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# The Providence Journal, the Providencer Anzeiger, and the Attack on all things German in the United States During the First World War


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**The *Providence Journal*, the *Providencer Anzeiger*, and the Attack on all things German in the United States During the First World War**

**Andrée J. Rathemacher  
Independent Study  
Spring 1992**

## Introduction

German influence on American culture has been a large one. Many words, foods, and customs which now seem all-American were brought to the United States by German immigrants when they arrived on American shores in large numbers during the nineteenth century and earlier. The words “dumb,” “shoe,” “standpoint,” “kindergarten,” and “gesundheit” entered English through their use by German immigrants at about the same time as beer, pretzels, noodles, hamburgers, sauerkraut, and frankfurters became part of the American diet. Santa Claus, or Kris Kringle, and the Christmas tree were also brought to the U.S. by Germans.

More Americans of European descent came from Germany than from anywhere else except Britain. In 1910 New York had the second largest German population in the world, next to Berlin. Around the turn of the century, 25% of the U.S. population spoke German. German was taught widely in American schools, and there were numerous German-American singing clubs, athletic clubs, and theater troupes. The German-American press made up over half of the foreign press in the United States.

Yet now, about seventy years later, almost no evidence of German-American culture remains. There is no German equivalent to the still-active communities of Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans, and Irish-Americans, other ethnic groups which came to U.S. shores at about the same time as the majority of Germans. German is rarely taught in schools, overshadowed by the instruction of French and Spanish. Less than one percent of the U.S. population speaks

German. There is no German press to mention, and no widespread membership in German clubs. There are simply no more German-Americans.

Why this apparent eradication of German-American culture? Certainly demographics had a lot to do with it. Since the beginning of this century the demographics of the United States have altered dramatically, as new immigrant groups have arrived and brought with them their customs and languages and as older immigrant groups have become "Americanized." By the end of the 19th century, this process of assimilation was already at work among the German-American community. Throughout the 1800s, failed revolution and economic depression in Germany caused Germans to emigrate to the United States in large numbers. German immigration continued to rise until 1882, then dropped as Germany's industrialization and the growth of the military brought about labor shortages, and the Imperial Government of Kaiser Wilhelm II partially prohibited emigration. By the early years of the 20th century, original German immigrants had begun to die off, and their children had weaker ties to the "fatherland" than did their parents.

But demographics do not explain the almost total eradication of German culture which took place over the course of only a few years during World War I. During this time, there was an all-out attack on all things German. German was removed from school curricula. The German department at the University of Wisconsin was dismantled. Teachers and professors were accused of being traitors. German books were burned, German literature was vilified, and music by German composers was not permitted to be performed. German-American clubs disappeared or changed their names. German names of cities, streets, and towns were changed. Foods and diseases with German names were Anglicized. The German language press was decimated. German-Americans were accused of disloyalty, of being spies, and there were many cases of innocent people being

hanged or tarred and feathered by angry mobs in the service of “patriotism.” German-Americans were forced to give up all ties to their culture. By the end of the War, it was no longer possible to be a ‘German-American.’

Perhaps the attack on German-American culture can best be illustrated by the fate of the German-American press. The German-language press was by far the largest foreign press in the United States at this time. In 1910, 488 German newspapers served over three million readers nation-wide. In 1920 there remained only 152 German newspapers, read by just over a million people — a decrease of about 60% in only ten years. Never again, not even with the Second World War, was there as much hatred in the United States against all things German as there was during World War I. (statistics: Kirschbaum)

## Purpose

In this paper, I will examine two newspapers — the *Providence Journal* and the *Providencer Anzeiger* — and attempt to trace how the attack on Germany and on all things German played out in and on both newspapers.

The *Providence Journal* was the main city newspaper of Providence, Rhode Island, with a circulation of over 50,000, including the *Evening Bulletin*. Like most American newspapers of the time, the *Providence Journal* actively participated in the media war against Germany and German-Americans during World War I. Yet the *Providence Journal* has a special significance. The editor of the *Journal* at that time, John Rathom, was rabidly anti-German and campaigned vehemently in his editorial columns for the United States to enter the war against the Central Powers. It is these editorial columns I will focus on. Rathom was apparently employed by British naval intelligence and had an insider’s access to information gathered by the British, much of which he published in the columns of the

*Journal*, but this has not been definitively proven. In any case, the *Providence Journal* became known nationally for its anti-German scoops.

The *Providencer Anzeiger* was a German-language newspaper which was published in Providence for 42 years, from 1876 to 1918, when circumstances related to the war resulted in its discontinuation. It was a small paper of about eight pages with strong socialist leanings which was published every Sunday, reaching about 300 of Rhode Island's 4000 or so Germans. The *Anzeiger* was an all-purpose paper, designed at least as much to entertain as to inform. It contained local, national, and international news, but the majority of the paper was devoted to entertainment and instruction, with serialized stories, poems, helpful hints for kitchen and garden, features on foreign cities, stories from history, local listings of German clubs and events, advertisements by German businesses, personal notices about weddings, parties, and funerals, and the like. Editorial comment was somewhat random, usually appearing amid local listings.

I will first attempt to establish that the *Providence Journal* had a relatively mild, if somewhat negative, attitude toward Germany until Rathom arrived on the scene in 1906 and as the events which eventually lead to war intensified, when the opinions of the *Journal* became openly hostile. I will then proceed chronologically, mapping the shifts in editorial opinion in the *Journal* as the United States moved closer to war, and later when war broke out. At the same time, I will look closely at how the *Providencer Anzeiger* responded to the possibility of war, to increasing anti-German sentiment, and finally, to war itself.

## **The *Journal* before Rathom and the War**

"The union of the States of Germany into a form of government similar in many respects to that of the American Union is an event that cannot fail to touch deeply the sympathies of the people of the United States." So spoke President

Ulysses S. Grant to Congress on February 7, 1871. Germany had just won the Franco-Prussian War and the many states of Germany had just been united under Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia. German immigration to the United States was increasing, and the Germans were fast becoming the second largest immigrant group in the country. Although the U.S. was culturally most connected to England and was an ally of France, there was a good deal of respect toward the new nation of Germany.

On the editorial pages of the *Providence Journal*, there prevailed a tone of detached respect for the new Germany, coupled with tempered admiration. An editorial from January 1, 1871 praises Count Bismark: "Germany will secure the guarantees for which she has contended, and will march forward in the new pathway of national progress and renown, which her great statesman has opened before her." The *Journal* was more reluctant with its praise regarding the German victory over France. The Germans were admired for bravely fighting a war which they did not begin, but sympathy remained largely with the French. At this time in which ideas of social Darwinism were commonplace, there was some confusion about why France, a "civilization always considered to be superior," (*Providence Journal*, 1/28/71) had lost the war:

The men of Germany have shown themselves to be stronger, more vigorous and more capable of endurance than the men of France in the terrible trial of strength which has been going on between them. But who will say that in doing this they have also proved themselves a better people, when judged by any moral standard that can be applied to them?... We should all shrink from holding up the triumphs won by the arms of Prussia as a reward of the superior morality or piety of her people; and why should we be more ready to speak of the overthrow of France as the punishment of her crimes? (*Providence Journal*, 1/28/71)

Thirty years later, in 1900, the attitude of the *Providence Journal* toward Germany hadn't much changed. 1900 was the year of the Boxer Rebellion, in which a secret society in China called the Boxers revolted against foreign

imperial powers in their country and laid siege to the foreign legations in Beijing. A German Minister was killed, and Germany, along with other countries, sent troops to put down the uprising. The allied troops were led by a German commander, the Kaiser inciting the Germans to fight like 'Huns.' The *Journal* viewed Germany's actions as responsible and appropriate, if perhaps tactless and troublesome. An editorial of August 27, 1900 states: "Despite the vaporings of the German Emperor, the course of Germany hitherto has been in every way satisfactory and creditable...The Emperor is setting an example which might be followed to advantage in other quarters." Yet four days later, on the 31st, another editorial complains: "It would not be surprising if the Chinese hatred of all foreigners which has culminated in the Boxer movement had been greatly stimulated by German insolence and aggression."

The preceding compliment paid to Germany about its handling of the Boxer rebellion was quite likely one of the last such compliments it was to receive from the *Providence Journal* for years. With the Moroccan Crisis in 1905 the attitude of the *Journal* toward Germany turned to wary suspicion. Germany was seen as an ambitious trouble-maker.

In order to prevent the French from gaining control in Morocco, the German Kaiser interrupted his cruise in order to visit the Sultan in Tangier, promising to support the Sultan's independence. The Kaiser challenged the French and vowed to defend German interests in Morocco. War between the two nations seemed likely.

On March 24, a *Journal* editorial comments on the Kaiser's visit to Morocco: "Perhaps his journey at this time is simply one of those indiscretions of which he has occasionally been guilty. But the French Government can hardly be blamed for watching his progress with suspicious eyes." The editorial on the 31st expresses concern: "But the restless and ambitious spirit of the German Emperor



is obviously disinclined to brook an arrangement in which he had no share...he is leaving no stone unturned to increase German influence...Will a Mediterranean Monroe Doctrine be strongly enough supported to check him as the original Monroe doctrine has checked him in the Western world?" By the Moroccan Crisis of 1911, after Rathom had been at the *Journal* already for five years, German policy was referred to by the paper as "detestable." (*Providence Journal*, 7/3/11)

## **The Arrival of Rathom and the Outbreak of War**

An Australian by birth, John R. Rathom arrived on the steps of the *Providence Journal* in 1906 and was hired immediately as the new managing editor. Who he really was, no one knows. John Rathom was not his real name, and he seems to have fabricated most of the details of his past. In 1912 Rathom replaced Frederick Roy Martin as editor and general manager of the paper, and two years later he began a dynamic campaign both on and off the editorial page to overcome the neutralism of President Woodrow Wilson and to get the United States to enter World War I on the Allied side. The *Providence Journal's* anti-German propaganda became nationally known and so irritated German officials that they put forth a considerable effort to trace Rathom's past. But although the *Journal* became famous for its anti-German stance, what appeared in its pages did not differ significantly from the anti-German propaganda of other newspapers in the country during the war.

In the summer of 1914, the world was seemingly unaware of any conflict breeding in Europe, much less of the possibility of war. The editorials in the *Providence Journal* were unconcerned with world politics, instead focusing on such newsworthy items as the heat, the smell of the Providence River because of the heat, the perils of canoeing, the need to plant shade trees, the construction of

the East Side tunnel, and the roses which lined the railroad tracks in Apponaug. When war broke out, it appeared to come as a complete surprise.

When war was certain, it itself was seen as the enemy, more so than any particular nation. A front page cartoon titled "Can She Hold Them?" (*Providence Journal*, 7/31/18) shows an angry Civilization with her arms outstretched preventing an armed Teuton and Slav from attacking one another. But before long, Germany became the clear enemy. In an editorial entitled "What Will England Do," the *Journal* reveals its sympathy for England and aversion to Germany: "Germany in the past ten years has come to be known as the bully and braggart of Europe. Time after time she has violated solemn agreements to recognize the neutrality of territory that surrounds her." (*Providence Journal*, 8/3/18)

The majority of editorials at this time took care to channel all animosity toward the German government, not toward German-Americans or toward the people of Germany themselves. An editorial of August 5 states, "There must be millions of German people who do not believe in acts of this character and who, regardless of their patriotism and military discipline, feel ashamed of the present false position in which their country has been placed before the world." This message is repeated on August 8 and 9, with the comments, "Statements that there is a feeling of hostility in the United States against the German people are not based upon facts. The industrious, intelligent Germans who excel in the trades and in scientific research are not objects of suspicion or hatred. It is the German Government that is criticized without reservation..." and "It should be unnecessary to say that the sympathy of the American people extends to the German populace in this unfortunate crisis. With fair-minded observers there can be no prejudice or antagonism against unfortunate fellow humans who have been dragged into an unnecessary war by a flamboyant paranoiac."

But by the end of the month, we see a different tone, a foreshadowing of the hatred toward everything German which was to come in the months ahead. This editorial of August 28 was probably written by Rathom himself: "The German military attitude from the Kaiser down to the least subaltern has been one of insolence and disregard for the rights of others. It has bred, moreover, a reckless disregard for human life and a passion for blood."

In his book, *The German-Language Press in America*, Carl Wittke discusses some of the characteristic responses of the German-American press to the outbreak of the war. At the outbreak of World War I, the German-language press was understandably pro-German. The war was blamed on the jealousy of other countries in light of Germany's industrial and economic success. Most German newspapers in the U.S. predicted a speedy end to the war. In addition, German-American newspapers sharply criticized the Anglo-American press, which they accused of being decidedly pro-British. Also, as most news was filtered through Britain after direct channels of information between Germany and the U.S. were broken, the German language press felt an obligation to present the other side of the story. Yet there were some things, such as the so-called 'atrocities stories' about the German invasion of Belgium during which the Germans were said to have defiled women and children and burnt historic cities (most of which was later proved to be grossly exaggerated) to which German-American newspapers would not even deign to reply.

The *Providencer Anzeiger's* coverage of the war supports Wittke's generalizations. On August 8, 1914, the *Anzeiger's* headline reads "Germany's Violent Struggle With Its Envious Begun." Above the news stories, an editorial comment notes: "Dependable information does not exist, as most reports pass through London and should be cautiously taken in." German victories were reported proudly with headlines such as "The Germans Win Further" and

“Brilliant Victory: The Allies Defeated by the Germans Along the Entire Line.” (8/29/14) On September 5, an article in the *Anzeiger* defended the Kaiser, claiming that “he has shown that he is filled with only one thought, that is to stand before the world as a prince of peace. With unusual energy, sacrifice, and persistence, he has dedicated his entire life to the noble task of bringing Germany to the point of setting the standards regarding civilization, education, science, trade, industry, the developing arts, and public morals.”

The *Anzeiger*, like many other German-language newspapers in the U.S., confronted the ‘biased’ coverage at the start of the war by the American press. On August 22, a lengthy editorial complains that “These newspapers have had unfriendly and hostile opinions against Germany from the very beginning... Our Anglo-American newspapers pick out the most untrue parts from the most untrue reports, and the more unfavorable they sound to Germany, the more prominent a place they’re given... That’s such utter nonsense that one can hardly understand how its possible that a newspaper that’s not printed in a madhouse can send forth such reports.”

## **The Sinking of the *Lusitania***

The sinking of the British passenger liner the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915 in which 1,198 people died, among them 128 Americans, is probably the single event which galvanized American opinion permanently against Germany and set the hate-campaign against all things German into motion. The actual details behind the sinking of the *Lusitania*, however, are considerably more complicated than the story of brutal and barbarous murder of innocent people which the American press related.

Although President Wilson promised that the United States would do everything it could to remain absolutely neutral, the behavior of the U.S. was not

quite up to the standards befitting a neutral nation. During the three years before the United States entered the War, from 1914 through 1916, U.S. trade with Britain and France increased from \$753 million to \$2.75 billion, a great deal of which consisted of arms sales. Trade with Germany during the same time period decreased from \$345 million to only \$29 million. The United States provided the Allies with \$2.3 billion in loans, while it loaned the Germans a mere \$27 million. The war against the Central Powers was being financed by the United States, hardly an act of neutrality. (statistics: *A People and a Nation*)

Furthermore, under international law, it was Germany's responsibility to put an end to this trade, not the United States'. If the U.S. had cut trade with the British (not that it would have), that would have constituted a non-neutral act in favor of Germany. International law would allow Germany to blockade enemy territory and to seize goods from belligerent ships and contraband from neutral ships. To this end, the Germans employed submarine warfare. To counter German submarines, the British violated international law by arming their merchant ships and by flying neutral flags, often American, on these ships.

In response, in the spring of 1915 Germany began a campaign of submarine warfare in order to defend itself from the British plan to stop all neutral trade with Germany in an attempt to cripple the Germany economy. Berlin proclaimed a war zone around the British Isles and warned all neutral ships to stay away. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan urged President Wilson to prohibit all Americans from travelling on neutral ships, stating that "Germany has a right to prevent contraband going to the Allies, and a ship carrying contraband should not rely on passengers to protect her from attack." (*A People and a Nation*, 670) Wilson rejected Bryan's advice and told the Germans they would be held in strict accountability for any American lives lost.

When the *Lusitania* was torpedoed, it was indeed carrying food and munitions for the Allies, and it was armed. The plot thickens, though, and the *Providence Journal* is involved. The British had broken the German naval code, and consequently knew the locations of all German U-boats operating around the British Isles. Also, the ship which had been assigned to signal the *Lusitania* to safety was suddenly and without explanation recalled. Did the British want the *Lusitania* to be sunk so that the United States would enter the war on the Allied side? More evidence suggests that was probably the British intention. Before the *Lusitania* left port in New York, nine telegrams were received by the ship's telegraphist, Robert Leith. The telegrams were sent to rich and important passengers, including Alfred Vanderbilt and well-known theatrical producer Carl Frohman, warning them not to sail. Leith notified the authorities, and within an hour it was determined that five of the telegrams had been sent from the Western Union office next door to the office of the *Providence Journal*. The young man who had brought them in was employed by John Rathom. (Simpson, 113)

So the story goes, early in the war Rathom and two other members of the Providence Journal Company met with a member of the British Government, perhaps the British ambassador, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. The British supposedly set aside a fund guaranteeing the *Journal* against any loss incurred by publishing articles exposing 'German propaganda' and other German 'activities' in the United States. Apparently, one day Rathom was sitting in the British embassy in Washington waiting for Spring-Rice. The naval attaché, Captain Guy Gaunt, arrived first and asked to speak with Rathom. Gaunt later claimed that he promised to provide Rathom with inside information from British intelligence so that it could be published in the *Providence Journal* and be distributed to other leading newspapers. (Byrnes & Spilman, 276) Rathom is said to have received

“substantial payments... by Captain Gaunt on behalf of the British Naval Intelligence.” (Simpson, 113)

British naval intelligence in the United States was working with a Bohemian named Emanuel Victor Voska who had organized a secret organization of Czechs and Slovaks to bring about the defeat of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. Voska’s Bohemian Alliance had agents planted in German and Austrian offices across America and collected information on German agents in the U.S. Meanwhile, Gaunt was constantly receiving information from the British government as it decoded German signals. Rathom was to be the one who fed Voska and Gaunt’s information to the American press through the *Providence Journal* in an attempt to turn popular opinion against Germany and precipitate the United States’ entry into the war. Years later, Gaunt commented that the setup “worked like a charm.” (Byrnes & Spilman, 277)

As could be expected, the *Journal’s* editorials about the sinking of the *Lusitania* were far from friendly. “This morning the mangled bodies of hundreds of innocent non-combatants lie at the bottom of the Atlantic, victims of this same savagery, which recognizes no law of God or code of honor and knows only how to slay,” reads part of an editorial which appeared on May 8. The next day, the metaphor continues, “As calmly might a butcher lead a helpless beast to the slaughter. So the Germans led men, women and children, non-combatants by the hundred, to the slaughter on Friday off Kinsale.” An editorial of May 12 refers to the sinking as “the most hideous crime in the history of so-called civilization.”

By 1915 too, the war against “German-American propagandists” had begun, yet the average German-American was still assumed to be loyal. On May 17, an editorial resists German-American attempts engage sympathy for Germany by making known the unfair and illegal practices of the British of arming merchant ships and flying neutral flags. The editorial counters, “The

German propagandists in this country are continually laying stress on Great Britain's part in the war, with the plain purpose of reviving the old-time American prejudice against her... This is not an Anglo-German conflict, but a clash of German militarist ideals with the ideals of a new and larger freedom."

While opinion in the American press had turned emphatically against Germany by 1915, support and sympathy for German-Americans can still be found. On May 9, there appeared in the *Providence Journal* the following editorial:

If the Berlin diplomats thought that American citizens of German birth or parentage could be depended on in any considerable numbers to range themselves with the Kaiser's government against the Government at Washington in the day when a choice would have to be made, they have found out their mistake. From every quarter of the country comes the same story—whatever these citizens who are bound by ties of birth or ancestry to the Fatherland think of the questions at issue between Germany and Great Britain, or between Germany and any other of the present belligerents, they stand for the United States as against the rest of the world.

This is their country, their home. It is here that they have elected to live and to raise up their children. Nobody objects to their retaining affectionate memories of the country from which they or their fathers came. It would be unnatural if they did not look back with interest and even with tenderness to the land that sheltered the race from which they sprang. But this is not inconsistent with a loyal devotion to America.

The sinking of the *Lusitania* covered the front page of the *Providencer Anzeiger* on May 15. The main news article mentioned that unfortunately the initial reports that not many had died were false. This article also noted with some relief that the President continued to hope for peace. There was no defense of Germany's action because, as the final words of the article explained, the government planned to take legal action against any newspaper or person who attempted to justify the *Lusitania* catastrophe.

Subsequent issues of the *Anzeiger* carried many insistences that German-Americans were loyal to the United States despite their love of Germany. One such example is a poem called "German-American," comparing Germany to a beloved mother and America to a bride, to whom the German-American would



be faithful through good and bad. One stanza invites all Americans to unite as Americans and not as descendants of any other land: "You stand for England, we for Germany/What does the lost homeland matter?/The stars and stripes remain our banner/It is to them that we have sworn." (5/15/15)

Yet despite its proclaimed loyalty to the flag, the *Providence Anzeiger* refused to be silent about U.S. arms sales to the Allies. One editorial entitled, "When Will the Disgrace End?" asked, "And what is the reward for everything that Germans have done to build and maintain this country, their adopted fatherland? Now, when the brothers of German-Americans are in a terrible struggle against superior enemy forces, America sends the latter the weapons and munitions and every possible thing which can only serve to prolong the horrible mass-murder. What a disgrace for a country which wishes to be neutral!" (5/22/15)

## **On the Way to War**

By the beginning of 1917 the campaign which was conducted on the editorial pages of the *Providence Journal* for the United States to enter the war had reached a fever pitch. Events were accelerating with the same intensity. In 1916 President Wilson had been re-elected on a peace platform, while Germany continued off and on to torpedo neutral ships, and Wilson continued to let American citizens sail on them. On January 22, 1917 Wilson gave his famous "Peace Without Victory" speech before the Senate and a few days later asked Germany for peace terms. Germany's answer was to declare a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare on the last day of the month. Two days later on February 3 the German Ambassador Count von Bernstorff was given his passport.

Since mid-January the President had been in possession of a telegram addressed to the German foreign minister in Mexico from the German foreign secretary Arthur Zimmermann, which had been intercepted and decoded by the British. The telegram instructed the German foreign minister in Mexico to suggest to the Mexican government that if Mexico joined Germany in an alliance against the United States, Germany would help Mexico recover former territories which had been lost to the U.S., namely Texas and New Mexico. On the first day of March this telegram was released to the press and served to stir up popular sentiment to an even greater degree in the favor of entering the war.

Hardly a day had gone by during this train of events in which an impatient editorial in the *Providence Journal* failed to chide President Wilson for his “long-continued weak and vacillating policy in international affairs.” (2/2/17) The *Journal* referred to Wilson’s treatment of Germany as “spineless” and stated on February 24: “It is inconceivable that the President should intend to let the international situation rest where it is... Present conditions are intolerable. Germany has deliberately covered us with humiliation. We are physically and spiritually besieged. We are sick at heart and stricken in soul. Is the heart of America content to shrink back into a coward’s hole at the wave of a bloody hand? ‘The nation must stand by the President’—yes, that sentiment rings true and the nation and the newspapers of the nation have loyally supported it through two dark years of humiliation and infamy. But it is time now for the President to stand by the nation.”

At the end of the month, Wilson asked Congress for the ability to arm merchant ships through his proposed Armed Neutrality Bill. The bill passed the House, but was voted down by the Senate a few days later. The *Providence Journal* blamed the defeat of the bill on traitors in Congress. An editorial of February 25 entitled “The Latest German Plot” claimed that, “the latest outburst in Congress

against the President's determination to maintain armed merchant vessels inviolate is due to the same old crowd of German plotters." On March 5 after the bill had been defeated, an editorial read, "The organized tactics of the filibustering group to block the passage of the Armed Neutrality bill, and the betrayal of [the President's] trust by the chairman of the Foreign Relations committee will be branded by the American people as little short of treasonable."

The *Journal* constantly accused certain members of Congress of being German conspirators. A month after the defeat of the Armed Neutrality bill, on April 1, a cartoon on the front page of the *Journal* entitled "Pulling the Strings" showed a huge arm with the word "Germany" written on it prying open the top of the Capitol building and literally pulling out strings, some of which were attached to tags reading "pro-German," "pacifist," and "peace at any price."

Shortly after the President asked Congress for armed merchant ships, he released the Zimmermann Telegram to the press. John Rathom apparently had not known about the telegram before its publication, but he had previously been informed about German activity in Mexico and the possibility of an attack by the Germans on the United States from across the border. On March 1, when news of the Zimmermann Telegram covered the front page of the *Providence Journal*, sharing the spotlight was a reprint of a story and editorial which had appeared in the *Journal* the past month. Above the reprints, the *Journal* proudly proclaimed, "The Providence Journal printed the following story with regard to Germany's intrigues in Mexico and the following editorial concerning the same subject on the ninth and tenth of February, respectively. The story was reprinted by a number of leading newspapers throughout the country on the day of publication in these columns, and credited to the *Journal*. The facts contained in this story were presented to Attorney General Gregory by the *Providence Journal* before publication."

After the defeat of the Armed Neutrality bill and the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram, the *Providence Journal* lost all patience for President Wilson's indecision. In a biting editorial on March 7, the *Journal* attacked the President:

Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, is frantically searching, outside the hours he is giving to golf, for reasons why he should not act in the submarine controversy...He has spoken brave words but has rendered them ineffective by the lack of deeds. He has consumed reams of paper in the writing of notes and addresses which the world has come by long experience to discount in advance. The long-suffering and patient attitude of American patriots, and above all the patriotic American newspapers, has been simply a courtesy to the fetish that we must not embarrass our great and good President. How much longer are we to sacrifice the respect of the world and our own sense of national dignity? How much longer are we going to float rudderless on the sea of international disgrace?

The *Providencer Anzeiger* did its part by urging unnaturalized Germans to become American citizens, explaining that if one was not a citizen of the U.S. one was of no use here and was no longer any use to one's homeland either. (3/24/17)

## War at Home and Abroad

On April 6, 1917 President Wilson declared war on Germany. It was from then on that the war against everything that was German began in earnest, both at home and abroad. All Germans were now seen as evil; the Germans in Germany were no longer victims of a repressive Prussianism, and the Germans in America were no longer loyal citizens. "It is impossible to conclude," read one editorial, "that the Kaiser's people are a mild-mannered, modest breed, whose unwilling participation in the war is a result of their wicked oppression by Potsdam and Berlin." (*Providence Journal*, 12/22/17) Anything and everything

German was to be hated. Fear of spies reached a panic, and the campaign to eradicate all German influence in the United States intensified.

The spy hysteria that erupted across the United States after the U.S. entered World War I was out of all proportion to any real danger from sympathizers with the German cause. In his *War Memoirs* published in 1935, former Secretary of State Robert Lansing concluded that “certainly nine out of ten, and probably ninety-nine out of a hundred” of the cases in which German-Americans were under suspicion resulted only in a waste of time for the federal secret service. (Wittke, 247)

The *Providence Journal* did more than its fair share of promoting this spy hysteria. Starting December 1, 1917 there ran every day on the editorial page, under the publishing information about the *Journal*, the following warning:

Every German or Austrian in the United States, unless known by years of association to be absolutely loyal, should be treated as a potential spy. Keep your eyes and ears open. Whenever any suspicious act or disloyal word comes to your notice communicate at once with the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, Room 301, Federal Building, Providence. We are at war with the most merciless and inhuman nation in the world. Hundreds of thousands of its people in this country want to see America humiliated and beaten to her knees, and they are doing, and will do, everything in their power to bring this about. Take nothing for granted. Energy and alertness in this direction may save the life of your son, your husband or your brother.

Rabid rhetoric such as that of the *Providence Journal* and other newspapers across the nation fed the panic and resulted in a number of lynchings and tarring and featherings of innocent German-Americans. On December 19, 1917 an editorial in the *Journal* inveighs, “the swarm of enemies on our own soil is still a menace to be met and strangled... The deed[s] of Teutonic agents are planned by the trained diplomatists and militarists who direct the worldwide Prussian propaganda of terrorism.” Calls for citizens to take the law into their own hands, like the following, were commonplace: “To rebuke and punish disloyal

utterances is patriotism, not lawlessness. This is a people's war, and the people must be on their guard to suppress treachery and sedition... If they venture to express disloyal sentiments, or to sneer at the country and its flag, they must be taught a wholesome lesson... We must smash pro-Germanism wherever it shows its head."

The *Providence Journal* also participated in campaigns to remove German from all American schools. An editorial of December 21, 1917 stated, "[No city] can afford to keep on its teaching staff any person who is not a hundred per cent American." At the end of April 1918, the Providence school board voted to eliminate German from the public schools of Providence. The *Journal* wholeheartedly approved and soon demanded that "every poisonous book should be removed from our schools and the shelves of our public libraries." (5/5/18) "We owe it to ourselves and those who are to follow us to be scrupulously careful to keep the poison of the German propaganda out of our schools." (5/6/18)

On October 6, 1917, as the anti-German panic was beginning to build, Congress passed a law requiring that all foreign-language newspapers submit English translations of all matters related to the war to their local postmaster. If, after a time, the government was sufficiently convinced of the loyalty of a particular newspaper, the paper would be issued a permit exempting it from having to file translations. Translation was a very expensive and time-consuming process, and forced many German-language newspapers to either consolidate or to shut down. It had the additional affect of practically eliminating news and editorial comment about the war.

As could be expected, the *Providence Journal*, like other American newspapers, was ecstatic about the growing number of suspensions of German-language newspapers. Not only did the law silence German-Americans, but it

eliminated competition as well, increasing the circulation of many English-language newspapers. The *Journal* approved, "The campaign against the enemy-language press is going forward industriously. It deserves to be pushed, for this is a time when every possible implement of propaganda should be taken from Germany's hands." (5/1/18). The Sedition Act, passed in May 1918, was also supported by *Journal*. In making illegal the obstruction of the sale of war bonds and the use of "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive" language against the government, the Constitution, the flag, and the military uniform, the Act received the *Journal's* "wholehearted approval" for the "evil that it remedied." (5/15/18)

Perhaps the *Providence Journal's* harshest words of ill-will came, though, in an editorial of May 2, 1918, called "The Only Way to Beat Germany." The editorial read, "If Germany is to be whipped and whipped so thoroughly that she will never again menace the civilization and peace of the world, she must be so thoroughly chastised that her man power is eliminated... The one way to accomplish this great result is to turn our dollars into bullets and our bullets into dead Germans."

The *Providencer Anzeiger* did its best to respond to this onslaught of hatred while keeping its readership abreast of new developments and trying to stay in business. It provided its approximately 300 readers, many of whom probably could speak only German, with legal updates, news about spy-arrests, information about protests and fund-raising drives, updates on the ongoing efforts in support of German seamen interned for the duration of the war at Gallups Island in Boston, and discussions about the assault on the German language and culture and about what it meant to be German-American.

From the beginning of the war, the *Anzeiger* had been providing its readers with important legal information, such as when and where to register if

one was a non-citizen, penalties for not doing so, how to register for the draft, what constituted traitorous behavior, and, repeatedly, the advice to “hold your mouths!”

The *Anzeiger* also followed closely any arrests of local German-Americans and unnaturalized Germans for treacherous activities, as well as reporting on arrests and anti-German violence nationally. There were quite a few arrests in Providence and the surrounding area, which isn't surprising given the hysteria the *Providence Journal* was actively fomenting. On May 18, 1917, F. Fritz Zschutschke was arrested for trespassing on the Fort-Reservation in Newport and was subsequently interned. Georg A. Rud. Krause, was arrested on July 18, 1917 in the area of the Herreshof shipyard in Bristol. In September he was released from the Cranston prison because an investigation proved that he was acting harmlessly. In Providence on January 13, 1918, Marie E. Clarke of 333 Friendship St. was arrested and held on \$2000 bail for allegedly threatening the life of the President. Charges were dropped three months later. And on April 28, 1918 nine local Germans were arrested in seven different gold factories for allegedly spreading German propaganda. The *Anzeiger* pointed out that “most of those arrested are married and have children...” (5/4/18)

The pages of the *Providencer Anzeiger* reflected more than anything else a great sadness at the state of war and the hatred in the United States of everything German. An editorial from July 7, 1917 replied bitterly to the refusal to exempt first and second generation German immigrants from performing their military service on the front, something which had been suggested so that German-Americans would not have to go to battle against their former countrymen: “For in the battle for humanity and democracy it seems that no young American may shy away from letting the grenades whiz and the bullets whistle until he succeeds in killing a dear relative, if not his own father.” A few weeks earlier, the



*Anzeiger* had reprinted a sad yet hopeful editorial from another German-language newspaper. Part of it read: "At times like these there is no desire to live, but one must endure the hideous weather and must not lose one's courage. These dreadful days of agony will too come to an end. We will outlive them, and we will preserve and nurture the true cultural treasures in our souls until a new morning breaks and sound reason is restored to its place." (6/23/17) A similar appeal to German-Americans to be patient appeared in an editorial entitled "Everything Will Be All Right!" The editorial assures readers that "the fear in our land that the German language will be lynched, brought about by the malicious attacks by certain super-patriots, is unnecessary...This storm too will blow over; patience!" (5/11/18)

The effects of the law of October 1917 which required all foreign-language newspapers to provide their local postmaster with a translation of any material relating to the war hit the *Providencer Anzeiger* immediately. Under the masthead of the *Anzeiger* on October 27 the usual war headlines failed to appear. Instead, on the front page were the "New England Chronicles," which typically appeared on the second or third page. Inside the paper there was an announcement by the editor noting that because of the new law "the reader might miss in our paper reports on the war and and on much else. We have applied for a license and hope to receive it soon." Apparently they didn't, as news coverage dropped out of the *Anzeiger* from then on, except for one issue in November which appeared with the main news items printed in English. This was either too expensive or unpopular, for it never happened again.

Six months later, having to provide translations was really taking its toll on German-language newspapers. On April 27, 1918 the *Anzeiger* noted that "every week the number of German-language papers in America is growing smaller...The publishers can no longer afford the higher costs." The last issue of

the *Anzeiger* appeared on July 15, 1918, with a letter from the publisher stating "To whom it may concern: On account of existing business conditions that have affected and increased the cost of publishing a weekly newspaper, the *Providence Anzeiger* will be discontinued for the present." Also, the editor, Felix Hamburger, thanked his advertisers and stated that he had always upheld American ideas and been loyal to the government. He "regrets being unable to continue a service that always produced good results." (Arndt, 606)

## **The End of the War and Beyond**

On November 11, 1918 the armistice was signed which ended the First World War. The war against German-Americans and all things German, however, did not end with it. The *Providence Journal* continued its cold-hearted crusade. Now they were campaigning for unconditional surrender and for harsh reparations. The editorial page was interspersed with many boxes, in which was written "UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER." Starting November 19, the large box which had appeared daily on the editorial page and had warned readers to be on the lookout for German spies now claimed that "since the signing of the armistice thousands of German traitors have begun in America a dangerous propaganda for lenient terms of peace. They are flooding the mails with appeals for 'starving women and children of Germany' and are seeking to make it appear that those who are determined to make the German people pay for their crimes against mankind intend to indulge in their own brutal treatment of the weak and helpless. Such arguments come only from disloyal men and women who are still permitted to live unmolested among us..." One editorial adds, "The pacifists and pro-Germans are already busy. They have arrayed themselves in the garb of pity and are working their tear-ducts overtime. We must have none of them, but give

ourselves to the punishment of the most vicious of all recorded criminals in such a way as to vindicate human honor and righteousness." (11/15/18)

Never before and never again in American history was the hatred of Germans as great as at the time of the First World War. Even the evils perpetrated by the Germans during World War II failed to incite such utter hatred. In that case, Hitler was seen to be guilty, not all Germans. An editorial in the *Providence Journal* in 1939 clearly states that "Hitler... stands convicted before the bar of history. The war guilt is his, and his alone." Little hatred was brought against those Americans of German descent during the Second World War. Perhaps this was because the category 'German-American' no longer existed, after having been decimated during the First World War. If anything, Italian-Americans were seen as the threat, not German-Americans. In any case, in World War II it wasn't an ethnic group which was being fought, but an enemy government which threatened the 'American way of life' and the "freedom and the right of the individual to live out his life without suffering they tyranny of the state." (*Providence Journal*, 5/8/45)

The *Providence Journal* itself has mellowed over the years, its vicious anti-German tirades appearing to have been forgotten, along with those of the rest of the nation, sometime after the end of WWII, which now has superseded World War I in popular memory as the great evil perpetrated by the Germans. The *Journal's* present attitude toward Germany is rather positive and trusting. An editorial after the reunification of East and West Germany on October 3, 1989 runs: "There is little reason to believe that the West German enthusiasm for democracy has been somehow artificial during these past 45 years... Moreover, while no nation is more mindful of its recent past than Germany, no nation has more reason to build on its democracy. In short, Germany prefers to look forward, not back... German unity and strength has much potential for good, and

the land of Luther and Goethe and Durer and Bach has many resources to battle its ghosts." Let's hope they're right. Meanwhile, popular demonology in America has moved on to embrace other enemies.

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