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Liberty Loans, Loyalty Oaths, and the Street Name Swap: Anti-German Sentiment in Ohio, Spring 1918

In 1914, patterns of nativism experienced a drastic transformation—in Ohio and around the nation. Prior to the beginning of World War I, international conflict generally incited rampant nationalism and quelled any nativist tone. American citizens and immigrants banded together under a common cause. Escalating differences with Germany, however, sparked the most ardent nationalism and widespread nativism ever witnessed in the United States. With Germans representing the largest number of foreign-born persons in the country, the situation was ripe for confrontation. In the period of neutrality, a significant number of Germans residing in the United States voiced sympathy for the cause of their homeland. Voices of protest from the German-American community exacerbated tensions. Extreme nationalists interpreted German concern for their former country as outright anti-American sentiment. In the months leading to American entry into the war, normal relations between the native stock and the German community deteriorated. The former perception of German immigrants that accepted them as easily assimilable and patriotic turned to a harsh xenophobia centered around accusations of disloyalty. Matters in Ohio—and the rest of the country—grew even worse as the war escalated.[1]

By the spring of 1918, the pitch of nativism reached its peak. As American soldiers began entering the fighting in Europe, support for the war at home became even more widespread. It is during this time that historians argue that the distrust and intolerance of anything linked to German origin reached virtually all levels of American society. Moreover, scholars contend that mob rule became the norm across the nation. So-called superpatriots led supporters of the American war effort to confront, at times violently, any person of German descent to ensure loyalty to the United States. The historiography of American nativism during World War I resembles a formula of citing incidents

Ohio cities in newspaper survey.

of public rallies, forced professions of loyalty, tar-and-featherings of alleged disloyalists, book burnings, and the extreme nativist action in the public lynching of a German immigrant in Collinsville, Illinois, in early April 1918. Unfortunately, the student of this era comes away with the perception that the nativist response to German immigrants and American citizens of German ancestry during World War I should be considered uniform across the country.[2]

There is no doubt that nativism during the war was ubiquitous. To argue, however, that there existed no divergence in the style of nativism perpetrated in the United States is misleading. A selective study of Ohio newspapers during the spring of 1918 reveals that there were different kinds of opposition—common acts, collective action, and symbolic action. Each of the styles sought the same end: loyalty of immigrants to the American war effort. To that degree, my research agrees with the previous scholarship on nativist reaction to German-Americans during World War I. Fear of suspected German attempts to undermine war preparation on the home front compelled an array of activities to ensure the loyalty of Germans in America. The nationalist movement, likewise, sought to eradicate any suspected disloyalty even when sufficient evidence did not exist. Ohio newspapers are filled with demands for outward displays of superpatriotism. Yet the story is more complicated than that.

By examining a cross-section of newspapers from large metropolitan cities to small rural towns in Ohio, a picture of the various and distinctive styles of nativism develops. The research for this study included thirteen Ohio newspapers—chosen with an organized randomness. All of the major urban areas were covered—Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus—plus, a broad geographical survey of the smaller towns and rural counties of the state was made—Alliance, Batavia, Cambridge, Coshocton, Hamilton, Marion, and Sandusky. Area papers over the spring of 1918 were scoured for articles and editorial comments on "patriotic" activities or blatant nativist reaction to German-Americans and immigrants. The results of the study clarify and amplify our knowledge of American nativism in the past.

The historiography of anti-German sentiment is partially correct in stating that certain acts of nativism occurred frequently and almost universally. These "common acts," however, did not include rampant violence or mob rule. In the case of Ohio, frequent ventures aimed against the German community primarily focused on the removal of the perceived dangers inherent in the immigrant culture. Newspapers often ran stories on opinion pages about the dangers of the "concerted propaganda of pro-Germans" that sought to undermine American efforts at garnering support for the war effort. The large numbers of German-language newspapers and German organizations, most agreed, easily perpetrated

the propaganda machine. Strict guidelines over what German language papers could publish sought to curtail any possible undermining of federal government or local policies. Pressure over the alleged pro-German activities within local and national organizations forced the closing of numerous societies including the disbanding of the National German American Alliance.[3]

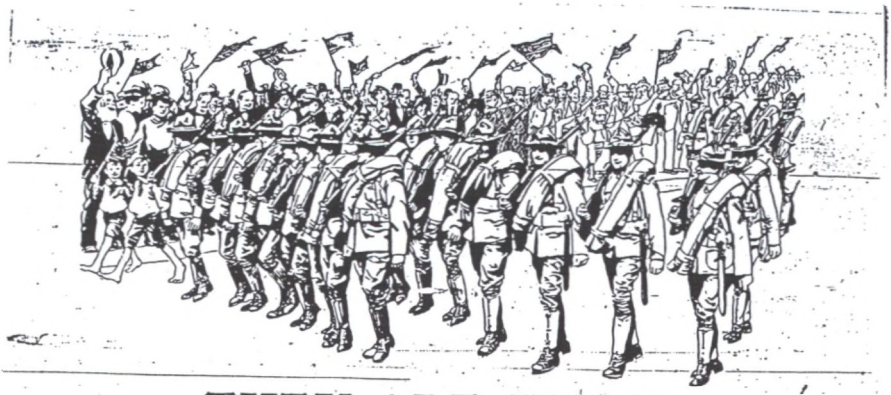
Ohio patriots, moreover, voiced concern that the state itself sanctioned the advancement of what they termed "Hun 'Kultur.'" Before the war, the study of German history, language, and culture had been an active part of the school system. Language study proved valuable for the adjustment of the most populous immigrant group in the state. In Ohio's 1910 census, the "foreign-born white stock" was almost 42 percent German. Similar numbers appear for the 1920 tally. The importance of utilizing the study of German in the school comes forth through these numbers. Public sentiment, however, changed with the onset of the war. Influenced by the level of tension between the United States and Germany, Ohioans felt that the continuance of German language and culture study harmed their children.[4]

Those battling to end the use of anything of German origin turned to the press. A newspaper article in the *Sandusky Register*—and typical for Ohio—stated that the "German language had been cunningly foisted upon the public school system." Moreover, the "textbooks [represented] vehicles for years of Prussian propaganda," in that they were "illustrated from start to finish with pictures showing the glories of life in Germany." Even more vivid was a political cartoon in the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* that depicted the near consensus perception of "German language in our public schools" (see Figure 1).[5]

In response to this widespread view of what might result if the study of German continued, public opinion across Ohio called for the immediate removal of language study and other German-related topics. Supporters of the ban used this common reasoning: "We do not hate the German language. But we should cease from teaching it to our children, . . . forbid its use wherever possible to show our hatred for what the German government stands for." Almost daily during the spring of 1918, Ohio newspapers reported new school boards calling for the abolition of German studies. The action touched nearly every community in the state to the point where the *Sandusky Register* stated ecstatically on 5 April 1918 that "Everybody's doing it!"[6]

In place of the language study, Ohio cities and towns, according to the *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, sought to "advance toward that condition of exclusive Americanism which, [they felt,] must be [the country's] future aim." School boards met this goal by replacing so-called German propaganda with their own brand of coercion. The spin tacked on to the new public school programming, however, came under the guise of patriotic studies. Instead of

Figure 1. *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 3 April 1918.



THEY ARE HERE!
OUR BOYS FROM CAMP SHERMAN!

From Atlantic to Pacific, From Lakes to Gulf, Every American To-Day—Liberty Day—
Will Feel the Thrill of the New Battle Cry of Freedom!

Just one year ago the United States of America stepped into the arena of war to

Save Womanhood From the Savagery of the Huns

and to forever throttle the monstrous doctrine that the Kaiser is foreordained to make America a slavish vassal within the wicked net of Kultur and Autocracy.

On this first anniversary of the nation's sacred pledge that Liberty shall not perish from the earth, our own Boys in Khaki are here to help inaugurate Greater Cincinnati's drive for The

Third Liberty Loan

Uncle Sam has asked Hamilton County to subscribe for $20,974,900 worth of the new 4 1/4 per cent Liberty Bonds.

The boys in Army and Navy are staking their lives that the Beast may not fasten his Imperial claws in the breasts of American mothers, wives and daughters. Perhaps your boy is already "Over There" or is on the way. You may not have the privilege of Defending your Heritage of Democracy either personally or through one of your own—but

You Can Enlist Your Dollars and Help Stop the Drive of the Teuton Hosts

For forty years they plotted and toasted "The Day"—the Day they could force you to kneel to Militarism, the Day they could take from you your money and your government.

Greater Cincinnati oversubscribed both former Liberty Loans. Her answer to this third call will be emphatic. It is better to *lend* Uncle Sam your dollars than to have the Kaiser and his Host—in whom flows the royal blood of the old Robber Barons—rob you as Belgium and Russia have been robbed.

UNITED STATES
Government 4¼% Bonds
of the
Third Liberty Loan
Dated May 9, 1918.
Interest Payable Sept. 15 and Mar. 15.
Dates for subscribers to pay, as set by the Government, are
3% with application
20% May 28, 1918
20% July 15, 1918
20% August 15, 1918

Start this Drive with a whirl of patriotic enthusiasm. Send the word to Cincinnati's sons at Camp Sherman, Camp Sheridan, at the Great Lakes, at Paris Island, in glorious France and wherever else they may be, that Cincinnati does appreciate their heroic sacrifice and will back them to the limit of the last dollar.

Buy Bonds of the Third Liberty Loan NOW.—Keep Buying them until the Conspirators Who Covet the World Shall Be Hurled Back Upon the Grave of Their Dastardly Ambition, the Dishonored Outlaws of the Nations Who Have Disgraced Their Claim To Place in the Councils of Civilization."

This space patriotically paid for by The Philip Carey Manufacturing Co.

(CUT THIS OUT AND POST IN A PROMINENT PLACE.)

Figure 2. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 6 April 1918.

being infested with pro-German ideas, the argument went, students would now spend extra time learning English, United States history, and "patriotic literature," and participating in "patriotic exercises."[7]

The key to these common acts of nativism seen throughout Ohio rested in their universal public sentiment. In this case, the public organized itself around the dislike and distrust of Germans and their culture. Even some stalwarts, the school superintendent of Cleveland for example, who desired to keep the study of the German language in the schools in order to "aid in combating German propaganda," lost their argument to the overriding power of public opinion concerning the dangers of the use of the German language.[8]

Campaigns to purchase war bonds through the Liberty Loan program was another way that patriots sought to define Americanness through participation. Newspapers commonly ran full-page advertisements highlighting the benefits of support for the Liberty Loan. Coupled with the message of patriotism through contribution also ran harsh nativist diatribes against Germans. A representative Liberty Loan advertisement in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* read, "Just one year ago the United States of America stepped into the arena of war to Save Womanhood From the Savagery of the Huns and to forever throttle the monstrous doctrine that the Kaiser is foreordained to make America a slavish vassal within the wicked net of Kultur and Autocracy" (see Figure 2). Joining the Liberty Loan campaign also provided the outlook that citizens on the home front could perform their civic duty. Public speakers stressed this theme in many speeches, contending that as the "boys give [their] lives [in Europe], people at home must loan money." Failure to participate in the loan program signified an extremely disloyal act simultaneously interpreted as pro-Germanism. As in events past, the nativist sentiment in the country sought to define what was un-American and replace the undesirable action with a sense of nationalism and patriotism in pursuit of the goal of immigrant assimilation. The curtailment of German culture in America and the Liberty Loan program represent prime examples of the style of nativism common to the general population of Ohio.[9]

But anti-German action took other forms as well. Friday, 29 March 1918, the town of Coshocton, Ohio, erupted in a violent display of nationalism. "Aroused to a high pitch of patriotism by meetings the night before," according to the local *Tribune and Times-Age*, approximately five hundred citizens gathered to visit the homes of several German-American citizens suspected of harboring pro-German sentiments. The crowd forced each alleged disloyalist to kiss an American flag and to denounce the Kaiser publicly. Most of the German Americans visited by the belligerent group complied with the demands with little or no complaints. The only visible defiance provoked swift antagonism from the mob. Mrs. Frank Gregor, in a defensive action, fearing what the mob would do,

approached her window brandishing a .32 caliber revolver in her hand. Members of the mob forcefully entered the Gregor apartment, seized the weapon and both of the Gregors, and led them to the courthouse steps to perform the loyalty ceremony. Mrs. Gregor, the local newspaper reported, only submitted to the crowd's demands due to continued threats that they would "tar and feather her" or "duck her in the river." Ultimately, Frank Gregor lost his job because of their perceived disloyalty. To escape further recourse from the rampant nativism growing in the community, he and his wife felt forced to leave Coshocton.[10]

As historians argue, "collective action"—organized intimidation at times leading to violence—against German-Americans and German immigrants during World War I was not uncommon. The Ohio newspapers frequently reported scenes similar to the one described in Coshocton. The poignant characteristic that sets this style of nativism apart from others, however, is not its frequency, but the location of the events. Collective action, according to newspaper documentation in this research, overwhelmingly occurred in small cities and rural areas of Ohio. In the instances that follow, no community possessed a population over 50,000.[11]

While it became common throughout the state to ban the study of the German language, citizens of small cities and rural towns of Ohio frequently took the elimination of German culture to the extreme. In such towns as Galion, Norwalk, Findlay, Kenton, Shelly, and Burton, organized parties met at schools, broke in if necessary, and proceeded, in the words of one local newspaper, to "remove, burn, and mutilate" all textbooks pertaining to the study of German. This collective action sought not only to rid the towns of German propaganda, but also to intimidate any pro-German element in the towns.[12]

Intimidation in the small-town setting, however, often did not prove satisfactory for American patriots in many cases. Suspected disloyalty was usually enough to provoke reaction from nativist groups. Local newspapers helped stir the furor. They encouraged Americans to assist the country by keeping a watchful eye over the German element. One article stated emphatically, "whenever you hear a doubting whisper of disloyalty, nail the whisperer as liar and criminal, and know you are doing your country a service." Most patriots in the small towns considered merely reporting the alleged remarks insufficient and organized their own brand of collective, vigilante justice. Following the pattern of the community action taken in Coshocton, townspeople elsewhere gathered to force suspected pro-Germans to pledge their allegiance to the United States. In Massillon, the town fire bell summoned its citizens to the town square for a public ceremony forcing a "man of German descent" to kiss the flag and swear his loyalty. Sandusky and Delphos "local patriots" of 100 and 1,500 men, respectively, raided the homes of alleged pro-

Germans and forced them to sign loyalty oaths. Inmates at local prisons even took the law into their own hands. It was not uncommon to see instances in local papers of fellow prisoners attacking and beating those arrested for pro-German utterances.[13]

Too often, the crowd action that began as a rally in support of the war effort ended in a nativist frenzy. A public celebration in Alliance on the first anniversary of America's declaration of war started out to benefit the Third Liberty Loan. The typical rally included patriotic sing-a-longs, the unveiling of a new American flag, and several speeches given by area veterans and distinguished visitors. At Alliance, the Reverend Dr. Richard Wilkinson of Lexington, Kentucky, stepped up to the podium and "commended Ohio for bringing the pro-German to his knees and compelling the disloyalists to kiss the flag," in the words of the *Alliance Review and Leader.* Speeches of this sort seemed to stir the crowd into a frenzy. The Alliance gathering, after the evening's festivities ended, "held a midnight parade to burn the Kaiser in effigy."[14]

The intensely patriotic elements in the towns, moreover, considered the refusal to purchase liberty loans an immediate affront to their ideals as Americans. The brand of intimidation used against delinquents typically sought to coerce acceptance of superpatriot definitions of loyalty, but frequently the collective action spilled into violence. Several instances in papers report factory workers of German descent who received a treatment of yellow paint over their entire body to signify their cowardice in not supporting the American war effort. The most extreme case took place in Marion. A group of men gathered and "adopted a new method of selling Liberty Bonds, . . . and at the same time bring some of the foreigners closer to the fold and show what might happen if they are not loyal Americans." The new method included threatening the assumed disloyalists with a noose to compel the purchase of the bonds.[15]

Increases in collective action, in the towns represented in this study, also produced a common extension to their initial campaigns of intimidation. Makeshift groups of vigilantes soon turned their patriotic and nativist fervor into creating permanent organizations, according to the Coshocton newspaper, "to deal severely with citizens suspected of being in sympathy with Germany." The associations assumed names such as: "100 Percent American," "League of Loyal Patriotic Citizens," or "Be True to America." The official organizations, sanctioned by town authorities and led by "prominent men," strove to gain further validation for anti-German sentiment and actions to quell and undermine the patriotic spirit.[16]

The validation that groups practicing collective action sought for their activities appeared most often in the small city and rural town newspapers.

Writers did not seem to hide their support for unrestrained nationalism. The late March incident in Coshocton provides a case in point. Commentary and analysis of the reporter from the local paper suggested that rousing the German community to pledge its loyalty to the United States was "not altogether a misfortune." The writer further argued that "if such [pro-German] meetings have been held, this will probably end them. If the reports are unfounded, no particular harm has been done .... [O]ccurrences tonight have served as a safety valve." The press sanctioned collective acts of anti-Germanism not only to stave off surging pro-German activity, but also to intimidate the German community from voicing any opinion except ardent loyalty to the United States. Unprovoked crowd action could then be overlooked as protection for the future. Even those persons in the Coshocton area who winced at the mob's demonstration sought to qualify their criticism by offering praise to those citizens "guided by patriotic impulse." Similarly, cases of collective action received this type of positive interpretation in newspaper articles that emphasized pro-American ventures rather than anti-German activity. Some representative descriptions included: "patriotic demonstration," "patriotic employees full of enthusiasm," "local patriots raided pro-Germans," and "the city was purged of all treason last night."[17]

National news reported in small-town papers produced further rationale for directing collective activity at German-Americans. The incident that stands out most clearly occurred in reaction to the Robert Prager affair in Collinsville, Illinois. Prager, by all known accounts, was the only person during World War I of German descent murdered in the United States as a result of mob violence. On 5 April 1918, an angry crowd lynched him for allegedly speaking against the American government and plotting to sabotage the local mines with dynamite. Astonishment over the situation reached as far as the nation's capital and prompted Attorney General Thomas Gregory to send a fact-finding team to Collinsville to investigate what he considered excessive and irrational treatment. Attempting to end vigilantism, congressmen began calling for more strenuous legislation to allow local law enforcement to take care of suspected disloyalists. Small-town and rural papers in Ohio, however, reacted differently. Printing what can be interpreted as all but outright support, the *Marion Daily Star* ran the headline "First Hun Pays Death Penalty." The story proceeded to explain that the townspeople of Collinsville acted in a determined effort to stamp out disloyalty and make the victim a warning to others considering public recognition of their patronage to the Kaiser. Yet another endorsement of the mob's conduct came from Coshocton, only six days after the raid, under the headline "Loyalist Mob Swings a Hun Sympathizer from a Limb." The article painted the incident as a "scene of patriotic demonstration."[18]

Contemporary critics, albeit an extreme minority, placed the blame for the exceeding levels of intimidation and violence against Germans on journalists and the newspapers. Critics argued that the papers improperly reported their stories and too often validated the local community's "idea of patriotism" through collective action. A socialist paper based in Cleveland argued that Ohio's press "having incited the mob to violence and anarchy, . . . now excuses and justifies openly in its press this subversion of every human and civil law . . . to punish violators of the espionage act."[19]

Patriots in the small Ohio towns, however, seemed to have a retort for the critics who considered their treatment of Germans excessive. Community leaders attributed the collective efforts of citizens taking the law into their own hands to inadequacies of federal statutes to deal quickly and harshly with disloyalty. In Coshocton, the idea for a permanent, organized association for "100 percent Americans" grew out of the belief that existing laws would not effectively defeat the pro-German element that had allegedly infested their town. The paper argued that "prominent men here are stung to the snapping point over the unpatriotic conditions" and insisted that until the federal government passed legislation restricting suspicious behavior, collective action was the only answer to the ongoing problem. Traveling public speakers agreed. A rally in Alliance taking place during the weeks that witnessed several pro-German round-ups in Ohio towns prompted one speaker to proclaim: "If the United States government does not take the suggestion given to it by Ohioans as to the treatment of plotters and disloyalists, I fear the consequences . . . . [Disloyalists] will receive for their punishment more than mere kissing the flag." Federal lawmakers started to respond only after the lynching in Illinois, but even then local communities considered the reaction too little, too late. Collective action and the mob mentality in small-town and rural Ohio had proved too successful in quelling public expression of German cultural spirit and sympathy towards their fatherland. In turn, small-town nativism insured the staying power of patriotism.[20]

Large urban centers of Ohio displayed a very different style of nativism in their attempt to define American patriotism and to control disloyal behavior. Metropolitan areas were no less anti-German in their response, but the pattern did not entail the mob spirit seen in the less-populated sections of Ohio. Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus with populations of approximately 400,000, 800,000, and 240,000, respectively, each possessed numbers of Germans representing significant percentages of their "foreign-born stock." Under the tense situation prevalent in the spring of 1918, however, mob-oriented antagonism directed at the German community did not occur in these cities. Each of the cities sought to conduct its brand of nationalism either under the

scope of the law or through public discourse in the urban newspapers. Leaders and citizens in these three influential Ohio cities even chose to condemn the growing instances of collective action in the smaller cities of the state. "Symbolic action" in the most populous areas was enough.[21]

Like the rest of the state, Ohio's largest cities expressed fear and concern over the specter of pro-German sentiment. In Columbus, the state fire marshall warned that "Ohio is infested with agents of a well organized and powerful German spy system that is constantly trying to burn and wreck its shops and factories in order to delay America's war preparations and aid the enemy for whom they are working." Moreover, city leaders continued to be wary of those in the German community who had publicly expressed support for the Kaiser prior to America's entry into the war. The Columbus newspaper pointed directly to several wards where "disloyal business men" allegedly resided. The city placed greater attention on unnaturalized German immigrants who continued to "roam the streets at will despite a permit that restricts the travel to direct passage between their homes and places of work." Several statements in the newspapers summed up precisely the impression of the heavily populated areas. In a pattern generally followed across the state, one article from Toledo contended that "all [Germans] tried to leave the impression that they were loyal but evidence in the hands of authorities is to the contrary." A writer for the *Blade* extended this argument by stating that "much as Americans dislike the idea of doing so, they will have to cultivate a strong, practical suspicion toward those who, for one reason or another, might be expected to lean kaiserward." The widely felt answer to this problem was that the United States must "diminish the Teutonic influence and hasten Americanization."[22]

Even though the sentiment throughout Ohio perceived a German threat, metropolitan area methods for pursuing the eradication of German influence were strikingly different than in the towns. Seen together, the largest urban areas generated an extensively symbolic reaction to the German influence in their cities. Citizens, organizations, and lawmakers perpetrated a variety of symbolic measures—acts that demonstrated discontent without harming people themselves. Members of the Cleveland YMCA, for example, hung an enormous Stars and Stripes flag to cover the "German" name on the German Hospital's sign. They reasoned that "the word affected [their] appetites." Hospital administrators stated that they had no plans to remove the flag. City council members in both Cincinnati and Cleveland voted to change street names that had a German origin with names that reflected the patriotism of the areas. In Cincinnati, Berlin Street became Woodrow Street, Bremen Street changed to Republic Street, and English Street replaced German Street. State government officials in Columbus refused to use a collection of pencils marked "Made in

Germany" and ordered them returned to their original distributor. These measures did not seek to confront the German community directly but intended, with grand public display, to break connections with anything linked to a German origin.[23]

In the large cities, direct encounters with alleged disloyalists occurred within the existing laws. A Cleveland manufacturer who reportedly promoted pro-German propaganda came under investigation by Federal authorities. Letters that investigators seized, according to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "disclosed an organized effort on the part of Germans and German societies to spread propaganda before and during the war . . . to Germanize the schools of Cleveland and Ohio." Most assuredly, paranoia brought on by the war encouraged popular suspicion of the German community. In the metropolitan areas, however, most attempts to battle pro-German activity unfolded in a law-abiding fashion.[24]

In fact, the leaders and citizens of these three cities preached adherence to existing laws and openly abhorred the tactics used by mobs in other areas of Ohio and the nation. The opinion pages of the newspapers overflowed with negative responses to the vigilante justice taking over other sections of the state and nation. A representative perspective from Columbus argued that "one cannot be loyal to his country, in the highest sense, unless he shows obedience to its laws." According to this writer, loyalty remained the paramount disposition of persons residing in America, despite some extreme episodes. It must continue, the article said: "We must . . . show our patriotism by allowing the laws of the land to reign supreme." In harmonious agreement, other writers in the large urban centers compared collective action to the style of government believed to be practiced in Germany, stressing the absence of overall freedom when the mob takes matters into its own hands. A Cincinnati native wrote: "What will it avail us to defeat the Hun if this safety is wrested away by that cruelest and most cowardly of beasts, the blood-seeking mob." At the beginning of April 1918 in the wake of the most widespread violence against Germans in America, Ohio cities even boasted of the fact that no such incidents had taken place in their borders. A Columbus editorial, written the day after the Prager lynching, stated proudly, "there has been no anti-German rioting in Columbus, and there will not be. Columbus is calm, well-poised, and law-abiding and gives promise to remaining so."[25]

This reaction, however, did not seek to appear sympathetic to the German element in those cities. In the same papers—on many occasions the same page—the rampant nativist sentiment played itself out. The difference, though, was that the metropolitan areas chose to release tensions symbolically through

discourse in the papers. Public opinion warned of the dangers of Germans in America or lobbied for tougher laws against disloyalists. Editorials were especially convenient places to showcase hostility towards Germans. Indicative of the tension is a letter from a citizen of Columbus defending his place as a "German-American" and expressing resentment for remarks ridiculing German soldiers as cruel. The editor's response resulted in an extended denunciation, not of the writer's defense of the German military, but of the insistence that the person was "German-American." The reply read,

> In the first place, you are not a German-American. You are either an American or a German. The hyphen was shot out of existence the day we severed diplomatic relations with Germany . . . . [W]e have a supreme contempt in this country for the fellow who holds Germany in one hand and the United States in the other with his heart representing the hyphen.

Daily, papers ran stories of suspicious characters in the midst of the loyal citizens of Ohio and encouraged patriots to report any seemingly disloyal activity to the authorities. Likewise, articles pinpointed groups to watch carefully. A "certain religious sect," most likely the Mennonites, received the brand of "slackers" not only because members consciously objected to war, but more, according to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, for the suspected "Teutonic spirit that survived [in its doctrine] though it has been here nearly two centuries." The existence of communities such as the Mennonites further fueled fear and resentment of the overall German element in the United States.[26]

New laws to battle disloyalty and to encourage assimilation, therefore, garnered significant support in the metropolitan press. Ohio Congressman Ben Wetly argued that it was "too easy to become an American citizen" and suggested that the legislation should require immigrants to register with the government as well as receive organized education to ensure loyalty. The Sedition Bill making its way through Congress in reaction to the growing mob menace also received support in hopes that it would encourage the swift and lawful dealing with disloyalists. Ultimately in the late days of April 1918, the state began to organize what it termed "Americanization Day." Organizers planned the celebration to fall on 14 June 1918, Flag Day, for the purpose of teaching "American ideals." The leadership for this drive toward German assimilation came primarily from the urban centers of Ohio. Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Akron city leaders led the charge, evidence again that law-abiding, symbolic activity generated the metropolitan style of nativism.[27]

The evidence presented in this essay demonstrates that three distinctively different styles of nativism were part of the rampant anti-German sentiment during the time the United States fought in World War I. Common acts, attempting to rid areas of any aspect of German culture and encouraging the purchase of Liberty Bonds, generally took place over all of Ohio. Collective action, however, occurred almost exclusively in small towns and rural areas, while symbolic acts took place in the large urban centers. Collective action sought, through group intimidation, to coerce patriotism and to quell any perceived disloyalty in the German community. Local newspapers encouraged the methods which unfortunately on many occasions utilized extralegal or violent means. Symbolic action in the metropolitan areas reflected equally anti-German sentiment but expressed it in a more lawful manner. Urban papers denounced the mob spirit and advocated the use of existing authority to deal with the suspected German problem. Through the editorial pages, antagonism for suspected disloyal Germans stayed within the bounds of discourse.

Locating an exact reason for the divergent styles proves more difficult. An analysis of the ethnic makeup of Ohio and the cities and towns focused upon in this study provides few obvious explanations. It seems there was something in the urban experience that made the difference. A historical examination of Cincinnati from 1870-1920 suggests that by approximately 1914, the discrete German community had vanished. The city itself had grown significantly. German immigration to Cincinnati had proportionately decreased. The old-stock German-Americans began to disperse throughout the city's numerous wards. With these developments taken together, it can be argued that Cincinnati's German community was deteriorating even before the beginning of the war. Thus, the strength of nativism by the spring of 1918 was merely attacking the last remnants of the once-strong German culture in urban Ohio.[28]

Conversely, in the small towns, instances of tighter immigrant communal ties were much higher. In less-populated areas, it remained easier to continue local ethnic societies and to maintain cultural heritage. As the war intensified hostility, enclaves of Germans practicing their country's customs or frequently using the German language stood out and became easy targets for rising nativist feeling. Anti-German parties organized to intimidate the so-called un-American practitioners, likewise, prevailed in the smaller towns and rural areas because groups were easier to gather and to organize.

This study follows traditional historiography in noting that anti-German sentiment reached all levels of American society during World War I. But it also provides an important new dimension by examining different kinds of nativism in Ohio. The brief and somewhat speculative look at local newspapers helps us

understand how some areas erupted, while others remained calm, and in the process underscores important deviations in various parts of the state.

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Notes

[1] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; with a new afterward by the author, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994), 194-250; Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War (With Special Emphasis on Ohio's German-Language Press)* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1936), 83-11; Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1974), 157-94.

[2] Luebke, 267-302; Higham, 194-233; Wittke 163-96.

[3] "It is Well to Hate!" *Columbus (Ohio) Evening Dispatch*, 3 April 1918, 4; "Wisely Disbanding," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 13 April 1918, 2. See also Wittke, 163-96.

[4] "German Tongue is Barred from Public Schools," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 2 April 1918; Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, vol. 3, *Population* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1913), 395; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, vol. 3, *Population* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1922), 767-810.

[5] "Glorification of the Kaiser in Public Schools Ended," *Sandusky (Ohio) Register*, 5 April 1918, 2; "When You Find Poison in a Well Quit Drinking the Water," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 3 April 1918, 4; Don Heinrich Tolzman, *The Cincinnati Germans after the Great War* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 85-86.

[6] "It is Well to Hate!" *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 3 April 1918, 4; "Everybody's Doing It!" *Sandusky Register*, 5 April 1918, 2. General news bulletins from around the state provide ample evidence that support the argument that the ban on German language study can be termed universal. See, for example: *Clermont (Batavia, OH) Sun*, 24 April 1918; *Alliance (Ohio) Review and Leader*, 3 April 1918; *Coshocton (Ohio) Tribune and Times-Age*, 7 April 1918; *Cleveland (Ohio) Plain Dealer*, 5 April 1918; *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 2 April 1918.

[7] "Wisely Disbanding," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 13 April 1918, 2; "German Tongue is Barred from Public Schools," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 2 April 1918, 2; "Ohio Gleanings," *Clermont (Batavia, OH) Courier*, 24 April 1918, n.p.

[8] "Spaulding is Ready to Drop German Study," *Cleveland News*, 1 June 1918, 10.

[9] *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 6 April 1918, 9; "Boys Give Lives, People at Home Must Loan Money Say Speakers at Rallies," *Alliance Review and Leader*, 6 April 1918, 1.

[10] "Coshocton Pro-Germans Made to Kiss Flag and Denounce Kaiser," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 30 March 1918, 1, 8; "Gregor Fired by Frederickson," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 30 March 1918, 8.

[11] *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 767-810.

[12] Quoted in "Galion Pupils Burn German Study Books," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 7 April 1918, 2. See also "Ohio Gleanings," *Clermont Courier*, 17 April 1918, n.p.; "Disloyal Talker Given Paint Bath," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 April 1918, 5.

[13] "Loyalty Great Need of Hour," *Alliance Review and Leader*, 2 April 1918, n.p.; "Mob Forces Ten to Kiss Flag at Huron," *Cleveland News*, 8 April 1918, 1; "Ohio Gleanings," *Clermont Courier*, 17 April 1918, n.p.; "Ohioans Keep Anti-Teuton Drive," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 April 1918, 2.

[14] "Boys Give Lives," *Alliance Review and Leader*, 6 April 1918, 1; "Burn Kaiser in Effigy," *Alliance Review and Leader*, 6 April 1918, n.p.

[15] "Bathed in Cylinder Oil," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 13 April 1918, 4; "Disloyal Talker Given Paint Bath," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 April 1918, 5. *Enquirer* story is reported from a nearby small town. *Plain Dealer* story reported from Alliance, Ohio.

[16] "Permanent Anti-German Club Talked," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 31 March 1918, 1; "Pro-Germans Forced to Kiss the Flag," *Daily Jeffersonian*; "Disloyal Talker," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. *Plain Dealer* story is reported from Findlay, Ohio.

[17] Coshocton Pro-Germans," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 30 March 1918, 8; "Protest Against Snap Judgement," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 7 April 1918, n.p.; "Patriot Demonstration," *Clermont Sun*, 24 April 1918, 2; "Use Rope to Compel," *Marion Daily Star*, 17 April 1918, 5; "Pro-Germans Forced," *Daily Jeffersonian*, 27 March 1918, 1; "Burned in Effigy is Kaiser as Fremont is Purged," *Hamilton (Ohio) Evening Journal*, 3 April 1918, 4.

[18] Luebke, 3-24; "First Hun Pays Death Penalty," *Marion Daily Star*, 5 April 1918, 1; "Loyalist Mob Swings a Hun Sympathizer From a Limb," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 4 April 1918, 1.

[19] "Capitalist Hun Press Reveals its Hand—Heart and Soul," *Ohio Socialist (Cleveland)*, 10 April 1918, 1.

[20] "Permanent Anti-German Club Talked," *Coshocton Tribune and Times-Age*, 31 March 1918, 1; "Boys Give Lives," *Alliance Review and Leader*. For a more extensive analysis on mob violence attributed to the insufficiency of existing federal laws, see Luebke, 11-24, 278-79.

[21] *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 767-810.

[22] "Agents Infest State of Ohio," *Daily Jeffersonian*, 17 April 1918, n.p.; "Disloyal Business Men," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 13 April 1918, 4; "Alien Germans Ignore Restrictions Imposed," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 2 April 1918, 10; "Guilty Until Proven Innocent," *Toledo Blade*, as published in *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 9 April 1918, 10; "Defense Society Urges Ousting of All Germans," *Cleveland News*, 10 April 1918, 2.

[23] "Blot out German Name with Flag," *Cleveland News*, 1 June 1918, 2; "Versenk! Hun Names Torpedoed," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 9 April 1918, 11; "Remove German Names," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 April 1918, 2; "German Street Names May Be Dropped Now," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 23 April 1918, 4; "Balks at Using German Pencils," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 April 1918, 2. See also the article in *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 4 April 1918, n.p.

[24] "Seize Letters of Clevelander in Plot Probe," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 April 1918, 2. The one exception to this contention found in the spring of 1918 occurred in Toledo, Ohio, a city similar in size to Columbus. A mob tarred and feathered three men for being "too outwardly pro-German and for refusing to purchase liberty loan bonds." The men, however, were not German but were admitted Socialists. Moreover, they did not reside in Toledo but were taken there by a mob that started in the small town of Holland, located near Toledo. See "Coats of Tar and Feathers," *Clermont Courier*, 17 April 1918, n.p.; and articles in the *Toledo Blade*, 17 April 1918.

[25] "Mistaken Loyalty," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 16 April 1918, 4; "Uphold the Law and Social Order!" *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 April 1918, 6; "No Mob Law in Columbus," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 6 April 1918, 4.

[26] "Have No Weak Pity," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 6 April 1918, 4; "Treatment of Certain Slackers," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 April 1918, 6. For warnings, see "Enemies at Home," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 1 April 1918, 8; "Mere Lip Loyalty," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 8April 1918, n.p. For further discussion on Mennonite harassment in the United States during World War I, see Luebke, 257-59, 274, 278, 289, 309, 315.

[27] "Citizenship—Too Cheap, Says Wetly," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 April 1918, 2; "The Sedition Bill," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 April 1918, 8; "Ohio Will Carry Liberty Message to Foreign-Born," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 24 April 1918, 3. For further discussion of "Americanization Day" as a national movement, and Americanization in general, see Higham, 234-63.

[28] Guido Dobbert, "The Disintegration of an Immigrant Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1870-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1965).