of nativism shifted from persons to ideology, its advocates grew increasingly diverse. With Coughlin, nativist rhetoric was appropriated by a figure associated with its oldest foe—Catholicism. The Bund consummated, or at least continued, this process. Nativist rhetoric was adopted by an organization that was itself largely foreign. Central to the Bund’s argument was the assertion that “native” and “alien” were not matters of geography, but ideology.

CONCLUSION

In June 2018, Arizona State Representative David Stringer came under fire for comments he made regarding immigration. Speaking at the Republican Men's Forum in Yavapai County, Arizona, Stringer declared that "If we don't do something about immigration very, very soon, the demographics of our country will be irrevocably changed, and it will be a very different country and it will not be the country you were born into."[343] "Immigration today," warned Stringer, "represents an existential threat to the United States."[344]

Concurrently, the United Nations has called on the United States to reverse a border policy which has resulted in the separation of 1,995 children from their parents between April 19 and May 31. This policy, enacted in April 2018 by the Trump administration, reversed pre-existing policy which treated irregular and first-time border crossings as a misdemeanor offense.[345] In its place, the U.S. government has implemented a "zero-tolerance" policy which treats all illegal border crossings as criminal offenses.[346] "What the US is doing now, there is no equivalent," stated Michael Flynn, executive director of the Global Detention Project, an advocacy group for people detained for reasons relating to their non-citizen status.[347]

The policies of the current administration however, are simply the most recent strain of a familiar disease. For as long as America has been an independent nation, nativists have sought to protect it from foreign corruption. In the embryonic years of the republic, fear of papal influence predominated. In subsequent decades, a more general fear of foreign influence emerged as poor aliens, it was widely believed, would undercut American laborers by working for substantially

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[343] "U.S. Lawmaker Calls Immigration 'Existential Threat to U.S.,'" BBC.com, June 15, 2018.
[344] Ibid.
[345] "U.S. Child Migrants: 2,000 Separated from Families in Six Weeks," BBC.com, June 15, 2018.
[346] "Why the U.S. is Separating Migrant Children from Their Parents," BBC.com, June 15, 2018.
[347] Ibid.

lower wages. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, fear of radical alien influence emerged, as nativists grew increasingly concerned with disruptive and potentially revolutionary activity of immigrants. Following World War I, nativist fears shifted, realigning to focus on foreign ideologies. Certain "isms," especially communism, came to be seen as the direst threats to the nation.

Underlying all nativist sentiments is a general fear of an alteration to the fundamental character of the United States. America, in the view of nativists, represented the proverbial "city upon a hill"—an emblem of exceptionalism which had to be protected from corruptive foreign influence at any cost. The desirability of various classes of immigrants correlated to their "assimilability." Immigrants from wealthier, Western nations which shared many American values could be easily absorbed into American society, and what foreign qualities they did possess would, in time, be washed away. Conversely, immigrants from more "alien" locations—Central and South America, Eastern Europe, and Asia for instance—were seen as indelibly foreign. No matter how much time these aliens spent within its borders, their foreign roots would remain, slowly eroding and diluting the American ethos until it was indistinguishable from that of lesser foreign nations.

At different points in American history, the qualities which marked an alien as "unassimilable" varied. For instance, Catholics, in the view of nativists, would forever answer to Rome first and America second. Their foreign bond to the Pope was unbreakable and thus they could never truly be incorporated into American society. In the early twentieth century, nativist focus shifted to foreign ideologies. Certain "isms," asserted these nativists, were simply incompatible with American values. The Bolshevik Revolution calcified fears of foreign ideologies. Communism, it was clear, maintained a parasitic relationship with its host country.

Taking advantage of the host country's infrastructure, it spread like a disease among its inhabitants until revolution was made inevitable. And in America, where the Constitution gave individuals the right to say or write whatever they pleased, the potential for communism to take root and spread was significant.

The nativist movements of the interwar era cast themselves as guardians against the spread of communism. First the Klan (in part), and later individuals like Virgil Effinger and Charles Coughlin, organized movements centered around stemming the tide of communism. Communists, these men asserted, were embedded in every aspect of American society, from labor unions and workplaces, to universities and government; and only vigilant American citizens could stop them. The German-American Bund served almost as a caricature of these movements—a foreign lens through which the waves of 100-percent Americanism were refracted and distorted, enmeshed with the doctrines of one of the foreign "isms" nativists so desperately defended against.

For as long as the United States has existed as an independent nation, nativist fears have persisted. Over the course of the country's history, the targets of nativist ire have varied widely, but the source of nativist fear remained constant. Aliens were welcomed or targeted based on how "assimilable" they were deemed by native-born Americans. When the tides of the indelibly foreign became too great, nativist fears took hold, and organizations like the Know Nothings, the 1920s Ku Klux Klan, and similar groups quickly (but often briefly) gained popularity. In the twentieth century, the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent Red Scare added a new dimension to nativism. Assimilability remained of fundamental importance, but now aliens were judged on the basis of their ideological beliefs in addition to their foreign origins. Fear of foreign "isms" superseded fear of foreign persons and 100-percent Americanism was born. With a revised

definition of nativism came a revision to who could be deemed a nativist. The aliens of previous decades, such as the Catholic Charles Coughlin and the German-American Bund, adopted the new nativist spirit as their own. Coughlin, the Bund, and the Black Legion all defined their Americanism in the context of their opposition to foreign ideologies, communism in particular. In the case of the Bund (and to a degree, Coughlin as well), their failure to gain widespread acceptance as a legitimate nativist organization stemmed not from their foreign origins, but from their espousal of a separate foreign ideology deemed equally antithetical to American values. At the core of this strain of nativism however, was the same belief in American Exceptionalism that underpinned all other chapters, past and present, of nativism.

Today, nativism once again finds itself a fulcrum for American policy-making. While the targets of nativists have shifted, modern nativism is underpinned by the same general fear that marked all previous nativist outbreaks. The sources of present fears—Mexican and Central American migrants, and Middle Eastern Muslims—are, to nativists, inextricably foreign. As residents, they can be merely tolerated but never assimilated. If their presence was to become too great, the American Eden would disassemble into a morass of disparate, unrecognizable parts.

Contemporary nativism shares roots with its forebears. Fear of Mexican and Central American migrants represent a modern iteration of a foundational nativist fear: the oversaturation of the Other and the subsequent loss of American identity through sheer numbers. Anti-Islamic sentiment on the other hand, is ideologically focused. Supplanting communism, Islam has evolved into the preeminent modern ideological bogeyman of nativists (which is not to say that anti-communist sentiments have faded completely). Citing texts like Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, modern nativists argue that Islamic beliefs are incompatible with Western values. Left unchecked, nativists believe, Islam threatens to undermine the United States from

within. But fundamentally, these fears are not new. Rather, they are simply the most recent manifestations of 100-percent Americanism.

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