

The War against German Culture

My topic today is “the war against German culture.” It is a topic that probably impacts many of you, given the fact that Missouri was settled to a large extent by Germans, in fact, according to Prof. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, Missouri is almost 40% German today. Can I have a show of hands as to how many of you in the audience are of German ancestry?

The topic impacts me, since I am a third generation American of half Germanic ancestry. I was born in Newark, New Jersey, in a hospital founded as the “Newark German Hospital” and now known as “Clara Maass Hospital” after its most famous nurse, who gave her life trying to help Walter Reed find a cure for yellow fever. The reason that the hospital is no longer named “Newark German” is the war against German language and culture, which continues to this very day. Things Germans were not always negatively stereotyped. Let me ask you a few questions, the answers might amaze you:

- 1) When was the first anti-slavery protest drafted, and what language was it in? (German, 1688 By Franz Daniel Pastorius in Germantown, Pa)
- 2) Who founded the first public library in New York? (A German refugee turned newspaper publisher named Oswald Ottendorfer and founded the Ottendorfer Library in 1884.)
- 3) Who founded the first legal aid society in the US? (Germans: Deutscher Rechts-Schutz Verein (German Legal Aid Society), was incorporated in New York City in 1876)

Now, the term German today has many implications to many people. I’d like to take a moment now to have a few of you give me your thoughts when you hear the word, “German.” Please don’t be shy; we need to know how our ideas have been molded. Let’s make a column of positive stereotypes and one of negative ones. We now have industrious, hard working and honest on the positive side, Nazi (our “N” word), militaristic and aggressive on the negative side.

These negative stereotypes were not always so. While many think that Germans are militaristic or well organized, Leo Tolstoy, in “War and Peace” gave a very different opinion of the martial qualities of the Germans, “awareness of disorder became a general conviction; but now, ascribing the cause of the *disorder* with particular pleasure ...to the *muddleheaded* Germans, everyone became convinced that the harmful confusion taking place was the doing of the sausage-makers.”

It was socially acceptable to be a German and be proud of it. Queen Victoria spoke only German until she was three. Her son, Edward VII, spoke English his whole life long with a German accent. Queen Victoria once declared

that “the German element is one I wish to be cherished and kept up in our beloved home,” she even went so far as to tell her cousin, King Leopold of Belgium, that, “my heart is so German.”

The queen was not alone in her feelings, on the eve of the First World War, a group of eminent British intellectuals published a remarkable open letter: it lauded Germany as a “highly civilized” country with a “culture that has contributed greatly to Western civilization, racially allied to ourselves and with moral ideas largely resembling our own”. Two days before German troops invaded Belgium, the letter called for British neutrality, arguing that war against Germany would be a “crime against civilization”.

While the first world war was what started the hard core war against German culture and language, there had been rumblings before the US entry into the war and the person who voiced these rumblings in the US loudest was Theodore Roosevelt, who said on Columbus Day 1915, before the US entered WWI that,

“There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism...a hyphenated American is not an American at all.. The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.”

Roosevelt implied in these remarks that the Germans and Irish, in particular, had some sort of extraterritorial loyalty. He and his whole class had no difficulty in identifying with and showing loyalty for the war aims of Great Britain, however.

Perhaps the seminal moment in the War against German Culture was on August 5, 1914, when the British cut the transatlantic cables from Germany to the US. The purpose of this act was to prevent the German side being heard in American press, to prevent articles showing the German war effort in a positive way from reaching the American public. All European news was now filtered by British censors, only German news dispatches brought in by ship or submarine reached the American press. The English-language press ignored these as “German Propaganda.”

Incidentally, in what language were the largest numbers of newspapers printed in the US until 1917? Anyone have a guess? (German).

So WWI progressed with only British propaganda being available to the American people. Germans went from being Saxon brothers to being Asiatic Huns overnight. Lies were told about rape and child murders committed by

German soldiers in Belgium, about German plants that turned the corpses of murdered Belgians into soap and other products for German use. Germans in Canada were terrorized; the town of Berlin was forced to change its name to Kitchener. Germans in Britain itself were interned en masse in the huge Concentration camp on the Isle of Mann, which held over 100,000 German-British civilians. Incidentally, when was the concentration camp invented, and by whom? (By the British during the Boer War)

Although they controlled most news from Europe, the British could not control the flood of news that resulted from the armed rebellion in Ireland during Easter week, 1916. The brutality with which the British put down the rebellion horrified Irish-Americans and many Anglo-Americans and came close to causing the US to enter WWI on the side of Germany. The execution of the leaders of the rebellion, seen by many Americans as the founding fathers of a free Ireland, further burdened US relations with the British Empire. It is interesting to note that there were no rebellions in the German Empire during WWI, its citizens, of whatever ethnicity, supported the country which had granted universal adult male suffrage before GB and had had the first social insurance system in the world.

But aside from the eye opening caused by the Easter Rising, Britain and France continued to control the flow of news and American sympathies slowly were molded in their behalf. Since the British and French navies controlled the seas, trade with Germany dried up and huge arms sales were made to the western allies, giving an economic reason for pro-Allied sympathies. Stockpiles of weapons and ammunition piled up on Black Tom Island in New York Bay. On the night of July 30, 1916, two million pounds of ammunition were being stored at the depot in freight cars, including one hundred thousand pounds of TNT, all awaiting eventual shipment to Britain and France. German agents, some American born, some born in Europe, detonated the stockpile to prevent it from killing Germans in the field. The shock was felt for miles around and remnants of ammunition continue to be found in New Jersey to the present day. Americans were outraged and turned a bit more against Germany. The economic loss made many in the elite more pro-British and interventionist.

Germany declared unlimited submarine warfare against all ships heading for allied ports. American ships, however, continued to travel to the ports. In the most famous case, German intelligence officers were informed by Irish and German American dock workers that the Lusitania was carrying war materials destined for the allied armies, indeed her manifest stated that her cargo included an estimated 4,200,000 rounds of rifle cartridges. The German Embassy did what it could, warning American citizens and other neutrals not to travel on the Lusitania. When the Lusitania was sunk off the coast of Ireland, where a first

explosion, caused by a German torpedo, did not sink the ship, but a second explosion, believed by many to have been caused by the ammunition on board, caused the ship to sink with great loss of life.

As we know, the US entered WWI against Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917. As a result of American resources, and of our fresh troops, the tide of battle turned against Germany and the war ended with an allied victory. To ensure German agreement to any terms the allies wanted, the blockade on food to Germany was continued and thousands of German children died in time of peace as a result.

The impact of World War I on German-Americans was huge; the KKK became actively anti-German, burning crosses on the lawns of many German-Americans. German newspapers were closed, speaking German in public or educating your children in German language schools became illegal. Many were tarred and feathered for alleged disloyalty to the US, Robert Prager, a socialist German immigrant living in the area of St. Louis, was lynched in Collinsville, Ill., after an anti-German mob gained entrance to the jail where he was being held and found Prager hiding in the basement. The police stood aside as the mob marched him beyond the city limits. After allowing Prager to write a brief letter to his parents in Germany and pray, he was hanged in front of a crowd of two hundred people at 12:30 am on the 5th April. "Collinsville Herald" editor and publisher J.O. Monroe said that "Outside a few persons who may still harbor Germanic inclinations, the whole city is glad that the eleven men indicted for the hanging of Robert P. Prager were acquitted." Monroe noted, "The community is well convinced that he was disloyal. ... The city does not miss him. The lesson of his death has had a *wholesome* effect on the Germanists of Collinsville and the rest of the nation."

German-American author Kurt Vonnegut described the losses suffered by German-Americans: The anti-German feeling so shamed Kurt's parents' generation, he noted, that they resolved to raise his generation "without acquainting me with the language or the literature or the music or the oral family histories which my ancestors had loved. They volunteered to make me *ignorant and rootless* as proof of their patriotism." As he put it elsewhere, he lost Europe, and so did most German-Americans of his generation.

The post WWI peace, which was supposed to ensure no territorial changes without the express desire of the population, and which was the promise which led to Germany's surrender, was not based on self-determination at all. Alsace-Lorraine, where 95% of the population of over 2 million spoke German as their mother tongue, was given to France without a plebiscite. The Sudetenland was granted to the newly created Czechoslovak state, giving 3.5 million German-speakers to the new state, persons that had no desire to belong to

Czechoslovakia. On March 4, 1919, Sudeten Germans peacefully demonstrated in favor of remaining part of Austria. On Czech government orders, Czechs military shot at the unarmed demonstrators. The crashing of hand grenades accompanied the salvos of gunfire and the screams of those mortally wounded - 54 dead and hundreds of injured remained lying in the streets. Among the places where this happened were Arnau, Aussig, Eger, Kaaden, Mies, Karlsbad, Sternberg and Freudenthal. The 54 dead included 20 women and girls, an 80-year-old man, one youth of 16, one of 13 and one only eleven years old! This bloody event that ought to have shaken the world to its foundations remained without echo and was the start of things to come.

Poland, which had not existed for more than 100 years, was rightfully resurrected after WWI, but her borders were drawn in a way to cause the new state to have permanent problems with Germany. In areas of mixed population, plebiscites were to be held, which was at least better than the situation in Alsace or the Sudetenland, but the rules for the plebiscites were strange: if Poland received 51% of the votes in an area, the whole area, even the 49% which had voted for Germany, was to go to Poland. If Germany got even 99% of the votes, the 1% of the area that voted for Poland was ceded to that state. This led to some 2,000,000 Germans becoming “orphans of Versailles” and becoming Polish citizens against their will. The city of Danzig, about 95% German, was made into a “Free City” although no one there wanted to be free, they wanted to be part of Germany.

The period of the Weimar Republic saw Germany stripped of the ability to defend itself and subject the whims of her neighbors. Austria, whose first act as a democracy, was to declare itself an integral part of Germany under the name “Deutsch-Österreich,” was forced to change its name to simply Austria and forbidden from uniting with Germany. German-speaking western Hungary was only allowed to join Austria in 1921 after a very corrupt referendum, which due to voting irregularities led to Ödenburg, today known as Sopron and Pressburg, today known as Bratislava, being given to Hungary and Czechoslovakia respectively. South Tyrol was given to Italy without a plebiscite. All this was done with the intent to decrease the number of Germans, in the words of Georges Clemenceau” There are 20 million Germans too many!”

The post WWI period saw intense Frenchification in Alsace, repression of the German minority in Poland, which led about one million ethnic Germans (one half of the population) to emigrate from Poland between 1918 and 1938 and hundreds of complaints being filed with the League of Nations. The same was true of Czechoslovakia, where Germans were subjected to arbitrary rules. Minority laws passed to protect the Germans, Hungarians and Poles were applied in such a way as to discriminate against them. Discontent grew in all

the areas which had been torn from Germany. In 1938, Lord Runcimore, a British nobleman charged with reporting on conditions in Czechoslovakia wrote, “It is a hard thing to be ruled by an alien race; and I have been left with the impression that Czechoslovak rule in the Sudeten areas for the last twenty years, although not actually oppressive and certainly not 'terroristic,' has been marked by tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination to the point where the resentment of the German population was inevitably moving to the direction of revolt. . . .” Based on his recommendations, the Sudetenland was unified with Greater Germany.

WWII started over the German-speaking sections of Poland, Hitler, after his bloodless incorporation of Austria and the Sudetenland, felt that he could pull the same thing off with western Poland. He miscalculated and WWII began. Although his attack on Poland cannot be justified, we should not forget that in the first days of the war, some 5,000 ethnic Germans were massacred by the Poles, and these massacres were later used by the Nazis as a justification for their own brutal treatment of Polish civilians.

The war against the Hitlerian Reich was justified on many levels; however, what once again became a war on German culture during and after that war was not. Germans were once again interned in large numbers in Britain, Canada, Australia and any countries allied with Britain. In the United States, starting in 1938, three years before we entered the war, the FBI developed a list of German-Americans it considered suspicious, it did the same with Germans in South American countries. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, ***but before Germany and the US were at war***, German-Americans were picked up and interned, eventually as many as 30,000 may have been interned in US camps: the same camps that housed 120,000 Japanese Americans. Several thousand German-Latin Americans were kidnapped from their countries and brought to the US for internment as well. The US State Department encouraged their home countries to arrest them, seize their assets and deport them to the US. Brazil set up its own internment camps in which some 15,000 German-Brazilian leaders, many of who's families had been in Brazil since the 1820s, were incarcerated for the duration of the war.

After the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union the entire ethnic German population of European Russia, millions of people, were deported in cattle cars to the Soviet Far East. Hundreds of thousands of these Germans died in the transports. This although ethnic Germans were accounting of themselves well in the defense of the Soviet Union, indeed one of the heroes of the defense of Brest was an ethnic German by the name of Wagner. To this day, the descendants of these deported ethnic Germans have not received an apology for their treatment at the hands of Soviet authorities. To this day, they are

forbidden from returning to their home regions, although all other ethnic “enemies of the state” have long since been allowed to return to their homes.

The bombing terror of German cities during the war took a tremendous toll, I can't begin to give you an accurate figure of the dead, since it has been deliberately falsified and revised downward since the end of the war. One example should suffice: Dresden. Shortly before the attack on Dresden, British Prime Minister Churchill said that, “there are one million Germans too many.” On February 14, 1945 his Bomber Command did their best to eliminate many of those “million too many.” After the attack in 1945 it was estimated that close to 250,000 people, mostly refugees from the east, had met their end there, based on an actual counting of corpses in the destroyed city by German authorities. Today, under American and British pressure, the city now claims that a figure of only between 18,000 and 25,000 were killed there. Kurt Vonngut, one of my favorite authors, was a POW in Dresden and lived through the firestorm there. He spoke of “hundreds of thousands” of dead in the attack.

As Soviet troops marched towards the west, and conquered German territory, they treated the civilian population with unheard of brutality. In the villages of Gumbinnen and Nemmersdorf whole populations were wiped out. These atrocities led to the two largest maritime catastrophes in history, as German civilians ran in terror from the Soviet army. These were the loss of the ships “Wilhelm Gustloff” and the “General Von Steuben,” both refugee ships torpedoed by Soviet Submarines. On both ships, there were between 7,000 to 10,000 people were on board, mostly women and children, died. Have you ever heard of either of those ships? Let me see the hands of those who have.

By the time the war ended, several million women had been raped by Soviet soldiers who should have been their liberators. Virtually every woman in Berlin and Vienna, and many women in smaller German towns suffered this ordeal. In the west it was better, but there were far too many incidents of rape by French colonial troops and even by American troops. The use of rape against German women was the largest application of rape as a weapon of war in human history.

Perhaps the greatest of all these atrocities was the treatment of German prisoners of war. The Soviets held many until 1956, 11 years after the war ended and hundreds of thousands died at their hands. The Yugoslavs buried 3,000 alive in a seaside bunker that they walled up. The US had huge POW camps in the Rheinwiesen, or Rhine Meadows. Camps in which there was no shelter, not enough food (and local people were forbidden from giving food to the captives, on fear of being shot). Estimates of German POW losses in US and French camps range up to 800,000.

Once the Nazis were defeated the Polish, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak authorities had their chance to even the slate. Poland and Yugoslavia set up

numerous concentration camps for ethnic German citizens. In some of these camps, infant mortality was 100%. In Poland 60-80,000 Germans died in these camps, after the war had ended. Polish authorities now admit that close to 99% of these people were innocent of any crime against Poland or the Polish people.

In Czechoslovakia, many of the Nazi concentration camps were kept in use, but now for Germans rather than Jews, the most famous of which was Theresienstadt, which saw service until 1946. All Germans were forced to wear armbands with an "N" for "Nemec" for German on them. They were subjected to much the same legal discrimination that Jews had suffered under the Nazis. There were many massacres of unbelievable brutality. In all, about 240,000 Sudeten Germans were killed during this period.

The Poles, Czechs, Hungarian, Yugoslavs, Romanians and Soviets were given the right to expel all or part of their ethnic German populations, only the Romanians made very little use of this right. About 1/7th of the ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia perished. Virtually all of the ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia lost their homes and were never paid any compensation for their losses. Add to this the Germans from Germany proper (east of the Oder-Neise line) and you have the largest act of ethnic cleansing in world history, with a total of some 15 million people expelled from their homes of whom approximately 2.5 million lost their lives. You have to imagine this, one third of the area inhabited by Germans was emptied of its inhabitants. One third! Are you familiar with these facts? Have you heard about the camps for Germans, the Expulsion? The two and one half million dead? Please show your hands if you have. Very few Americans know about these events, because our press was silent at the time, and continues to be silent to this day about these atrocities.

Today, the war against German culture and language remains in effect. Little is written that is positive about Germany or the Germans, whether in Germany, Switzerland, Alsace, Austria or elsewhere. We are exposed to a non-stop torrent of abuse of the good name of the Germans in movies, TV and radio, in cartoons and even in the public schools. Jokes are made about "German Peacekeepers." How could there be such a thing! In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia discriminatory anti-German laws known as the Benesch Decrees, Bierut decrees and the Avnoj Decrees are still in effect. Germans are excluded from getting their properties back, by law, although Jews and others can get their properties back. Even provably anti-Nazi Germans who attempt to reclaim their properties, are prevented from so doing by the decrees. In Poland the German minority continues to live in such fear that they are afraid to ask for rights granted them in present day, democratic Poland. The same applies to the Czech Republic, where the inhabitants of the

few German villages that remain are so terrified that they do not even request bi-lingual signs for their villages. In Alsace I have seen a group of ten Alsatians, speaking German among themselves, immediately switch to French when a police officer draws near. And in the United States, German-Americans interned during WWII in the same camps as Japanese Americans continue to be denied the restitution granted the Japanese over twenty years ago.

Yes, my name is Kern Schemm, and I am a German-American. I am also a person who believes in standing up for the weaker guy, the guy everyone picks on. The Germans are the weaker guys who have been so cowed, so frightened by the 90 year war against the Germans that they are terrified to open their mouths and state the basic fact: we are people too. Our pain counts too. Wrongs done to us need to be remedied too.