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The *Lusitania* Effect:
America's Mobilization against Germany in World War I

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The sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine in 1915 became not only a crucial factor for the American entry into World War I, but unleashed an increasingly emotional drive of exclusion in the name of forging a new unity of the American nation. In the broader context the persecution of German Americans reinforced hysteria against socialists and other dissenters for the next half-century. A closer look at the battle for and against German culture reveals it as part of America's battle for its cultural independence, which became a fatal identity test for German Americans but also a challenge to American intellectual elites who maintained strong interest in German modernity and social policies.

"The sinking of the *Lusitania* had a more jolting effect upon American opinion than any other single event of the World War." The remark by Arthur Link, the eminent historian and biographer of Woodrow Wilson, highlights an incident of World War I that became the catalyst not just for reconsiderations of American neutrality and innumerable exhortations of action against the German Empire but also for a more general reflection of American reaction to outside threats as triggers of military mobilization and war. Link explained: "For most Americans, except for Southerners with long and bitter memories of Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas, it was their first real introduction to total war—to war as much against civilians as against armed forces, against women and children as well as men."[1] With the sinking of the British Cunard liner off the coast of Ireland by a German torpedo on May 7, 1915, American public opinion decisively turned against the German cause and raised the specter of war. As the ship sank in only 18 minutes, it took with it 785 passengers and 413 members of the crew, among them 128 Americans, while 472 passengers and 289 members of the crew survived.

Whatever the Germans proposed as justification of this act of warfare—that American citizens had been warned of crossing the Atlantic on a British ocean liner, that the ship also contained a cargo of ammunition—could do nothing to assuage the shock not just in America but the world over. When President Woodrow Wilson declared war on the German Empire two years later, on April 6, 1917, the reference to the sinking of the *Lusitania* was still on the mind of Americans, newly activated by the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Just mentioning the *Lusitania* conjured a whole world of brutality, barbarism, and betrayal that tainted everything remotely connected

with the German cause. Its force remained intact for several decades, the name became synonymous with an unprovoked attack from outside that was deadly and repulsive and needed to be requited.

No history of German-American relations can afford to leave off the effects of this disaster. And no recounting of the dismal fate of German Americans in World War I is complete without pointing to the suspicion and alienation that resulted from this brush with real war. Likewise, without the *Lusitania* affair the narrative about Wilson and his bumpy path to leading the United States into war would miss a crucial element. There are at least three major narratives in which the following observations will lay bare the immense impact of this event, connecting the disaster that caused the death of about 1,200 people—a small number compared with the millions of deaths on the European battle-fields—with the trajectory of America's assumption of world power status. There is, first, the American narrative of the German military threat that continued to shape German-American relations in the twentieth century; there is, secondly, the story of the increasing violence against German Americans that resulted in destroying their self-proclaimed identity as a culturally distinct minority; and thirdly, there is the unfinished, still-being-written story of an American way of mobilizing for national unity and war that owes its militant energies to a real or assumed attack from the outside, generating an overload of suppression of the "enemy within" that borders on political paranoia.

In other words, the pursuit of the *Lusitania* disaster leads not only into the intricacies of international diplomacy and American neutrality in World War I but also into the politics of creating public narratives as part of the symbolic battles that made this four-year conflict the first truly worldwide propaganda war. The calamity off the Irish coast became a communication venture of the greatest magnitude whose incendiary nature gave a foreboding of things to come when the American mobilization finally became official by the declaration of war in spring 1917. Given the immense eagerness of thousands of journalist and intellectuals in all countries to contribute to the national camps of rhetorical firepower, this development is hardly surprising. The fact that the official neutrality of the United States kept intellectual elites from direct intervention in the first phases of the war did not preclude their participation in the propaganda battles—mostly on the side of the Allies. And the fact that the country was far away from European battlefields did not hamper the search for hidden enemies on American soil.

The event itself produced a flood of narratives full of drama, conspiracies, technological exploration, and hypotheses. Different from the incomparably greater flood of books, films, and songs about the disaster of the *Titanic*, the literature about the sinking of the *Lusitania* always involves a political dimension. It became the quintessential focus of conspiratorial theories, a genre especially honed in America. The fascination with disaster connects all titles, such as

Wilful Murder: The Sinking of the Lusitania; *Lusitania: Saga and Myth*; *Murder on the Lusitania*; *Lusitania: Unraveling the Mysteries*; *Seven Days to Disaster*; *A Ten-Year-Old on the Lusitania, 1910*; and, in a more political vain, *Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy*; *America Entangled: The Secret Plotting of German Spies in the United States and the Inside Story of the Sinking of the Lusitania*.[2] These books ebb and flow with time. When Colin Simpson, an Englishman, in 1972 rehashed the old rumor that the British admiralty under Churchill had instigated the sinking in order to provoke the U.S. to enter the war on their side, he failed to bring evidence.[3] Shortly thereafter, Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, in a painstaking analysis of the available facts, put this theory to rest.[4] In a more recent study, Patrick O'Sullivan came close to answering the most perplexing question: why did the *Lusitania* experience two explosions when the German submarine had clearly only shot one torpedo? She sank in only 18 minutes while the *Titanic* needed two hours and 40 minutes. After the blame was usually put on exploding coal dust, O'Sullivan advanced the theory that the cargo of 46 tons of aluminum dust must have exploded in the terrible heat of the ensuing fire.[5]

While the symbolism of the *Titanic* has encompassed the demise of a whole era—the prewar European society in its reckless greed and splendor—its larger significance extended into the religious—to build the ultimate, unsinkable ship as a challenge to nature and God—which formed a grandiose metaphor of human hubris sinking into the abyss. Reinterpreted by every generation, the *Titanic* indicates the limits of human ambition and self-assurance. In contrast, the story of the *Lusitania* exposes not only the capsizing of a great ocean liner but also the other, the enemy, hidden from view, submerged in the ocean, plotting, shooting from the dark, taking the lives of innocents. Who is the other? The German. The sinking of the *Lusitania*, torpedoed by a German submarine, established an image of breaking the cocoon of invulnerability not through God's hand but by German malice. American cartoons showed the Kaiser smirk at the victims floating in the waves.[6]

Once the *Lusitania* was associated with a sneak attack against America, the ship's name became a free-floating signifier for malice, war, and evil—setting off a forceful response, justifying violent mobilization. It depended on the circumstances whether evil was directly associated with something German or in a more general manner with America's enemies. The fact that this association occurred immediately after the news reached the American shores, fueling thoughts of military retaliation, indicates that the American public was not totally unprepared as it recalled another such incident: the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in the harbor of Havana in 1898, which incited the Spanish-American war. "Remember the *Maine*" was a battle cry that originated in the accusation, especially by the Hearst Press, that the Spaniards in Havana had destroyed the battleship *Maine* by exploding a mine. Although the scenario of the sinking of

the *Maine* is much less straightforward—later examination of the cause of the explosion pointed to combusted coal dust and no outside interference[7]—references to these disasters retained their power as they conjured a pattern of American reactions to assaults from outside that projected a rather direct line from the enemy's belligerent act to the American declaration of war.

The *Lusitania* affair was neither the first nor the last time that this pattern took shape. Its most forceful expression is forever tied to the images of sinking ships 26 years later when on December 7, 1941, the Japanese air force bombed the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. This time retaliation was especially swift and immediate as President Franklin D. Roosevelt, fully supported by the shocked population, declared war on the country that had inflicted this attack, which cost the lives of thousands of Americans. Similar to the challenge from an overseas power in World War I, the American reaction included the assumption that the outside enemy was helped by an enemy within. In the earlier war this meant an increasingly hostile scrutiny of the status of German Americans as citizens, which eventually developed into a veritable act of cultural ethnic cleansing; after Pearl Harbor the focus was on Japanese Americans of whom thousands, despite their lifelong citizenship, were interned as enemy aliens. This constellation, including the search for the enemy within, found new expression in the attack on September 11, 2001, when terrorists from outside the country struck the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington with passenger airplanes, killing thousands of Americans.[8] President George W. Bush responded with a declaration of war against terrorism. Roosevelt's utterance of the "Day of Infamy" found new meaning.

"*Lusitania*," or the Use of a Free Floating Signifier of Aggression
In 1915 the attacker was the German Reich. Though more than three thousand miles away and nowhere near to launching an invasion, its conduct of war, especially the unrestricted submarine warfare, had led it into a course of confrontation with the United States. Directing its propaganda towards keeping the United States, whose elites tended to support the allies, out of the war, Germany, fully absorbed by the battles with Britain, France, and Russia, tried to break the British naval blockade. For Germans the sinking of the *Lusitania* was only an instance in the fight against the British. For Wilson it meant the strongest challenge to his presidential authority. If it had been the decision of his loudest critic, former President Theodore Roosevelt, war would have been declared as a matter of course. Yet, while the public was in shock, Wilson took his time in responding. He tied the response to his concept of neutrality, with which the Germans had to comply. Three notes were sent, demanding that Germany disavow the sinking, compensate the victims, and cease the attacks on passenger ships. Wilson's strategy succeeded to the extent that the able and cooperative German ambassador, Count Johann-Heinrich Bernstorff, remarked in

his memoir: "The foundation of my entire politics originated in those 'Lusitania' days. These events furnished proof for me that Mister Wilson was peacefully disposed, public opinion bellicose, and that the President single-handedly prevented the immediate outbreak of war, and yet, as an American politician, was forced to play along public opinion."[9]

Having defused the impact of the Lusitania shock, Wilson's credibility as a peacemaker rose enormously; at the same time Roosevelt, his foremost critic, determined Wilson's politics to be even more disdainful than the sinking itself: "To sink a hundred American men, women, and children on the Lusitania, in other words, to murder them, was an evil thing; but it was not quite as evil and it was nothing like as contemptible as it was for this nation to rest satisfied with governmental notes of protest couched in elegant English, and with vaguely implied threats which were not carried out."[10]

Mitigating the effect of the sinking was indeed a surprising use of the moral high ground. It empowered Wilson to enforce his neutrality policies but also created its own dependency as it made these policies vulnerable to future violations from the German side. Such use of the affair—which gave American business a more secure route to its rapidly growing customer base in Europe, especially Britain—impressed the German ambassador, who first had anticipated the break of diplomatic relations as a step towards war. In his report to Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, Bernstorff wrote on May 17, 1915: "All excuses are in vain. We will do our best if we frankly admit that our propaganda in this country has completely collapsed under the impact of the Lusitania incident."[11] Although German propaganda, organized to a large extent by Bernhard Dernburg through the German Information Service, had never convincingly countered the anti-German trend of the American press, it had been able to interject affirmative arguments about American neutrality politics into public opinion, reaching out to Irish and other anti-British groups as well as pacifists and other anti-war alliances.[12] Yet when Dernburg, in a public speech in Cleveland, carried the protest against the British blockade of Germany—and the American involvement in it—to the point that he defended the German action also in the case of the sinking of the Lusitania, he gave critics an easy mandate to condemn not just his insensitivity but also the German cause in general. Dernburg blamed the British for using passenger ships for ammunition transport. While he apologized for the sinking, he asserted that the British were to blame for not warning the Americans of the inherent danger.[13] Bernstorff, fearing the break in diplomatic relations, decided that Dernburg's presence in the country was no longer tenable and advised him to leave voluntarily (before being deported, as he suspected).[14]

The fact that an advertisement in which the German embassy warned passengers not to travel on British vessels appeared in the papers on the day of the Lusitania's departure from New York added to the suspicion of German guilt.

Conspiracy theories, focusing on the network of official and unofficial opera-
tives of the Reich, began to form.[15] An additional burden to any public effort
on behalf of the German cause represented the report by the Viscount James
Bryce, whom the British government had commissioned to investigate the
reports about German atrocities in Belgium. The Bryce Report was released a
week after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and Wellington House, the headquarters
of British propaganda, made sure it went to virtually every newspaper in the
United States.[16] Bryce's description of the atrocities—dismissed as fabrication
right after the war but later partly confirmed—showed the Germans in the
worst possible light, "a huge propaganda victory for the British, convincing
millions of Americans and other neutrals—the report was translated into 27
languages—that the Germans were beasts in human form."[17]

All the more impressive was Wilson's restraint in Bernstorff's eyes. Nonethe-
less he had to learn that Wilson did not easily abandon the manipulation of the
Lusitania shock effect when it became useful again in November 1915. Facing
new negotiations about the compensation question, Bernstorff spoke of a second
Lusitania crisis, which exerted new pressure on the Germans to relent in the
use of submarines.[18] When the chances for peace negotiations were weighed in
the following year, he stated in a cable to Berlin that the mood in the country
favored peace; pointing out that, in order to excite Americans to the extent
that for a certain time war with Germany seemed unavoidable, it needed the
hysterical rage that was caused by the *Lusitania* affair.[19] Aware that the hysterical
rage was not a one-time occurrence, Bernstorff relentlessly pursued a policy
of mitigation between the two powers, which did not ingratiate him with his
superiors in Berlin.

While Bernstorff maintained an unusually positive reputation in Washington
and in the White House, he was increasingly seen as a liability by the hawkish
faction in Berlin. As shown by Reinhard Doerries, the German army and navy
built their own intelligence networks in the U.S., independent from the em-
bassy, instigating several acts of sabotage in order to undermine America's war
production for the Allies. The most prominent actions were the destruction of
the Black Tom terminal in the New York harbor in July 1916 and the demoli-
tion of the big factory complex of the Canadian Car and Foundry Company in
Kingsland, New Jersey, in January 1917. Doerries points to the double-crossing
nature of German policy as the Reich was giving Wilson strong indications for its
willingness to engage in peace negotiations in the winter of 1916/17. Extremely
counterproductive, these actions intensified the search for the "enemy within,"
undermining the claims of German Americans to be patriotic Americans while
maintaining their traditional ties to Germany and German culture. Although
the German government had rarely understood the precarious position of Ger-
man Americans—either exaggerating their influence on American politics or
dismissing their stance after 1914 as disappointing in the battle for American

neutrality—it was not until the sinking of the *Lusitania* that German Americans publicly began to reevaluate their unconditional solidarity with the country of their provenance.

From the Hun Scare to the Red Scare

In view of the compulsion to organize warfare against the "enemy within," which has manifested itself at various times and with various enemies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the effect of the *Lusitania* disaster is telling in its foreboding if not in its casualties. The fact that its incendiary power resulted from the death of Americans on a British ship—not even from the attack against an American ship—illuminates the indirectness of the ensuing agitation against German Americans as the accusation of their unpatriotic stance began to resonate despite their reputation as a steadfast, well integrated segment of the American nation. In the two-year period until the declaration of war German Americans came to be identified as different, dissenting, disagreeable or outright un-American. In his own version of nativism, Theodore Roosevelt pledged "One Hundred Percent Americanism" as the measure of social acceptability, attacking "Hyphenism" as the ultimate betrayal. German Americans presented the most ostentatious target for patriotic agitation but there were other groups that drew the suspicion of the guardians of the American spirit, large groups of political dissenters such as socialists and pacifists or the unwieldy stream of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe that swelled by the millions in the prewar years and transformed America's social fabric. In his classic study of this period, *The End of American Innocence*, Henry May places this transformation between the years 1912 and 1917, characterizing it as extremely tension-ridden, close to a "cultural civil war" with its economic, racial, and educational conflicts. "Part of the reason for increasing tension was, as in earlier crises, economic." May explains:

> The depression of 1914 revived labor's fear of foreign competition, and decreased the employers' interest in a steady flow of immigrant workers. Lawrence and Paterson presented to newspaper readers the picture of the dangerous alien immigrant. And every time anybody, for any reason, worried about the preservation of the old ways, he was likely to glance, with alarm, at the annual inflow of half a million newcomers."[20]

Doubts about the loyalty of the country's large foreign-born population were accentuated by the great number of German-American rallies in which solidarity with a foreign power was used to enhance cohesiveness, activism, and ethnic pride.[21] The often irritating expressions of self-assertion of an otherwise well integrated segment of the population stirred new questions "about the nation's assimilative capacities and the impact of ethnocultural diversity on American security" with the result that "politicians and opinion leaders increasingly

called for government policies promoting national conformity."[22] Roosevelt bolstered his attacks against German-American "hyphenism" with calls for mobilizing the nation in "soul and spirit,"[23] conjuring broad-based preparedness campaigns that went much beyond what Wilson, with some hesitation, agreed to after the *Lusitania* affair. Federal agencies—the Departments of Interior, Labor, and Justice—devoted considerable energy to the assimilation crusade and established, each on its own terms, their distinctive Americanization policies.[24] Unsurprisingly, newly founded national associations, labor unions, and vigilante groups welcomed the new forms of social control that accompanied Americanization programs.

The preparedness campaigns that aimed at a buildup of American military power triggered forceful rebuttals by the newly invigorated pacifist movement. Progressive reformers and socialists, especially the radical Industrial Workers of the World, created a noisy anti-war opposition, based on the notion that only the capitalists profited from the war. Already before the United States entered the war in spring of 1917, they became targets of newly created public watchdog associations of Americanism—most prominently the American Defense Society and the National Security League—and experienced increasingly hostile attacks, surveillance, charges of anti-Americanism and unpatriotic propaganda. As in the case of German-American organizations like the National German-American Alliance, which gave its claims for American neutrality often direct and uncompromising expression, socialists and pacifists formulated their anti-war stance as part of an ideological battle, which deepened suspicion in large segments of the middle classes as well as among academics and intellectuals. Once the war was declared in spring 1917, all these proclamations in favor of American neutrality were scrutinized and exposed as demonstrations of unpatriotic behavior, even though most of its adherents fully embraced their patriotic duty, filled out the forms, and registered for the draft.[25] This response to the call of the nation notwithstanding, at this moment the mobilization of the public had assumed a momentum that used these proclamations as markers of the "enemy within," embarking on a nation-wide vendetta against dissenters wherever they could be identified.

Most historians characterize the stages that American society passed on its way towards mobilization as growing nationalist hysteria. Especially apt were Wilson's prophetic words to Frank I. Cobb on April 2, 1917: "Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fibre of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street."[26] What Wilson had sensed all along and tried to contain—at the risk of being accused of weakness—became reality even more forcefully than anticipated: once war was declared, a self-propelled mobilization of society penetrated all walks of life and ran roughshod

over individual rights, restricting free speech, privacy, and fair judicial practice. As forcefully as this mobilization was set in motion by the challenge of the outside power—usually condensed in the image of the German Kaiser or the "Hun"—its dynamics were clearly determined by domestic forces and targets, responding to the cultural wars of the preceding years in which socialists, pacifists, and immigrant groups were linked to German Americans as troublesome dissenters. Once the war started, Wilson also gave voice to this mood in his famous words, "It is not an army we must shape and train for war, it is a nation."[27] In view of the opposition of millions of Americans to the entry into the war, his administration as well as state and local authorities used a combination of persuasion and coercion to unite the country behind the war effort. After years of public debate whether the United States would benefit from the drive for unity that a mobilization for war usually produces—that the country profited greatly from its close trade cooperation with Great Britain was hardly contested at that time—the war became a reality, and the reality was first and foremost a domestic war.

In describing this war, historians have tended to focus on individual groups, thereby blurring the intertwined practices of their persecution both by public agencies and private vigilante actions. The techniques of surveillance and persecution were indeed mostly the same even though the target groups varied greatly from each other as demonstrated in the different self-perception that found expression in different narratives of victimization. The two most gripping narratives have both been linked with the rage and hysteria of national mobilization: most brutally in a form of cultural ethnic cleansing of German Americans under the suspicion of collaboration with the enemy and cultural subversion of the country, but also viciously in a campaign against socialists, which stretched far beyond the end of the European war, evolving into the battle against the "Red Scare," which branded every radical action in the political turmoil in 1919/1920 as Bolshevist under the suspicion of political subversion of the country. Both campaigns were successful in a very costly way: the presumed unification of the nation did not occur on the battlefields in France or at the peace conference in Versailles but rather in a domestic war against dissenting groups, which were never able to recover and remained rather marginal in the following decades although they were—each in a different way—routinely conjured up whenever a subversion of the country was alleged. The "Red Scare" of 1919/20 reverberated for decades, at times ignited with the harshest measures of surveillance and restriction of civil rights as in the McCarthy era; the campaign against the German menace remained a viable tool in the lower depths of the political unconscious, providing a negative mirror for the positive affirmation of the American nation. Since the socialist movement had been strongly shaped by Germans, such association can hardly surprise. In the initial perception the Bolshevist regime was branded as a tool of the German military, a kind of re-

venge for the loss of the war. In his psychological analysis of political hysteria in America, Murray Levin pointed out the connections:

> The Red Scare commenced almost immediately after the war ended. The connection is more than temporal. In some ways the Red Scare is a symbolic continuation of the Hun Scare, for the war nourished a way of looking at the world and activated many satisfying feelings which later fed the Red Scare and which, in turn, were satisfied by the hysteria. The Committee on Public Information, which was designed to produce fervent and unified support for the war, fed Americans stories of sinister German agents and international plots and conspiracies directed toward America's destruction. The Committee nourished superpatriotic instincts and American nationalism and spread the doctrine that the Reds were not only in league with the Huns, but also that the Russian revolution was a German creation. One hundred percent Americanism was the Committee's credo. Intellectuals and radicals who opposed the war were portrayed as traitors. All Germans were stereotyped as wreckers of Western civilization."[28]

Do these complex developments still resonate with the shock of the *Lusitania* disaster? Their frightening breadth, violence, and transformational potential clearly set them apart from the public convulsions of the year 1915, which expressed themselves mostly in press campaigns, diplomatic notes, and surveillance orders. What Richard Hofstadter termed the "Paranoid Style in American Politics"—defined as more than the tendency to see conspiracies or plots "here and there," namely to see "a 'vast' or 'gigantic' conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events"—does apply to the hysteria after 1917 but not yet to Wilson's measured response to the sinking of the British ocean liner.[29] Yet, the public reaction, especially from newspapers and intellectuals, already revealed a different temper in 1915. The immediate amplification of the attack into grand-scale symbolism indicated that the terms of defining the German cause was changing irreversibly. A famous cartoon in the Literary Digest on May 22, 1915, showed the attack as an encounter between CIVILIZATION—written in capital letters on the ocean liner on top of the image—and KULTUR, written on the side of the submarine that approaches the ship from below. The legend reads: "As the world sees it."[30] The image of a sneak attack of *Kultur* on civilization exposed the forceful promotion of "Kultur" as the quintessence of German ingenuity and associated it with the evil that torpedoes civilization, the bastion of values that the allies stood for. It implied both America's alignment with these values and the alignment of things German with threat and evil.

CIVILIZATION hit back, although it took some time: What was still an image in 1915 became reality in the following period when German KULTUR turned into the target of national mobilization. Though many observers realized the absurdity of this battle, only few voices dared to expose it publicly. Among

them was an anonymous writer at the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, who indulged in the irony of this *Kulturkampf*. Michael Singer, the editor of the last comprehensive assessment of German-American ethnic culture, the *Jahrbuch der Deutschameri-kaner für das Jahr 1918*, praised the *Tribune* article as a piece that should make those German Americans blush who renounced their adherence to German culture. It begins:

> An unpleasant expression of hysteria is the suggestion that German music be blacklisted. We assume that this logic would cover all things German—German literature, German science, German medicine, German food, German customs—the Christmas tree, for example. Pacifists might well cite this as one of the idiocies of war. We have an issue with the German government. We think the German state is a menace to our safety or its policy to our interests. We think it has injured us. Therefore we are to penalize ourselves by refusing to take advantage of the vast wealth of thought and feeling and beauty the genius of a race has produced. We disapprove of the Kaiser and his projects. Therefore we punish him by snubbing Beethoven. We do not like von Tirpitz. Therefore we refuse to listen to Bach, to read Goethe and Heine. [...][31]

The Quandary of the German Americans

If there is any doubt about the long-term effect of the *Lusitania* disaster, the history of German Americans provides proof. How deeply German Americans were shocked was noted by Ambassador Bernstorff:

> Not only did our propaganda break down but our political friends grew silent and did not dare to go public until the case of the "Arabic" was settled. After the "Lusitania" incident German America in the United States was dead so to speak and only slowly came to life again.[32]

Bernstorff was sensitive enough to understand what was going on behind the silence. The initiative in favor of an American embargo to stop the shipments of ammunition to the British, which had led to a conference of German-American organizations in Washington on January 30, 1915, died. It was neither the moment for boisterous demands for American neutrality nor for advertisements of unconditional German-American solidarity with the politics of the Kaiser. A poignant report of the "terrible predicament" into which German Americans were thrown with this incident appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* two years later, written by an unnamed German-American woman who deplored the "inner civil war" the *Lusitania* disaster had ignited in every German American:

> Then came the sinking of the Lusitania. Never shall I forget the moment when I picked up the paper and read the headlines. I could not see to read further. I sat down with the paper in my hands, staring into darkness. I now

believe that this event marked a crisis in many a German-American home.
[...] I am just beginning to realize what has been—what is—the state of
mind of German sympathizers living in this country. They endure civil war
within their own minds and hearts. It must be a bitterness, a disruption,
greater than any other imaginable. There are two reasons why they are so
extreme: they are forcing themselves to unnatural conclusions, and they are
maddened by pain."[33]

Shocked in 1914 by the immediate anti-German reaction of the press, German
Americans had embraced all outward signs of solidarity with the Central Powers,
organizing financial support for the war victims, returning to the classrooms
and learning German—which accounts for the phenomenal rise of German
in high schools in 1915—and generating new interest in German-American
organizations and newspapers. The new shock was not a matter of press hype,
propaganda, and ethnic pride anymore but of life and death of Americans. The
individual American of German ancestry was thrown onto a cliff where he or
she had to decide to cut these ties in order to survive the storm of patriotism
that was gaining momentum. As he had to take sides for or against the German
Empire and its conduct of war, the *Lusitania* disaster propelled him into the
dilemma that the identity politics of the initial solidarity had created. The shock
of such an attack was absorbed in various ways, from laying the blame squarely
on the British to learning a rueful distancing from the Kaiser's regime. Whereas
"church Germans" relied on the recognized division between American life and
their German-speaking God, many "club Germans" felt compelled to exhort the
overwhelmingly unorganized, vaguely informed and uncommitted majority of
the ethnic group to remain steadfast in its ethnic pride and its relief efforts for
German victims of war. In addition to language, customs, and the abhorrence
of prohibition, they erected many of those markers of ethnic identity that were
targeted once the nationalist storm was officially released.

      While the narrative of the demise of the German-American ethnic group has
concentrated on the vehemence of this storm and exposed a hysteria that made
those organizational and propagandistic actions appear rather dilettantish and
counterproductive (if not beholden to the German-American beer industry),
it has neglected to illuminate the "inner civil war" that tore apart innumerable
German-American communities. This "inner civil war" spread proportionally
to the pressure from government agencies, vigilante groups, and committed
individuals. Looking at the material that scholars have amassed on the basis of
numerous reports and documentations, the avalanche of chicanery, denouncing,
harassment, and outright abuse and persecution, culminating in the lynching of
a German immigrant, Robert Prager, in spring of 1918, is truly disconcerting.
One of the prominent progressive critics of the time, Randolph Bourne, minced
no words in regard to the outrageousness of this crusade, blaming East Coast
society, especially its social and intellectual elites. In his essay, "The War and

the Intellectuals," Bourne pointed to the unholy alliance of these elites, usually of the upper class with close ties to Britain and France, with the most illiberal and least democratic elements of the other classes. The upper-class elements in other regions identified with "this Eastern ruling group," he wrote in June 1917, adding: "It must never be forgotten that in every community it was the least liberal and least democratic elements among whom the preparedness and later the war sentiment was found. The farmers were apathetic, the small business men and workingmen are still apathetic towards the war."[34] As the rampage that was to save Americans from the "enemy within" was supported by a sizeable segment of the intellectual elites it does not suffice to ascribe its violence solely to "hysterical" outbursts of the masses. On the contrary, it was a well orchestrated movement of ethnic and political cleansing. Intellectuals conjured a coordination of political and cultural subversion.

The genius of Wilson's decision to authorize the prominent muckraker George Creel to found the Committee on Public Information (CPI) as a federally sponsored agency lay in Creel's use of voluntary ambition for national propaganda, carried by the will of the individual to ennoble itself by taking over a policing function vis-à-vis a real or fictitious threat. Typically, Creel summarized his achievements in mobilizing America in his famous book, *How We Advertised America*, by pointing to a general state of unrest in the country in which individual characteristics of dissenters faded:

> While America's summons was answered without question by the citizenship as a whole, it is to be remembered that during the three and a half years of our neutrality the land had been torn by a thousand divisive prejudices, stunned by the voices of anger and confusion, and muddled by the pull and haul of opposed interests. These were conditions that could not be permitted to endure. What we had to have was no mere surface unity, but a passionate belief in the justice of America's cause that should weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination.[35]

Encoding his work as a success story of complete Americanization, Creel formulated the official narrative of these years with which the narratives of victimization of a special segment—German Americans or socialists—could hardly compete. In the case of German Americans, neither the press nor clubs or organizations were able to organize their plight into persuasive narratives that spread beyond the confines of the ethnic group. And when the group—which actually was not one group but rather hundreds of differently structured and organized communities—did come together in a remarkably sacrificial, well coordinated four-year effort to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars for the relief of German war victims, the financial campaign needed to be kept out of the national limelight and did not even get the deserved recognition from the

German and Austrian governments.[36] Historians have usually subscribed to Creel's credo of uniting the nation for war, while the narratives of victimization of the individual groups remained a matter for their historians. In the case of the German Americans, the credo of the need to unify the ethnic group, which amounted to the complaint about its failure to unite, dominated the historical narrative, thus distracting from the pains of exclusion as the "enemy within."[37] A discussion of this exclusion did not materialize where it belonged: within the national discourse about the achievements and blunders of America's mobilization in World War I.

Although German Americans usually referred to their service to the American nation in war, education, abolition, and colonization of vast areas, a particular agenda of political commitment in the spirit of the Forty-eighters did not survive into the twentieth century. The considerable contribution of the Forty-eighters, the refugees of the 1848 revolution in Europe, to the political and intellectual life of the country was forgotten or, as in the case of Carl Schurz, absorbed by the satisfaction over a successful integration. Otherwise Reinhold Niebuhr, the aspiring theologian who saw in assimilation the only way to overcome the inner division and pain of German America, would not have come to the conclusion in his famous article of 1916, "The Failure of German Americanism:" The German-American "has manifested no great interest in a single one of the great moral, political, or religious questions that have agitated the minds of the American people in late years." The American people did not feel hostility "to our ideals" but rather indifference on the side of German Americans. "The German-American had poorly fortified himself by solid achievement against the day when his loyalty would be, justly or unjustly, questioned."[38]

Similar to the poet Hermann Hagedorn and his criticism of the German Americans, Niebuhr contradicted the claims of the propagandist George Sylvester Viereck, editor of The Fatherland, that German Americans should be seen as a counterweight to the British influence in the struggle for America's soul and its neutrality toward the European entanglements in war.[39] Niebuhr made a point in stressing that German Americans had been unstinting in their service to the nation during four wars—indeed a matter of great pride—but insisted that they had not made a particular effort in displaying active support of the American ideals in times of peace. Invoking the laudable achievements of modern Germany as "a clinic of humanizing industry," he chided German America for failing in the transfer of these concepts: "While America has freely borrowed from Germany in workmen's compensation and insurance legislation and other kindred measures, the German-American did not turn a hand to facilitate this importation. The Jew has been a far more potent factor in modern social tendencies than the German-American."[40] Different from Randolph Bourne and other Progressives who kept Germany's advances in civic administration, community organization, and social politics in view despite the overwhelming

negative clichés about the country's military spirit, Niebuhr used the issue as an argument for distancing himself from German Americans as a group that not only failed to espouse American ideals but also remained indifferent to the modern advances of the Fatherland.

This clearly did not constitute a narrative of victimization—and was close to blaming the victims for the persecution—but rather of disappointment and failure. It is illuminating that Niebuhr kept a rather high opinion of Germany as a strong initiator of modernization, contrasting it with the conservative and rather sedate and unenlightened spirit of German America, a characterization that H. L. Mencken, another heretic German American, shared. While contrasting Germany with German Americans at their expense is not exactly a rare occurrence—the rituals of indulging in the shortcomings of the ethnic group, especially among academics, are rather gratuitous—it might help define the quandary of German Americans who, after the generation of the Forty-eighters had vanished, conveyed no particular political mission. As the German political system was shunned as autocratic and militaristic, maintaining public arguments for the allegiance that went beyond language use, traditional rituals, and drinking beer became very hard. Not surprisingly, ethnic organizations and journalists that tried to display leadership reverted to wrapping their message of self-confidence in the concept of culture or *Kultur*, using a recognized notion of Germanness without directly referring to politics, often directly resorting to the well honed academic and educational mission. Because this concept had been embraced in earlier decades by middle-class Americans with a sense for social and educational advancement, it still carried the cachet of a distinction that other ethnic groups could not muster. It was at this stage of disconnect with the nation's declared enemy, yet of defiance as a proud minority, that the reference to culture assumed more than "cultural" meaning, namely social and even racial distinction. The implied higher status of *Kultur*, which many of those middle-class Americans had previously accepted as a distinction, suddenly appeared as mere arrogance and vapidity. The use of this concept both on the part of German-American leaders, who conjured its elevating power, and on the part of their adversaries, who denounced it as a prescription for undermining the American nation, confirmed its importance for the struggle of the ethnic group as an entity.

In this context the use of the term *Kultur* by the leading representative of a German-American organization, Charles Hexamer, president of the German-American National Alliance, in a much quoted speech in Milwaukee in 1915 cannot be reduced to a mere attack against the cultural inferiority of the American nation. This was done upon the suggestion of Gustavus Ohlinger, a German American from Ohio who embarked on a broad vendetta accusing Germans and German Americans of undermining American culture, at the Senate hearings that prepared the bill to dissolve the National German-American Alliance in

April 1918. Hexamer's choice of words marks without doubt a feeling of supe-
riority that his fellow German Americans were supposed to hold up, yet it was
also carried by the indignation to be lumped together with other immigration
groups that he considered culturally inferior. "For a long time we have suffered
the preachment," Hexamer exclaimed, "'You Germans must allow yourselves to
be assimilated, you must be merged into the American people'; but no one will
find us prepared to step down to a lesser kultur; no, we have made it our aim to
draw the others up to us."[41] Hexamer's frustration was clearly grist for the mill
of anti-Germanism, yet as much as it justified suspicion and aversion among
opinion leaders in the mobilization campaign, it also revealed the idiosyncrasies
of an ethnic minority that still tried to collect points for its higher standing in
an increasingly raucous immigration society.[42] The increasing use of the term
culture among German-American opinion leaders directly reflected both their
attempts to keep themselves above the machinations of political and social dis-
senters and the futility of recharging the group's genuine Americanism against
a well organized campaign of vilification.

    This predicament became all the more perilous as the insistence on holding
on to culture simultaneously intensified the entrapment in culture, which meant
the persecution of the German language both in public and even in church ser-
vices, the closing of German schools and prohibiting the teaching of German
in many states, the abolishing of German names of towns and streets, and the
censorship and restrictions of the German press.[43] As German Departments at
colleges and research universities had enhanced their standing as facilitators of
both liberal arts education and scholarship, for which German *Kultur* and *Wis-
senschaft* represented core factors, they lost this edge when German culture was
increasingly associated with adversity, threat, and suspicion.[44] Two prominent
academics at Harvard, Kuno Francke and Hugo Münsterberg, came to repre-
sent the mixed reaction of German faculties to this association: while Francke
tried to keep close ties to German culture yet a measured distance to German
politics, Münsterberg engaged in a strong public defense of Germany's political
and military conduct. Münsterberg faced unrelenting polemics and was banished
from the university; Francke, thoroughly discouraged in his endeavor to promote
German culture as a boon for American education, withdrew from Harvard in
1917. As Germany itself insisted on labeling the war as a war about culture,
George Creel had an easy time in mobilizing resistance against manifestations
of another culture, not just of other political and ideological opinions. Incited
by the invocation of *culture* and *civilization* as the great dividers of good and
evil, friend and foe that the *Lusitania* affair had set in motion, Americans took
this code, especially when pressed by an ethnic group, as a promoter of their
preparedness for war. More than three thousand miles away from the European
battlefields, they came close to the Europeans in their full embrace of warfare
as a physical and mental activity. In this embrace Creel considered the home

front as important as the battlefield:

> The trial of strength was not only between massed bodies of armed men, but
> between opposed ideals, and moral verdicts took on all the value of military
> decisions. Other wars went no deeper than the physical aspects, but Ger-
> man *Kultur* raised issues that had to be fought out in the hearts and minds
> of people as well as on the actual firing line.[45]

Historians of the American mobilization for World War I have left little doubt
that the success of the story of national unification, in which George Creel's
CPI played a central role in Wilson's war efforts, was in itself a propaganda tool
that blocked the view at the political and psychological destructions it caused.[46]
In a different take on the loss of American innocence that concentrates on the
comparison of the war effort within the U.S. and that of the American Expe-
ditionary Force (AEF) in France, Meirion and Susie Harries even speak of the
"failure of Woodrow Wilson and his war managers to unite the country behind
the war," conceding that the "CPI's gigantic effort" had not been without effect.
They explain:

> What the propaganda had done was intensify many of the pressures that
> had been building up within American society before the war, to the point
> where an explosion was inevitable. The war effort, as much as the fighting
> itself, was inflicting damage on the American psyche that in some ways was
> irreversible. This became most obvious in the summer and fall of 1918, a
> period of mass paranoia to rival the later McCarthy era, when hatred, mis-
> trust, and hysteria would grip the nation.[47]

The main instrument of repression was the Sedition Act in May 1918, which
reinforced and extended the Espionage Act. Disloyalty became a crime, punishable
by a $10,000 fine or 20 years in prison; obstructing the draft was an offense as
was opposing the Liberty Loan scheme, spreading depressing rumors about the
war, or calling for a revolution along Soviet lines.[48] Given these blows against
the democratic fabric of American society, one might conclude that German
Americans, pacifists, socialists, and trade unionists were not the only victims
of the mobilization effort; yet the force of the cultural ethnic cleansing, which
shattered the German American community, was unparalleled. In comparison,
General Pershing's strikes against the German army in France were rather limited,
impressing the world more with the threat of American mobilization than with
the actual military intervention in the forests of Lorraine.[49] British and French
leaders, who had implored Wilson to mobilize in support of their side, had to
wait a full year for American troops after his declaration of war, but then were
neither particularly cooperative in accommodating Pershing's sketchily trained
AEF in spring 1918 nor interested in having the Americans take the lead before
they themselves secured the spoils of war. They clearly succeeded in Versailles,

leaving Wilson alone on the high road. Inciting Americans on the home front brought the United States into the war but had little to do with facilitating the deployment of the Doughboys "over there." The AEF had to purchase most of what it used in Europe—artillery from France and tanks and planes from both France and Britain.[50] The much discussed plan to stage an overwhelming offensive early in 1919, which would drive Germany into surrender and win Wilson's idealistic peace, remained an American dream. At best, it contributed to Ludendorff's decision to ask for an armistice before it could be realized.

The Fractured Intellectual Mobilization

Wilson's shrewd manipulation of the *Lusitania* shock carried its weight until the Germans became serious in resuming unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917. At that moment his political options became precariously limited, and yet the public saw the *Lusitania* as giving legitimacy to his declaration of war. Shocks of this magnitude legitimize great political maneuvers as modern American history has shown. But the *Lusitania* effect was not all shock. For many Americans, especially intellectuals, journalists, and academics, whose response at the outbreak of war had been an often furious turn against the German empire, its culture, and its Kaiser, the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine caused a feeling of spiteful satisfaction, in the sense of "I told you so!" What had been a gut reaction to the war politics of an increasingly suspect European nation that had challenged Britain and appeared threatening to the United States, was now legitimized in its harshness, releasing restraints of neutrality and scruples vis-à-vis an admired cultural power. The abovementioned cartoon, in which the submarine of KULTUR torpedoes Western CIVILIZATION, profiled the crucial components of a discourse that had come to dominate the public exchange about the warring powers especially among the intellectual elites. Britain's successful propaganda campaign against the barbarous "Hun," revealed in the atrocities against Belgian civilians, was to undermine Germany's insistence that it fought this war for the defense of a higher culture.

A substantial segment of American academics had been trained at German universities and felt challenged in their attachment to that country when the war broke out. Many of them lost their often romantic affection as the endless flood of pro-British books, articles, and speeches shook the feeling of neutrality.[51] Most influential was the argument that Germans themselves had betrayed their higher culture by submitting to the militarism and authoritarianism of Prussia. In view of this betrayal—promoted in a plethora of publications that usually featured culture or *Kultur* in the title[52]—the turn of the individual American against Germany and its *Kultur* lost the character of a betrayal with the outrage over the *Lusitania* incident. The outrage was most convenient for those with strong and well-known ties to Germany—German Americans and others—to declare a categorical break. Even the most militant observer who

pleaded for entering the war with Germany after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Theodore Roosevelt, insisted that this incident had made him go this route, being of German heritage: "It has been a matter of sincere regret to me to part company with so many German friends who believe that I have been unkind to Germany."[53] Indeed, Roosevelt found admiring words for Germany—"The German element has contributed so much to our national life, and can yet do much more in music, in literature, in art, in sound constructive citizenship"[54]—but insisted that with the attack on the *Lusitania* there could be no dual loyalty, no hyphenism among Americans, and Germany needed to be punished.

The thesis of the two Germanies juxtaposed Prussian militarism with the high culture of Beethoven, Goethe, and Kant. It was used to answer the most often asked question—why the German people, at once scientifically and culturally advanced and with a tradition of work ethic, orderliness, and romantic self-indulgence, could be at the same time so militaristic, autocratic, ruthless, even barbaric. A perplexing link between the two was built by John Dewey, the philosopher who had once studied in Germany and traced the roots of the dichotomy to the dissociation of abstract ideals and everyday action, blaming Kant for setting up a gospel of duty without filling it with a concrete agenda of moral and humanistic behavior.[55] Closer to the original thesis, President Wilson, in his war address to Congress on April 2, 1917, separated the "military masters of Germany, who proved to be also the masters of Austria-Hungary" from the "German people": "We have no feeling toward them but one of sympathy and friendship."[56] This differentiation proved convenient in many ways—also for later decades in the twentieth century—not least for Germans themselves.

However, the validity of this thesis was not a given for those who entertained an informed dialogue with contemporary Germany and its cultural and organizational potential, at least during the period of America's neutrality. Most prominent among them were Progressives who had studied in Germany or taken inspiration from the social agenda of German economists and reformers like Gustav Schmoller in their attempts to place American urban industrial society on a socially sound foundation. Centered on a critique of capitalism and its abuses by industry and city bosses, Progressives responded to the much debated instability and injustices of the economic system, drawing on German concepts of social politics, city government, and effective national organization. For reformers such as Frederic Howe, whose volume, *Socialized Germany* (1915), espoused the virtues of German city planning, the differentiation between a good and a bad Germany did not make sense because they felt drawn to new organizational models for mastering progress and modernity that integrated nationalism. Several expressed a sense of perplexed admiration for the intensity and efficiency of German organization, which characterized both military and social politics of that country and transcended the established clichés of its subjugation to the prophets of nationalist ruthlessness, Nietzsche, Treitschke,

and Bernhardi. When Max Eastman, the prominent socialist, in 1916 published a book with the risky title, *Understanding Germany*, in which he displayed this perplexed admiration, he was strongly rebuked. His conclusion that "popular welfare insured by a centralized government" was "a policy of German culture that will become the common heritage of the world, whatever way the war goes,"[57] did not ingratiate him with journalists and academics. In this context, Eastman's comment, "that even the sinking of the *Lusitania* is not a reasonable occasion for directing our single hatred against Germany,"[58] is hardly unexpected. He admired the French for their ability to "abstract from their personal passions in making intellectual judgments," quoting a Frenchman in Paris who told a surprised American correspondent: "I think the Germans are altogether right about the *Lusitania*. They do not put their case well, but their main position is unassailable. In the present state of sea war they must sink on sight a ship loaded with enemy munitions."[59]

Randolph Bourne, with H. L. Mencken, one of the most outspoken critics of America's abandonment of neutrality, refrained from such provocative musings about the *Lusitania* when he attacked America's embrace of war as a viable option for enhancing national unity. Yet Bourne also did not shy away from direct comparisons of American and German ways of organizing modernity in highly developed industrial societies. In his article of September 1915 in the *New Republic*, "American Use for German Ideals," Bourne espoused, though uneasily, the modernizing energies of German organized collectivism, comparing them favorably with Anglo-American individualism:

> Although it becomes more and more evident that, whatever the outcome of the war, all the opposing countries will be forced to adopt German organization, German collectivism, and have indeed shattered already most of the threads of their old easy individualism, we have taken the occasion rather to repudiate that modest collectivism which was raising its head here in the shape of the progressive movement in national politics.[60]

Already in his probing analysis, "A Glance at German 'Kultur'," of February 1915, Bourne had put the criticism of German militarism and autocracy in a comparative framework, advocating the message that one could not talk about the wrongs of Germany without discussing the defects of America. With this approach, which focused on the social, organizational, and aesthetic advancements in Germany, Bourne was less successful in shaping the perception of modern Germany than Thorstein Veblen, who employed many of the clichés about Germany's imperial feudalism that circulated in the Allied and American press. Sharing Bourne's disdain for war as a catalyst for reform, Veblen differed considerably in his insistence on Germany's peculiar dichotomy between the remarkable industrial progress and the reactionary autocracy that ruled the *Kaiserreich*. Veblen's legacy was the insistence that its reactionary spirit sought

aggressiveness and militarism as a way to counteract democracy and its disintegration of hierarchical discipline.[61] This argument retained much of its explanatory power in coming decades. After World War II it contributed to the prevailing view of American politicians and historians in which the United States, thanks to its democratic constitution, remained on the high road of modernization while Germany, by rejecting democracy, derailed off the path to modernity.

Bourne's legacy is different as he pointed to the need for interconnecting American modernity with that of other nations and committing its democracy to multiculturalism, or in his words, "a trans-national America." "It will be folly to hurry [America] into a premature and sentimental nationalism," he warned in July 1916. "No Americanization will fulfill this vision which does not recognize the uniqueness of this trans-nationalism of ours."[62] Although Germany clearly was not a model in this self-definition, Bourne projected its potential for generating modernity.

> Both England and France are fighting to conserve, rather than to create," he argued in "American Use for German Ideals." "Our ideal we can only find in our still pioneer, still struggling American spirit. It will not be found in any purported defense of present 'democracy,' 'civilization,' 'humanity.' The horrors of peace in industrial plutocracies will always make such terms very nebulous. It will have to be in terms of values which secure all the vital fruits of the German ideals, without the tragic costs.[63]

The mobilization for America's entry into the war had its own tragic costs at home, aside from the 53,000 Americans killed on the battlefields. In his main argument against Dewey's endorsement of the war as a means for social reform at home and the advancement of its world mission abroad, Bourne asserted that the unrestrained use of hysteria and repression against minorities and dissenters in the mobilization contradicted the claim that America's engagement in the war was a sure way to achieve democratization in the world ("The Collapse of American Strategy," "A War Diary").[64] Indeed, in 1917/18 the defense of democracy and civilization amounted to a hardly controllable drive against an assumed cultural and political subversion of the country. Obsessed with the themes of subversion and disloyalty, innumerable private and public organizations chased what Hofstadter later defined as the image "of a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life."[65] What Gustavus Ohlinger fed into the hearings of the Senate Subcommittee in spring 1918 was exactly the notion of the cultural subversion with which German Americans as proxies of the German empire undermined the United States.[66] The fact that the campaign of outlawing the teaching of German in schools continued long after the armistice with Germany confirmed that the mobilization against subversion had developed a momentum of its own, feeding fully into the Red Scare and disenchantment of

the postwar years.

What Bourne had held against the ideal hopes of his teacher John Dewey—that they led to the bungling of democracy in defense of democracy—found its most devastating analysis in H. L. Mencken's polemic fireworks when he attacked "the colossal waste of public money, the savage persecution of all opponents and critics of the war, the open bribery of labor, the half-insane reviling of the enemy, the manufacture of false news, the knavish robbery of enemy civilians, the incessant spy hunts, the floating of public loans by a process of blackmail, the degradation of the Red Cross to partisan uses, the complete abandonment of all decency, decorum and self-respect." Aside from the fact that the Germans were incredibly demonized but assumed to surrender immediately once the American force entered the battle, Mencken found most detestable "the capital fact that the war was 'sold' to the American people, as the phrase has it, not by appealing to their courage, but by appealing to their cowardice."[67]

At the time of Mencken's devastating insights into a larger phenomenon of American history, John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, and other liberal intellectuals who had joined the mobilization for war had given up on their hopes and illusions. Although Bourne clearly had been more insightful, they failed to give him credit—as did others.[68] He could not continue the debate, succumbing to the ravaging influenza epidemic in 1919. Yet Dewey and others did express their disillusionment about the fact that "instead of aiding progressive reform, the war had encouraged reactionary and intolerant forces at home and abroad."[69]

In America's mobilization against Germany in World War I the long-standing battle for cultural independence from Europe reappeared with a vengeance. After the *Lusitania* incident this battle turned into an outright cancellation of the German influence that for several decades had contributed substantially to the development of an immigration society with an Anglo-Saxon hegemonic culture towards a modern unified nation. What first seemed like a negotiation of a new identity on the world stage, contained under the roof of Wilson's diplomacy, developed into a domestic war on culture, social radicalism, and pacifism. In the narrative of the fast escalation towards a national witch-hunt, the effect of the *Lusitania* affair can be measured in its use for projecting threat, subversion, and enmity. As such it has retained its significance for illuminating the roots of the less formidable features of America's handling of democracy in its encounter with the reality of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

[1] Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, 1914–1915 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 372. A first version of this article was presented at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Max Kade Institute at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on October 23, 2008.
[2] Diana Preston, *Wilful Murder: The Sinking of the Lusitania* (London/New York: Doubleday, 2002); David Ramsay, *Lusitania: Saga and Myth* (London: Chatham, 2001); Conrad Allen,

Murder on the Lusitania (New York: St. Martin's Minotaur, 1999); Patrick O'Sullivan, *The Lusitania: Unraveling the Mysteries* (Westlink Park: Collins Press, 1998); Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *Seven Days to Disaster* (New York: Putnam, 1982); Ruth Glass, *A Ten-Year-Old on the Lusitania, 1910* (Alexandria: Alexander Street Press, 2003); Thomas Andrew Bailey and Paul B. Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy* (New York: Free Press, 1975); John Price Jones, *America Entangled: The Secret Plotting of German Spies in the United States and the Inside Story of the Sinking of the Lusitania* (New York: A. C. Laut, 1917).

[3] Colin Simpson, *Lusitania* (London: Longman, 1972).

[4] Bailey and Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster* (note 2).

[5] O'Sullivan, *The Lusitania* (note 2).

[6] "But why did you kill us?" *Current Opinion* 58, No 6 (June 1915): 380.

[7] Hugh Thomas, "Remember the *Maine*?" *The New York Review of Books* (April 23, 1998): 10.

[8] Richard Gid Powers, "The Evil That Lurks in the Enemy Within," *The New York Times* (June 16, 2002): WK 1, 14.

[9] Graf Johann-Heinrich Bernstorff, *Deutschland und Amerika: Erinnerungen aus dem fünfjährigen Kriege* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1920), 150 (my translation).

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 186.

[11] Bernstorff, *Deutschland und Amerika*, 27 (note 9; my translation).

[12] Reinhard Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908–1917* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 39–76.

[13] "Sinking Justified, Says Dr. Dernburg," *The New York Times* (May 9, 1915): 4.

[14] Bernstorff, 144 f.

[15] As an example, John Price Jones, *America Entangled : The Secret Plotting of German Spies in the United States and the Inside Story of the Sinking of the Lusitania* (New York: A. C. Laut, 1917).

[16] Thomas Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 53.

[17] Ibid., 55.

[18] See the chapter, "Die zweite 'Lusitania'-Krisis," in: Bernstorff, 210–37 (note 9).

[19] Cable to Berlin, July 13, 1916, ibid., 278.

[20] Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 347.

[21] The particular case of native Germans and Austrians who lived in the U.S. and were declared "enemy aliens" has been analyzed in the context of the mobilization campaign by Jörg Nagler, *Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg: "Feindliche Ausländer" und die amerikanische Heimatfront im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000).

[22] Daniel J. Tichener, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 139.

[23] Roosevelt, 42, 55, 186 and passim (note 10).

[24] Tichener, 140 (note 22).

[25] William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 88–91; Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 2008).
[26] Quoted after H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917–1918* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 11.
[27] John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 244.
[28] Murray B. Levin, *Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression* (New York/London: Basic Books, 1971), 92 f.
[29] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," in: *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York; Knopf, 1965), 29.
[30] Reprinted in Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 89.
[31] Michael Singer, "Deutschamerika in den Kriegsjahren," *Jahrbuch der Deutschamerikaner für das Jahr 1918: Mit einer übersichtlichen Schilderung der Haltung der amerikanischen Regierung und der Deutschamerikaner bis zum Eintritt Amerika's in den Krieg*, ed. Michael Singer, vol. 4 (Chicago: German Yearbook, 1917), 165.
[32] Bernstorff, 142 (note 9; my translation). The British ocean liner *Arabic* was sunk with several Americans on board by a German submarine on August 19, 1915.
[33] M. L. S., "The Wives of German-Americans," *Atlantic Monthly* 119 (1917): 789.
[34] Randolph S. Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915–1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York; Harper & Row, 1964), 5.
[35] George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York/London: Harper, 1920), 5.
[36] Michael Singer (note 31) gave the most comprehensive account of the nation-wide campaign of *Kriegsfürsorge* for German war victims that German Americans undertook during the war years (up to 1917), with listings of individual cities, and a special section about the help for Germans in East Prussia. ("Deutschamerika in den Kriegsjahren," *Jahrbuch der Deutschamerikaner*: esp. 204–71, 150–7) Frequent accounting also in *Mitteilungen des Deutschamerikanischen Nationalbundes* (note 42).
[37] John A. Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America: The Germans in the United States of America during the Nineteenth Century—and After* (New York/London: Putnam, 1940). Heinz Kloss, in his *völkisch* inspired volume, *Um die Einigung des Deutschamerikanertums: Die Geschichte einer unvollendeten Volksgruppe* (Berlin: Volk und Reich, 1937), treats the material as if the history of German Americans developed independently from American history. Frederick C. Luebke, in his path-braking *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), established the model for a balanced assessment of American and minority history.
[38] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Failure of German-Americanism," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (1916): 14 f. Niebuhr was not alone in his criticism of the cultural inertia of German Americans. Camillo von Klenze, Professor of German at New York University, countered the usual pro-Germanism with sober assessments such as: "In what we might call spiritual empire building, the contributions of German-Americans has not been satisfactory." His critical speech to German-American women in the Astor Hotel, New York, was featured in the *New York Times* on October 23, 1916 ("Says Germans Fail to Uplift America: Little Infusion of German Thought into Country's Life, Dr. von Klenze Declares"). See also Klenze's speech before the German University League in New York on March 17, 1915 (*Die Zukunft der deutschen Kultur in Amerika*. Providence: Brown University, 1915).

[39] Richard Whitman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 43 f. See also Phyllis Keller, *German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 189–255.

[40] Niebuhr, 16 (note 38).

[41] Quoted from *Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Sixty-fifth Congress, Second Session on S. 3529. A Bill to repeal the Act Entitled "An Act to Incorporate the National German-American Alliance," Approved February 25, 1907, February 23-April 13, 1918* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 25 f. Illuminating in this respect is the speech, "Die deutsche Bewegung in Amerika" (1912), by Hexamer's "Freund und Mitkämpfer" Julius Goebel, Professor of German at the University of Illinois, and his critique of Israel Zangwill's Drama "The Melting Pot." Goebel, *Der Kampf um die deutsche Kultur in Amerika* (Leipzig: Dürr, 1914), esp. 11–13.

[42] See the article in the last issue of *Mitteilungen des Deutschamerikanischen Nationalbundes der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* in 1918 that was not distributed anymore: "Every descendant of Germans is classed with Pacifists, traitors and spies despite the fact, that these people are subject to draft rules and are contributing to every war campaign with the others." ("A Plea for Real Unity," 4 f.). The issue is preserved in the German-American Collection of the German Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

[43] The most thorough and comprehensive account of the mobilization against German Americans with focus on the Midwest where it was most brutal is Katja Wüstenbecker's *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg* (note 30). Still a valuable source is Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War (With Special Emphasis on Ohio's German-Language Press)* (Columbus: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1936).

[44] Gustavus Ohlinger considered American universities a crucial gateway for the subversion of the United States from the side of Germany (*The German Conspiracy in American Education*, New York: Doran, 1919, 33–39).

[45] Creel, 3 (note 35).

[46] Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. 59–69; William J. Breen, *Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917–1919* (Westport, CT/ London: Greenwood Press, 1984). See also the more systematizing study of war mobilization by Arthur A. Stein (*The Nation at War*, Baltimore/ London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 53) who sums up: "The fundamental conclusion here is that domestic cohesion decreases during wartime as a function of the process of mobilization, despite any positive effects the war may have in bringing a society together."

[47] Meirion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917–1918* (New York: Random House, 1997), 293.

[48] Ibid., 302.

[49] This did not go unnoticed by German Americans. In the abovementioned article, "A Plea for Real Unity," (note 42), the author summarizes: "This system of warfare, which fights Germany here rather than abroad and wastes a vast amount of good energy, has enlisted not only the press, but also the pulpit and forum to a most alarming degree." (4)

[50] See Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25–58 and passim; Stanley Weintraub, *A Stillness Heard Round the World: The End of the Great War, November 1918*

(New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985)

[51] Fraser J. Harbutt observes that the initial stage of attacks and rebuttals between English and German intellectuals after the outbreak of war received much attention in the U.S. before a more distanced concept of neutrality—which became economically highly profitable—developed. "War, Peace, and Commerce: The American Reaction to the Outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914," in: *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914*, eds. Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (New York/ Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), 320–34. About the dominance of British views see Jessica Bennett and Mark Hampton, "World War I and the Anglo-American Imagined Community: Civilization vs. Barbarism in British Propaganda and American Newspapers," in: *Anglo-American Media Interactions, 1850–2000*, eds. Joel H. Wiener and Mark Hampton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 155–75.

[52] The most concise definition of the thesis of the two Germanies can be found in Oswald Garrison Villard, *Germany Embattled: An American Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 30–44. For the different approaches to culture see Frank Trommler, "Inventing the Enemy: German-American Cultural Relations, 1900–1917," in: *Confrontation and Cooperation: Germany and the United States in the Era of World War I, 1900–1924*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schröder (Providence/Oxford: Berg, 1993), 99–125. Symptomatic: Hugo Münsterberg, *The War and America* (New York/London: Appleton, 1914), John Cowper Powys, *The War and Culture: A Reply to Professor Münsterberg* (New York: Arnold Shaw, 1914), Simon Nelson Patten, *Culture and War* (New York: Huebsch, 1916).

[53] Roosevelt, *Fear God...* (note 9), 40.

[54] Ibid., 41.

[55] John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York; Putnam, 1915).

[56] *War Addresses of Woodrow Wilson* (with an introduction and notes by Arthur Roy Leonard) (Boston: Ginn, 1918), 53, 42.

[57] Max Eastman, *Understanding Germany: The Only Way to End War and Other Essays* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1916), 55.

[58] Ibid., 25.

[59] Ibid., 163.

[60] "American Use for German Ideals," *The New Republic* (September 4, 1915): 117–19. Quoted from Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals* (note 34), 50.

[61] Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

[62] "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 86–97, quoted from Bourne, 122 (note 34).

[63] "American Use for German Ideals," (note 34): 50 f.

[64] Bourne, 22–35, 36–47.

[65] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style* (note 29), 29.

[66] Ohlinger, *The German Conspiracy in American Education* (note 44). See also his *Their True Faith and Allegiance* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), and Frederic William Wile, *The German-American Plot: The Record of a Great Failure* (London: Arthur Pearson, 1915).

[67] "On Being an American," in: H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices, Third Series* (New York: Knopf, 1922), 46 f. (reprinted New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

[68] Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 231–40.

[69] Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change* (note 27), 245.