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# Scapegoats, slackers and spies: the portrayal of Germany, Germans and German-Americans by three eastern Iowa newspapers during World War I

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**Scapegoats, slackers and spies: The portrayal of Germany, Germans and  
German-Americans by three eastern Iowa newspapers during World War I**

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by

**Lucinda Lee Stephenson**

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Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

**Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa**

1985

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

It was a time when sauerkraut became "liberty cabbage" and hamburger became "liberty steak." Berlin, Iowa, started calling itself Lincoln, Iowa, and scores of people filled court houses across the country to have their German surnames changed to "more patriotic and American" names. All aspects of German culture were frowned upon by loyal patriots of the red, white and blue; things that were once a great source of pride for German-Americans suddenly became a source of shame.

America's participation in World War I sparked a period of national paranoia, hysteria and violence--the likes of which America would not see again until the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II. For America's German population, the war caused them to endure years of divided loyalties, misunderstandings and persecution. Hyphenism became a buzz word that emphasized the hyphen between "German-Americans," and it implied a divided loyalty that was frowned upon by those fortunate enough to be "100 per cent" American. President Woodrow Wilson explained it by saying that "some Americans need hyphens in their names because only part of them came over" when they left the Fatherland for America. <sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the United States entered the conflict, German-Americans found themselves the objects of intense scrutiny. Many were accused of refusing to cut their ties with Germany, and every remark or action they made was monitored for signs of disloyalty. Many historians have found it ironic that these same German citizens were highly respected before the war. Germans had gained a reputation in the U.S. as skilled tradesmen, farmers and professionals. Not only had they carved out a respectable niche in their adopted country, but they also formed the largest

immigrant group in America.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Census for 1910 reveals that the total population of the United States was just short of 92,000,000 people. Out of this number, 8,282,618 persons in America, or 8.7 per cent, listed Germany as the country of their origin. Over two and a half million were born in Germany and nearly four million were born in the United States of parents born in Germany. The remaining one and a half million had one parent born in the U.S. and the other in Germany. Thus, in 1910, Germans represented "26 percent of the total foreign white stock in America."<sup>3</sup>

But for most of America's native born and immigrant population, the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife in Serajevo on June 28, 1914 was just the start of another fleeting European squabble. America had long held a course of neutrality and isolationism in world affairs, and President Wilson intended to keep it that way. But less than a year later, Wilson found himself breaking his 1916 campaign promise to keep the U.S. out of war. On April 2, 1917, Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany and her Allies. Four days later, Congress gave Wilson an affirmative answer, and a few months later, America marched thousands of its sons and daughters to war.<sup>4</sup>

As the country began to ready itself for combat, Wilson and his administration quickly realized the complexity of preparing the United States for world war. Up until this time, no war had created such an unprecedented demand for materials, manpower and munitions. It soon became clear that the mobilization of people and provisions for war was no longer enough; there must also be sufficient mobilization of public opinion.<sup>5</sup> As Terence Qualter wrote in his book, Propaganda and Psychological Warfare:

It came to be recognized that influencing men's minds was another important theater of conflict as essential to victory as the production of guns, the healing of the sick and the destruction of the enemy's property.<sup>6</sup>

Recognizing the necessity for arousing Americans to defend the cause, Wilson created the Committee on Public Information on April 13, 1917, just seven days after the U.S. officially entered the war. George Creel was appointed chairman of the CPI, and the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy served as official members.<sup>7</sup> The committee's original purpose was to disseminate news about America's war effort, but over the course of its two year existence, the organization mushroomed into the greatest advertising agency the world had ever known.<sup>8</sup> And much of the CPI's work had a direct effect on America's German population.

Chairman Creel, who had earned a reputation as a crusading newspaper journalist in such cities as Denver, Kansas City and New York, was a longtime supporter of Wilson's policies and administration. Creel believed passionately in Wilson's proclamation that the war was being fought to "make the world safe for democracy" and he set about creating the CPI with great passion and conviction. Creel gathered together an unprecedented group of editors, scholars, journalists and artists to carry the CPI's message and give all Americans a burning desire to fight for Uncle Sam. A majority of these experts was summoned by a "come at once" telegram. Most caught the next train to Washington, where they found themselves in charge of a brand new division of the CPI.<sup>9</sup>

One of the CPI's first divisions was the Division of News, which supplied newspapers and magazines with carefully censored articles, advertisements and photographs of the war. To guard against information falling into the hands of the enemy, Creel appealed to the patriotism of the country's news editors by asking them to submit to voluntary censorship. As part of this agreement, editors were not to publish any information about the size and movement of troops, departure and arrival ports of ships, or any type of map, chart or picture related to America's war

efforts.<sup>10</sup>

In order to make it as easy as possible for the press to comply with CPI guidelines, Creel urged editors and reporters to submit articles for CPI approval if there was even the slightest doubt about their contents. If the article was stamped "Passed by the Committee on Public Information," this meant it could be published safely, although there was no guarantee the information in the article was completely accurate. If the article bore the stamp "Authorized by the Committee on Public Information," this meant it had been carefully investigated and officially approved.<sup>11</sup>

An interesting aspect concerning the enforcement of these guidelines is that the CPI actually had no legal authority to insure compliance with its rules. Although the Espionage Act, the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act and the Sedition Act were already on the books by the spring of 1918, the real authority for enforcing censorship rested with the Department of Justice and with the Post Office Department, which could refuse to mail publications that violated established guidelines. Despite this handicap, Creel was able to exert direct and indirect pressure, all supported by law, because of his close ties with the Justice Department. Creel was also a member of the Censorship Board, which was created by Wilson to control communication with foreign countries. This membership and the full cooperation of Military, Naval and Post Office officials made Creel's enforcement problems virtually disappear.<sup>12</sup>

For the most part, the majority of editors complied with the CPI's guidelines for voluntary censorship.<sup>13</sup> Creel's philosophy regarding censorship was that America needed "expression not repression," and he felt the CPI was committed to presenting the public with unbiased facts and truth about the war. In order to facilitate the availability of information, the CPI's News Division was organized like a huge city

desk where CPI employees gathered and wrote over 6,000 news releases.<sup>14</sup> These stories were then mimeographed and placed on a table for reporters and correspondents. Thus, by choking all the channels of communication with official CPI versions of war-related news, Creel controlled the flow of news in America. All information about the war was censored somewhere along the line--whether at the source, in transit, or in the newspaper office in compliance with the CPI's voluntary guidelines.<sup>15</sup>

If, however, information was published that was in violation of these guidelines, it was extremely rare that the Committee did not find out about it. All editors, reporters and citizens were instructed to report immediately to the CPI any suspected violations. First Assistant Postmaster General J. C. Koons even issued an order to all postmasters to report "suspicious characters, disloyal and treasonable acts and anything which might be important during the existence of the present state of war." It soon became clear that in addition to regular enforcement agencies, there was a whole host of civilian investigators that were on the lookout for evidence of a violation of Creel's rules.<sup>16</sup>

One of the major auxiliary organizations formed to monitor the public during the neutrality period was the Council of National Defense. When war was declared, the council expanded on both state and local levels.<sup>17</sup> State governors were in charge of organizing State Councils of Defense, and midwestern councils gained a notorious reputation for delivering homegrown versions of justice. In fact, most of these organizations were quasi-legal groups that didn't have any real authority.<sup>18</sup> Members of these organizations became instant judges and juries who delivered punishments for alleged disloyal activities and utterances--all under the guise of serving Uncle Sam. In most cases, though, the public didn't need laws or

organizations to keep them from saying treasonous or disloyal remarks. The CPI had done its work so well that most citizens had a burning desire to believe and support the CPI's version of the war.<sup>19</sup>

Not only were Americans given news that was managed by their own government, but they were also fed strictly the Allied version of the war, since Britain controlled the transatlantic cable.<sup>20</sup> This gave Britain a distinct advantage for promoting war propaganda in the United States. Germany's cable to American had been cut by the Allies early in the war, and although the Germans had a weak cable linkup with the U.S., most of their information wasn't reaching the American public.<sup>21</sup> President Wilson also deepened wartime censorship by placing restrictions on all cable, telephone and telegraph messages entering or leaving the United States as of April 28, 1917.<sup>22</sup> Thus, almost from the onset of the war, America was gripped by censorship without even realizing it.

As wartime censorship measures expanded, Creel moved from directing the release of war news into the arena of opinion management.<sup>23</sup> One of the Committee's most ingenious and effective techniques came in the form of the Four-Minute Men who delivered four minute speeches on war-related topics during intermission at movie theaters. Over 75,000 men volunteered to give short speeches on topics that were outlined in the Four-Minute Man Bulletin, which was sent to all speakers. The Bulletin not only contained a list of topics the government wanted to stress, but it also contained sample speeches.<sup>24</sup> National, state and local chairmen helped organize the Four-Minute Men, and it was the responsibility of local people to choose suitable speakers. Creel estimated that the Four-Minute Men gave over 750,000 speeches to an audience of approximately 134,000,000 people. This system provided a nationwide hookup so that America had a coordinated broadcasting network before radio or

television was invented.<sup>25</sup>

Advertising also played a major role in helping the CPI shape the opinions of Americans. William H. Johns, then president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, was appointed director of this division, which pioneered one of the most successful ad campaigns in the world.<sup>26</sup> The division placed powerful ads in hundreds of periodicals throughout the country requesting that the public support America's war effort, conserve natural resources for war work, and contribute to war stamp and liberty loan drives. Publishers were convinced by the division that it was their patriotic duty to donate advertising space, and Creel estimated that millions of dollars worth of free space was donated to the CPI.<sup>27</sup>

Working closely with the advertising effort of the Committee was the Division of Pictorial Publicity, headed by artist Charles Dana Gibson. This division formed a committee of prominent designers, illustrators, artists and cartoonists to help the CPI sell America's war effort through pictures. Gibson's committee, in consultation with government officials, held weekly meetings to decide what topics needed to be stressed in their artwork.<sup>28</sup> Creel's Complete Report on the CPI revealed that Gibson and his colleagues designed 700 posters, 310 advertising illustrations and 122 window cards.<sup>29</sup>

In a world without radio or television, the poster took on a major role as an instrument of mass communication. What made this medium especially attractive to the CPI was that posters were cheap to produce. As a consequence, posters were printed by the millions to urge conservation of food and energy, recruit men to serve in the military, and request money for war loans.<sup>30</sup> With the start of the first Liberty Loan drive, Gibson's poster crew launched the most massive poster campaign of WWI. The concept of loaning the government money to cover the costs of the war was new

to Americans, but before the drives were completed, nearly 22 billion dollars was collected for the war effort.<sup>31</sup>

Creel also formed a division to work with the more than 14 million residents of the U.S. that were born in foreign countries. This "Division of Work With the Foreign Born" mounted a massive educational campaign to inform foreign citizens about the democracy, peace and freedom that Wilson was seeking. In addition to translating CPI pamphlets into foreign languages, the CPI provided speakers, patriotic rallies and press releases for fourteen different nationalities. Other miscellaneous efforts were directed toward organizing foreign citizens along patriotic lines.<sup>32</sup>

Another critical segment of the CPI was Guy Stanton Ford's Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation, which published more than 75 million pieces of literature that ranged from simple leaflets to elaborate works of research. Creel qualified this figure by saying it didn't include pieces that were reprinted in newspapers or privately financed by state organizations or individuals.<sup>33</sup> Although most of the pamphlets were to be strictly educational, many continually stressed only the most barbaric and militaristic aspects of German society. At the same time, most publications and posters emphasized the need for absolute loyalty among people, and the public was told to be on the lookout for German spies in this country. Before long, it became clear that the CPI's publications did more than educate the public about America's war efforts--they created a climate of fear and hysteria that caused people to be suspicious of anything that was German.<sup>34</sup>

Soon this suspicion grew into an almost hysterical effort to rid the country of everything German. In connection with this effort, many political and community leaders made motions to do away with German-language newspapers, which were seen as vehicles for pro-German propaganda. During the period of U.S. neutrality,

German-language newspapers were strongly pro-German, but after war was officially declared, these papers made an amazing turnaround and expressed loyalty to the Allied cause.<sup>35</sup> Despite this decidedly pro-Ally stand, almost half of the German-language newspapers in 1917 suspended publication voluntarily because of unbearable public pressure. Others ceased publication in accordance with the wishes of their local State Councils of Defense. The number of German-language dailies in the U.S. dropped to twenty-six, less than half the prewar figure. The total number of German-language periodicals stood at 522 just before the war. Forty-seven percent had disappeared by the end of 1919.<sup>36</sup>

Along with this movement to do away with German-language newspapers came a great wave of misguided patriotism that called for a ban on teaching the German language in public schools. The reaction of national and local leaders to this language ban was mixed. Chairman Creel and President Wilson both thought the language ban was "childish." Wilson delivered a speech in April 1918 in which he told people that America was at war with the German government and not with its people. Despite these attempts to make a distinction between the German people and their government, approximately half of all states in the U.S. had curtailed or abolished instruction in the German language by the summer of 1918. Several of these states, along with dozens of counties and cities, went a step further and restricted the rights of citizens to speak German in public.<sup>37</sup>

This anti-German feeling was not only restricted to the German language; restrictions overflowed into the area of German music as well. The works of German and Austrian composers, such as Beethoven and Mozart, were banned in several cities. For example, the Philadelphia orchestra on November 10, 1917 decided that German music would no longer be included in its program. The state board of

education in California ordered all German folk songs in music textbooks to be ripped out and destroyed. The American Defense Society said German music was "one of the most dangerous forms of German propaganda, because it appeals to the emotions and has power to sway an audience as nothing else can."<sup>38</sup>

Almost immediately after Congress declared war, Americans started organizing and participating in patriotic ceremonies and parades. In emotionally charged speeches, patriotic groups frequently denounced Germans in a very theatrical and harsh manner. Germans were described as barbarians and Huns, and German-Americans in the audience were frequently called upon to publicly denounce their Fatherland and pledge allegiance to the United States. Gradually, this type of harassment escalated to more physical forms. German-Americans were often forced to march in parades and kiss the American flag. Many Germans were forced to purchase Liberty bonds, and groups of overzealous Americans painted German houses and churches yellow. Some Germans were even dragged from their homes and beaten or treated to a coat of tar and feathers.<sup>39</sup>

These acts of harassment and violence were extremely frightening and humiliating for German-Americans, whose personal integrity had never before been questioned or attacked. Although thousands of America's German population were accused of disloyalty, few German-American citizens were convicted or even officially charged with such crimes. Chairman Creel stated that only 1,532 people were arrested under the provisions of the Espionage Act--65 for threats against the President and 10 for sabotage. All in all, only 908 indictments were returned.<sup>40</sup>

But the Creel committee and overzealous citizens aren't solely to blame for creating this anti-German climate. Many pro-Ally forces were operating in this country long before the United States actually declared its commitment to the

struggle. During the early stages of the war, ancestral ties and a common language made it easy for many Americans to identify with the British. Britain's control of the transatlantic cable to the United States, and its censoring of all information the U. S. received about the war also contributed to America's increasing identification with Britain. American journalists were not thrilled with British censorship, but their papers could not exist without news, so eventually they learned to function under British restrictions.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to censorship, the United States had been the major target of a British propaganda movement since the summer of 1914, when hostilities first broke out between the Allies and the Central Powers. Britain's propaganda arm, officially called the American Ministry of Information, was chaired by Sir Gilbert Parker. The objective of British propaganda during the neutrality years was to create a climate of opinion that would force the U. S. to support the Allies and eventually enter the conflict. Parker's first effort involved a massive mail campaign directed at America's opinion leaders. Pamphlets and personal letters were sent to thousands of influential Americans, including preachers, politicians, teachers and other intellectuals. Journalists were also on the receiving end of British material, especially since the principal outlet for British propaganda was the American press. Newspapers were the sole reading material for 90 percent of America's population, and the medium played an important role in the battle to sway public opinion.<sup>42</sup>

America was also influenced by its economic involvement with the Allies. Early in the war, the British declared an illegal blockade that prevented Germany from receiving supplies from America--making England the sole benefactor of American trade. Britain monopolized America's exports so that in 1916 U.S. exports skyrocketed from over two and one-half billion dollars to four and one-third billion dollars. The

total dollar amount of goods exported during the years of U.S. neutrality to Great Britain, Russia, France, and Italy was over seven billion dollars, and of this figure, only two billion was spent for munitions. The other five billion dollars was used to pay for raw materials, metals, food, cotton, and general manufactured goods. All branches of American industry and commerce were reaping big dividends and profits from the European war, and this naturally led to a movement where it became "intellectually fashionable" for Eastern, aristocratic industrialists to support their most reliable business customers. By the winter of 1916, the economic interests of Britain and the U.S. became so entangled that long before the U.S. made it official by sending troops to France, American industry, commerce and finance had become active participants in the European war.<sup>43</sup>

But perhaps nothing was as effective a tool for recruiting pro-Ally sentiment in the U. S. as atrocity propaganda. Graphic stories of alleged German brutalities reached newspapers in the United States and infuriated the public. The person held responsible for this behavior was the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II. In his book, Propaganda Technique in the World War, Harold Lasswell states: "It is always difficult for many simple minds inside a nation to attach personal traits to so dispersed an entity as a whole nation. They need to have some individual on whom to pin their hate."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the Kaiser was portrayed as a modern day Attila, who sent his soldiers to "behave like the Huns of old."<sup>45</sup> Cartoons and posters illustrated by British artists, and later by American artists, depicted German soldiers as larger than life barbarians who murdered women and children at whim. Although most German atrocity stories were later found to be false, this type of propaganda was a powerful factor in swaying the American people from their neutral stance.<sup>46</sup> The most famous atrocity story

involved Belgian children, whose hands were supposedly cut off by German soldiers so that they would be unable to fight when they reached maturity. Later investigations failed to turn up any children with missing hands. Other famous reports told of German women wearing necklaces made out of eyes ripped from the sockets of wounded French soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Also popular were sex stories, which graphically described how young girls and nuns were brutally raped by German soldiers. Many of these tales were embellished by accounts of pathetic, scared women wandering helplessly across the land--their breasts amputated by men in the Kaiser's army. In simple economic terms, the supply of atrocity stories didn't even begin to meet the demand.<sup>48</sup>

The British also successfully exploited new methods of warfare used by the Germans. The German use of submarines, poisonous gas, and midnight air raids helped to reinforce the British message that Germany was a ruthless aggressor that violated the laws of civilized warfare.<sup>49</sup> News stories, carefully censored and slanted by the British government, detailed merciless midnight attacks on sleeping Belgian communities in which women and children were given no opportunity to escape the wrath of German bombs.

The British also used Germany's destruction of churches in Belgium and France to mobilize American opinion against Germany. British stories about the destruction of the Rheims Cathedral were perfect examples of propaganda in action. Germans fired upon the cathedral out of military necessity because the French often used church towers as storage areas and observation points. The British ignored the motives of German army and only stressed the damage inflicted upon the structure by the Germans. The destruction of the cathedral saddened and infuriated many Americans, in part because etchings of the cathedral were popular additions to many

living rooms of the lower middle class. Americans also considered Rheims as an outstanding example of beautiful European architecture. The burning of Louvain, Belgium and its university library equally outraged Americans and made Germany's army seem all the more unmerciful.<sup>50</sup>

Germany tried throughout the war to counter Allied propaganda with its own effort, but its work was unskilled and poorly planned, and severely handicapped by the British cutting of the transatlantic cable. The Germans were unsuccessful in exploiting events such as the ruthlessness of Britain's economic blockade that was slowly starving the Central Powers. Germany also had the disadvantage of dealing with language and cultural barriers. German agents did secretly manage to purchase the New York Evening Mail to help with their propaganda effort.<sup>51</sup> The Germans also distributed propaganda through German-language newspapers, but these efforts were of limited value because, at least to some, it was a matter of preaching to the converted.

To compensate for the pro-British press, German-language newspapers in the U.S. began a forceful crusade to explain the purpose and mission of their Fatherland. They elaborated on Russia's hunger for land, France's thirst for revenge and Britain's quest for profits.<sup>52</sup> German-Americans literally showered Congress and the White House in 1916 with letters and petitions protesting the pro-Ally sentiment of the Wilson administration. American newspapers were also bombarded with letters from German-Americans protesting pro-British coverage of the war, and attempting to explain Germany's position. Although a great majority of America's German citizens held beliefs somewhere between those of the pro-German and pro-American extremes, efforts continued to organize rallies and demonstrations to educate Americans about Germany's role in the war. Fundraising efforts were even

conducted to raise money for the German Red Cross. These organized and visible activities increasingly irritated native Americans, who were gradually becoming more receptive to British propaganda.<sup>53</sup>

Much of the pro-German war effort in the U.S. was carried out by the German-American Alliance, a group that operated under a Federal charter granted by Congress in 1899. Originally, the Alliance was to pursue "high cultural aims," but as the organization grew, it gradually adopted a more political slant. The Alliance actively worked against such proposals as the Woman's Suffrage Amendment and prohibition, and during the neutrality years, the Alliance was in the forefront of the struggle to publicize the pro-German side of the war. It also was actively involved in raising money for German people suffering from the effects of war.<sup>54</sup> Although the Alliance was vocal and occasionally indiscreet in its efforts to educate the American public about the war, the group's membership never consisted of more than a small minority of America's German citizens. In fact, many German-Americans opposed its aggressive tactics, and when the U.S. broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, the German-American Alliance abandoned its pro-German stand and suspended its efforts to collect money for Germany. When war was officially declared, local, state and national branches of the Alliance pledged their support to the U.S. and many suspended their activities.<sup>55</sup>

Despite this sudden outburst of patriotism by the Alliance, a bill was introduced in the U. S. Senate in 1918 that demanded that its charter be revoked. A special sub-committee of the Senate Judiciary Committee conducted stormy hearings on all kinds of alleged disloyal activities of the Alliance, and a recommendation was passed on July 2, 1918 that revoked its charter.<sup>56</sup> Shortly after the hearings had begun, public pressure and opinion against the organization had built to such

heights that the Executive Committee of the National German-American Alliance voted in April (three month prior to the Senate's recommendation) to dissolve the organization. The Alliance turned what was left in its treasury, \$30,000, over to the American Red Cross.<sup>57</sup> Carl Wittke effectively described the aura of suspicion that grew to surround the activities of the Alliance: "Nevertheless, the Alliance had tried to consolidate the German element into a great national unit, and as such, it was suspected of having played a major role in the great 'pan-German plot' to Germanize the world."<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Americans began to identify with and support the Allied cause, and many blamed the Central Powers, especially Germany, for the war. The struggle was effectively reduced by the British to a battle between right and wrong, good and evil, and democracy and autocracy.<sup>59</sup> Rudyard Kipling even wrote that there were two divisions in the world--"human beings and Germans."<sup>60</sup> The work of America's propaganda agency, the CPI, helped to reinforce this hatred for Germany, and in the course of its two year existence, the committee whipped America into a patriotic frenzy. Efforts to shape news and public opinion greeted the average citizen at every corner. Every possible type of media available was used to drive home to the public Wilson's reasons for involving the U.S. in the war, and there was absolutely no escape for any American with his wits and senses intact.<sup>61</sup> And despite warnings from Wilson that the country was not at war with the German people but at war with their government, Americans still perceived Germans, even those living in the U.S., as America's enemy. The battle lines had been drawn, and the American people united as one with the ecstasy of sharing a common hatred for the enemy.<sup>62</sup> The resulting high level of emotion moved Americans to new heights of cruelty and prejudice, and their hatred kindled a regrettable time in America's history. It was a time when as a

nation, America turned its back on its largest and most productive immigrant group, German-Americans. And Iowans, while somewhat isolated from the front line of the propaganda war that was being waged on the East coast, eventually came to recognize the German "menace" lurking within their own borders.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Frederic L. Paxon, Edward S. Corwin, and Samuel B. Harding, War Cyclopedia-A Handbook for Ready Reference on the Great War (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Wittke, German-Americans and the World War (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), p. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 3, and Frederick Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob A. Swisher, Iowa In Times of War (Iowa City, Iowa: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1943), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Terence H. Qualter, Propaganda and Psychological Warfare (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Mock, and Cedric, Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information 1917-1919 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> George Theofiles, American Posters of World War I (New York: Dafran House Publishers, Inc., no date), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 81-82.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 6, 11.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 78, 83.

<sup>17</sup>Swisher, Iowa in Times of War, p. 342.

<sup>18</sup>William J. Breen, Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 18, 79.

<sup>19</sup>Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information 1917-1919, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Stephen Vaughn, Holding Fast the Inner Lines-Democracy, Nationalism and the Committee on Public Information (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 64.

<sup>21</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>24</sup>Jeanne Graham, "The Four-Minute Men: Volunteers for Propaganda," Southern Speech Journal 32 (Spring 1966): 49-50.

<sup>25</sup>George Creel, How We Advertised America (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup>Creel, How We Advertised America, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Darracott, ed., The First World War in Posters (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup>Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Darracott, ed., The First World War in Posters, p. vii.

<sup>31</sup>Theofiles, American Posters of World War I, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>Mock and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 215, 216, 220.

- <sup>33</sup>Creel, How We Advertised America, p. 35, 37.
- <sup>34</sup>Vaughn, Holding Fast the Inner Lines-Democracy, Nationalism and the Committee on Public Information, p. 71.
- <sup>35</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 129.
- <sup>36</sup>Frederick Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 271.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 252.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 249.
- <sup>39</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 188.
- <sup>40</sup>Creel, How We Advertised America, p. 168.
- <sup>41</sup>H. C. Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 16, 28, 30.
- <sup>42</sup>Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty (London: Quartet Books, 1982), p. 105.
- <sup>43</sup>Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917 p. 175, 248, 256-257, 266, 271.
- <sup>44</sup>Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War, p. 89.
- <sup>45</sup>James Morgan Read, Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 17.
- <sup>46</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 18.
- <sup>47</sup>Read, Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919, p. 34, 36, 43.
- <sup>48</sup>Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917, p. 54.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 133.
- <sup>50</sup>Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917, p. 60, 61.
- <sup>51</sup>Mott and Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, p. 615-616.

<sup>52</sup>Clifford Nelson, German-American Political Behavior in Nebraska and Wisconsin, 1916-1920 (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Publication, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>53</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 12 and Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 158.

<sup>54</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 166.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 163-166.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 170-171.

<sup>57</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War, p. 270.

<sup>58</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 163.

<sup>59</sup>Knightley, The First Casualty, p. 106.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>61</sup>Frederick Lumley, The Propaganda Menace (New York: The Century Company, 1933), p. 222.

<sup>62</sup>Ross Gregory, The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 107.

## CHAPTER II: THE WAR REACHES IOWA

During the first World War, a majority of America's German immigrants, more than eighty-five percent, resided in the Middle Atlantic states and in the Midwest.<sup>1</sup> In the state of Iowa, about forty-one per cent of its entire 1910 population consisted of people who were born in a foreign country or whose parents were foreign born. Of these people of foreign origin, the largest contingent was German. In fact, forty per cent were Germans, almost twice as numerous as the next group--Scandinavians, with twenty per cent. The third largest group was the Irish, with ten per cent. Most of Iowa's 88,450 German residents settled on Iowa's eastern boarder, along the Mississippi River.<sup>2</sup> Although the reasons for this settlement pattern are not known, it can be speculated that the Mississippi River area reminded them of Germany's Rhine River. Perhaps many of these immigrants were able to utilize their river skills from Germany, and this led them to adapt more easily to the area around the Mississippi. The greatest majority of German immigrants in Iowa settled in Scott county, especially in and around the city of Davenport. Clinton county had the second highest number of German residents, followed by Dubuque, Crawford, Pottawattamie, Plymouth, Des Moines, Woodbury, Carroll and Muscatine counties, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Since most of Iowa's Germans settled on its eastern boarder, this study will examine three eastern Iowa newspapers for their editorial stand toward German-Americans during the first world war. This study will also look briefly at news articles describing the treatment that America's German population received as the war progressed. The three newspapers that will be examined are the Davenport Democrat and Leader, the Dubuque Telegraph Herald and the Burlington Hawk-Eye.

All three newspapers received their news from the Associated Press Wire Services, and their weekday editions usually ran from ten to twelve pages, except for the larger twenty to twenty-four page Sunday edition. These newspapers usually published four or five original editorials, and sometimes as many as eight or nine short editorial statements (usually consisting of a sentence or two).

The Davenport Democrat was an evening newspaper that served residents of Scott county. With a total population of 65,645 people, Scott County had the highest number of German residents in Iowa, with 7,113 Germans listed in the 1915 Iowa Census.<sup>4</sup> This accounted for approximately one third of the population of Davenport. Many of the city's most prominent businessmen and leaders were of German descent, and many organizations were actively involved in promoting German life and culture.<sup>5</sup>

Dubuque, located in the upper northeastern section of the state, was served by a daily morning paper called the Telegraph Herald. The county of Dubuque, Iowa, with a total population in 1915 of 60,975, was third in the state with 4,068 Germans claiming residence. The third newspaper this study will examine is the Burlington Hawk-Eye, a morning paper that served the 22,437 residents of Burlington. Des Moines county, with a total population of 35,656, had 2,159 people listed as Germans in the 1915 Census of Iowa. It ranked as number seven in the list of Iowa counties with the greatest number of German residents.<sup>6</sup> This paper was chosen for this study as a control to see if its treatment of German-Americans differed from those papers published in areas with a large German population. It was also chosen so that an equal geographic distribution of eastern Iowa newspapers could be examined.

Many previous studies have found that after the official period of U. S. neutrality ended in 1917, a sampling of small town papers revealed "anti-German

allusions in almost every issue."<sup>7</sup> In order to investigate the truthfulness of this assertion in Iowa papers, six different events were used as indicators that may have been responsible for raising the frequency and intensity of anti-German sentiment in Iowa. To investigate anti-German feelings in the neutrality period, this study will examine a fourteen day period in history during Germany's invasion of Belgium, the sinking of the Lusitania and the release of the Zimmermann telegram. Authors have judged all three events as key indicators that triggered anti-German feelings in America. These newspapers will also be examined for anti-German sentiment when the U.S. officially declared war on Germany and when the only documented lynching of a German-American was carried out in Collinsville, Illinois. The signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918 will also serve as a final indicator. An explanation of each of these events will be given prior to their discussion in this text.

It is generally accepted that during the period of neutrality, the physical abuse and harassment of German-Americans was not a problem. But shortly after the United States officially declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, anti-German hysteria began to take shape. By the fall of 1917, an organized hatred for everything German was in full swing.<sup>8</sup>

Iowa, like other states in the union, participated in this anti-German movement. One of the first aspects of German culture to be attacked involved German names. An article in the Hawk-Eye reported that scores of banks in Iowa had changed their names so that the word "German" would not appear. It also stated that other business institutions were "dropping the Hun word from their names."<sup>9</sup> For example, the German-American Savings bank of Dubuque had filed papers with the Secretary of State to change its name to American Savings Bank. The German Savings bank of Preston had already changed its name to First Trust and Savings bank, and the

German-American Savings Bank of Burlington, Iowa was preparing to hold a meeting to discuss a possible name change to the American Savings Bank and Trust Company.<sup>10</sup> Even German dental supplies were not immune from attack. The Iowa Dental Society adopted a resolution on May 9, 1918 that banned for the duration of the war and fifty years thereafter the use of German-made dental equipment.<sup>11</sup>

This anti-German crusade also included the use of German literature and books. The Secretary of the Iowa State Council of Defense asked librarians to examine all books and eliminate "such as laud as the Huns."<sup>12</sup> Soon, school children and their teachers burned German textbooks and pages torn from geography texts. One such example, reported in the May 8, 1918 edition of the Davenport Democrat and Leader, stated that more than 500 students from Pierce School tore maps of Germany from their geography books, and together with over 300 other German books, burned them in a bonfire. The article stated that pictures of "Kaiser Bill" were also thrown into the fire, and "frequent cries of "Kill the beast" and "Bury his land" came from the howling mob of youths. Members of the faculty offered no interference, and students were "given leave to do the Kaiser and his land what was justly coming...." The article called the event a "celebration," and stated that the students were expressing "their opinions of the beast of Berlin." It was also reported that similar demonstrations were held in other school yards across the city.

The attacks also spread to the German language. Iowa's Republican Governor, W. L. Harding, signed a language proclamation on May 23, 1918 which reminded Iowans that the official language of the United States and the state of Iowa was English. The proclamation stated that freedom of speech was guaranteed by Federal and State Constitutions, but added that this was not a guarantee of the right to use a language other than English, especially when the use of such a language "tends in

times of national peril, to create discord among neighbors and citizens, or disturb the peace and quiet of the community."<sup>13</sup> The governor's message also asked that four rules be followed by the public:

- 1-That English should and must be the only medium of instruction in public, private or similar schools
- 2-Conversation in public places, on trains and over the telephone should be in the English language
- 3-All public addresses should be in the English language
- 4-Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their religious worship in their own homes.

The proclamation also stated that this course should be carried out in the spirit of patriotism, and although it may be inconvenient to some, it should not interfere with guaranteed constitutional rights and "will result in peace and tranquility at home and greatly strengthen the country in battle."<sup>14</sup> In connection with this ban, the superintendent of the Scott County Council of Defense fined four women \$225 for speaking German over the telephone. He then donated the money to the Red Cross.<sup>15</sup> Iowa's Secretary of the Iowa State Council of Defense shows the strength of this conviction when he was quoted as saying: "If their language is disloyal, they should be imprisoned. If their acts are disloyal, they should be shot." And even Iowa's German language newspapers bowed to the intense pressure to remove from the land everything that had a connection with Germany. Iowa had twenty-six German language papers (including one daily) before the war, and only eleven were published two years later.<sup>16</sup>

Soon, other great public displays of patriotism were produced in the form of ceremonies, parades and speeches. The Iowa State Council of Defense sent out notices to county school superintendents urging increased participation in war work, daily flag raising ceremonies and the singing of the national anthem. Sheriffs and local officials were even summoned to Des Moines to discuss methods to curtail pro-German

activities in their communities. Counties and cities with a high percentage of German-Americans were even investigated by state and Federal officials.<sup>17</sup>

The midwest was particularly noted for its methods of "encouraging" citizens to give to the Liberty Loans, an unprecedented effort by the government to collect money to finance the war. The idea of buying bonds was new to many of the farmers and rural people of the midwest, and as a result, big city publicity efforts failed miserably. As the campaign for the next couple of loans was mounted, officials got wise and began to target their appeals to different audiences. The reason the government needed money from citizens was spelled out in plain language, and peer pressure to subscribe was employed. Eventually, voluntary subscription amounts changed to assigned quotas which attempted to figure out (according to each individual's income and property holdings), the amount that should be given.<sup>18</sup> In some rural communities in Iowa, this amount was almost two per cent of the value of property owned by an individual. In other areas, local bankers secretly determined a person's share by considering an individual's bank account, his investments and his income.<sup>19</sup>

In Iowa, a favorite method of coercing unwilling subscribers was to have them appear before locally organized "kangaroo" courts. These courts, which operated under various names such as "Loyalty Court" or "Slacker's Court," employed methods that ranged from friendly conferences to "pseudo-legal forms of procedure."<sup>20</sup>

In addition to these courts, immense public pressure was exerted to subscribe to liberty loan drives. Several liberty loan committees threatened to publish the names of all citizens who refused to contribute, and in one town, a yellow monument was built which displayed the names of a rural German family that refused to subscribe.<sup>21</sup> Many people were even threatened that they would lose their jobs if they didn't

contribute, and it was not uncommon for employers to send out a statement declaring that all employees were expected to give generously.<sup>22</sup>

The State Council of Defense in Iowa was especially active in promoting liberty loan subscriptions and bringing slackers to justice. Midwestern state councils earned a notorious reputation for "patriotic vigilantism," which served to undermine many of their other positive contributions to America's war effort. In April, 1918, Lafayette Young, Chairman of the Iowa State Council, responded to acts of violence that were occurring to alleged "disloyalists," and he asked at a conference for State Councils of Defense in Washington, D. C. for a more rigorous federal law that would deal with sedition and treasonous utterances. He was quoted as saying, "We ought to have in our state five thousand people stockaded. We have got to deal with this thing or there will be a tragedy."<sup>23</sup>

As a result of this anti-German feeling, Iowa was not a friendly or pleasant environment for most German-Americans. The loyalty of many of Iowa's Germans was questioned, and the Iowa State Council of Defense coerced many to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause by donating money to America's war effort. A great movement to "Americanize" Iowa's German citizens (by banning the use of such things as their language, books and music) had taken place almost immediately after America's declaration of war. And certain events, beginning with Germany's invasion of Belgium, cast an aura of suspicion around German culture that eventually grew and attached itself to Germans living in the United States.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Carl Wittke, German-Americans and the World War (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick C. Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Census of Iowa for the Year 1915 (Des Moines, Iowa: Robert Henderson, State Printer, 1915), p. 462-464.

<sup>4</sup>Census of Iowa for the Year 1915, p.462.

<sup>5</sup>Ralph W. Cram, ed., History of the War Activities of Scott County Iowa (Davenport, Iowa: Fidler and Chambers, no date), p. 7, 125.

<sup>6</sup>Census of Iowa for the Year 1915, p.462, 593.

<sup>7</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 288.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>9</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 14, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1918, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1918, p. 2

<sup>12</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup>Benjamin F. Shambaugh, ed., Chronicles of the World War, Vol. II (Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1923), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 45-46.

<sup>15</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p.186-187.

<sup>16</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 252, 271.

<sup>17</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup>Nathaniel R. Whitney, "The Sale of War Bonds in Iowa," Chronicles of the World War, Vol. II Edited by Benjamin F. Shambaugh (Iowa City, Iowa: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1923), p. 2, 6 and 38.

<sup>19</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 157.

<sup>20</sup>Whitney, "The Sale of War Bonds in Iowa," p. 135

<sup>21</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 273.

<sup>22</sup>Whitney, "The Sale of War Bonds in Iowa," p. 124.

<sup>23</sup>William J. Breen, Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 79, 85.

CHAPTER III: THE INVASION OF BELGIUM  
(August 13-26, 1914)

Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium in the summer of 1914 marked a small but significant turning point in America's interest in the war. Although President Wilson advised Americans to be "impartial in thought as well as action," certain aspects of the war were already starting to influence public opinion. By invading Belgium, Germany violated a treaty it had signed in 1839 with Great Britain and France that assured neutrality for Belgium. In keeping with the demands of the treaty, Great Britain was forced to come to Belgium's defense and declare war against Germany if the Germans broke the treaty agreement. Meanwhile, Germany explained its invasion by saying that it was forced to be the aggressor because France was preparing to cross Belgium to attack Germany. <sup>1</sup>

As the Germans marched into the tiny country, they encountered fierce resistance that they hadn't planned on, both from the Belgian army and civilians. This obstacle led the Germans to adopt a ruthless policy whereby all resistance to German occupation was declared illegal and all violators were killed. Although over 5,000 Belgian citizens were killed as a result of this policy, little evidence exists that Germany acted in a manner more calculated or fiendish than other armies in battle. <sup>2</sup>

The three newspapers examined in this study devoted dozens of column inches to the plight of Belgium, which was of considerable interest because of its unwilling involvement in the first major battle of the war. The Burlington Hawk-Eye devoted an entire page to Belgium's history, its major cities, its army and its role in the European war. <sup>3</sup> The Dubuque Telegraph Herald described Belgian soldiers as brave and honorable fighting men, and it ran a picture of "Some of The Terrible Fighting

Men of Little Belgium." A caption below the photograph explained that "...the world has a higher respect for the fighting men of King Albert's little country than ever before. The Belgians are now ranked among the best fighters in the world."<sup>4</sup>

But despite all the information about the countries involved in the battle, news about the war was often scarce due to heavy censorship by the British. This censorship led the Associated Press to issue a warning to all newspapers. The warning stated that newspapers should make it plain to readers that since the cables to Germany had been cut, news was only available to reporters from an "exceedingly meager service through London," and these reports were "rigorously censored" by British authorities. The warning also said reports from France and Belgium were subject to like supervision.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of these warnings, all three newspapers used their editorials to explain the situation to readers. The Telegraph Herald advised:

It is to be remembered in connection with reports of the progress of the war that the cable to Germany is cut, and that all news is from English and French agencies and censored by military authorities of those countries. Keeping this fact in mind will serve to restrain disconcerting readers from accepting every war report at its face.<sup>6</sup>

The next day, the Herald ran an editorial that explained the "Sources of War News." This article stated that the newspaper received its news from the Associated Press, the leading newsgathering organization in America. The editorial further explained that correspondents in all corners of the world were trying to furnish papers with unbiased accounts of the war, but their information was often censored by other country's governments. It explained that since the cable from Germany was cut, most news from Germany originated from "indirect and unfriendly" sources. This seems to suggest that the Herald was admitting that some of its news was biased, but that biased news was better than no news at all. In another editorial, the Herald

concluded: "No man with capacity for understanding will conclude that his favorite newspaper is, because the war news is not to his liking, prejudiced against him."<sup>7</sup>

Like the Telegraph Herald, the Hawk-Eye attempted to explain why much of its war news appeared biased. The Hawk-Eye ran a message from the German embassy on page one of the August 23, 1914 edition that said Germany's communication lines were completely cut off from the rest of the world, and therefore the empire was "unable to defend itself against the falsehoods propagated by the press of the hostile countries." The message continued, "The German people will be profoundly grateful for every effort to disseminate the real truth."<sup>8</sup>

The Davenport Democrat urged its readers to use their best judgment in forming opinions about the war. The paper said: "Little of the news probably is made out of the whole cloth. The general impression you get from the whole body of war news probably represents fairly correctly the general situation."<sup>9</sup> In another editorial, the Democrat stated that "all Americans who look back to some other country as their Fatherland or the home of their ancestors should realize that some newspapers are just trying to fan the flame of race feeling in this country." The editorial concluded by saying: "We are all Americans now, and the fact that we are good neighbors and townsmen everywhere shows that there is something wrong in Europe if the present war is to be fought out on racial lines."<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps no group was more sensitive to the pro-British slant of the press than German-Americans. Dubuque's German community was so outraged by the "unfriendly attitude" of the American press that they organized a meeting initiated by officers of the local branch of the National German-American Alliance. A resolution was passed stating:

We as American citizens insist that the American press shall present its information regarding the present European war in an unbiased and impartial

manner, and that editorials shall as far as possible be without prejudice or hatred toward any class of American citizens....<sup>11</sup>

But Dubuque's German-American population eventually seemed satisfied with the paper's efforts to present an unbiased view of the European war. On August 20, 1914, the Herald ran an article on page three stating that a local committee of German-Americans called on and complimented Mr. P.J. Quigley, the proprietor of the Herald, for the "conservative manner in which the paper has been handling European war news." The committee also approved of the neutral editorial stand of the paper and the side-articles it published on war-related issues.

In Burlington, German-Americans formed a German-American Defense committee to "neutralize all intentional and unintentional attempts to create an unwholesome feeling in the United States against Germany and especially German-Americans."<sup>12</sup> The Hawk-Eye also received a letter from the Press Committee of the Burlington German-American Association. This letter stated that much of what newspapers were currently printing lacked truth, but it was printed because it was the only news available. The letter reminded readers that Germans were among the earliest settlers in this country, and that "there is not a city, not a town, not a county in the state, where Germans have not been busy, early and late, making Iowa a better, a more prosperous, a more progressive state." The letter concluded by saying that Germans have always "been among the most loyal of all citizens, and from the days of the colonies to the present, Germany has always been our faithful friend."<sup>13</sup> Not only were German-Americans active in the press, but they were also busy raising money for Germany's war effort. The Democrat featured several articles about the progress of a fundraising effort, called the German Relief Fund, which was collecting money to send to German families left destitute by the

war. As of August 23, 1915, the Democrat reported that over \$5,000 had been collected for Germany in Scott County. The Democrat even printed a list of contributors and the amount of money they donated.<sup>14</sup>

But evidence exists that this active "side-taking" was starting to conflict with Wilson's call for impartiality. The Democrat stated in an editorial that like Chicago's German-Americans, Davenport's German population had cancelled a proposed mass meeting that was to demonstrate support for Germany. The German-Americans had instead decided to limit their war work to fundraising activities. The Democrat approved of this and said: "This is the kind of statement that will disarm more critics and create more sympathy with Germany than any other action that could have been taken."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that Americans were supposed to remain neutral, opinions about both sides of the conflict were freely aired in all three newspapers. It can be speculated that in their quest for neutrality, all three newspapers were at least willing to give Berlin and German-Americans a chance to make their case in print. Dozens of column inches were devoted to explaining different causes for the war, and plenty of space was given to German-Americans to build a case for Germany's role in the conflict.

The Herald ran an editorial by the German-American Press Committee of New York that explained how Germany was forced to participate in the war, and how "eagerly England threw off the cloak of friendship" and declared war on Germany. Another article explained the views of a professor (identified simply as "Professor Reu") who stated that Austria declared war against Serbia to avenge the terrible assassination of its leader. The professor said that Serbia was not willing to punish the guilty party, and that if Russia had not interfered on the side of Serbia, the case

would have been "decided long ago." But Russia's intervention, the professor declared, caused Germany to "unsheath her sword against Russia in order to prove faithful towards Austria, her Ally...." The article also said Germany was forced to violate Belgium's neutrality because England and France were preparing to invade Belgium in order to attack Germany.<sup>16</sup>

The Hawk-Eye reprinted a New York Sun Times editorial by Hubert Cillins, President of the New York German-American Chamber of Commerce, in which Cillins stated America was mistaken to assume that Germany had an autocratic government. He said Germany was forced to fight to control the ambitions of other countries, and he concluded by saying: "And war being inevitable, surely it is not for energetic, quick moving Americans to condemn the Kaiser for seeing to it that as he had to strike, he struck fast and hard...."<sup>17</sup>

All three newspapers in this study seemed to remain neutral, if not a little pro-German, in their editorial position toward the war. The Hawk-Eye said in an editorial that Germany had always desired peace, but since she was surrounded on all sides by turbulent neighbors, she had been compelled to fight many times. The opinion piece concluded by saying that had Germany not fought numerous battles, it would "long since have vanished from the earth."<sup>18</sup>

The Herald said in an editorial that the opinion of the average man on the street blames Germany for the war because most people form their opinions from newspaper headlines--even though headlines are generated from news written by anti-German sources. The paper said Germany violated its treaty respecting Belgium's neutrality because the other countries involved in the situation "left no reasonable doubt to the German mind that the intent of France and England was to do as they have since done, march their armies through Belgium to get to Germany."

The Herald stated:

If one insists upon painting Germany as the only European power harboring aggressive designs, then, of course, the responsibility is Germany's for the war. But if one does the logical thing and assumes like designs in other powers, then the situation presents a radically different aspect and Germany shines in a new light. The responsibility for war then passes from her to Serbia and thus to Russia, France and England, all parties to the Triple Entente. And if not that at least it raises doubt that Germany is alone greedy for more power and discloses all the powers to be tarred with the same stick.

Two days later, the Herald stated in an editorial that if people criticize the Kaiser for building up his army, then they must also criticize the King of England for building up his naval strength. The paper concluded by saying the British empire was built on aggression, and that neither Great Britain, Russia or France were in "any position to call Germany names."<sup>19</sup>

In another editorial, the Hawk-Eye stated that American people feel "a great sympathy for all the unfortunate people of Europe who have been drawn into this horrible carnage." The editorial said most people are responding in "excellent good spirits" to President Wilson's appeal for impartiality, and that America has a "kindly feeling toward the German people." The editorial did state, however, that there was "a less tolerant feeling" toward the emperor and the militarists who surround him.<sup>20</sup>

The Hawk-Eye seemed to support this distinction between the people of Germany and their militaristic rulers earlier in an editorial quote that said:

'The American has always had a soft place in his heart for the Germans,' says a new York financial writer. 'He admires their literature, their music, their worth and solidarity of character. But he has no use for the swash-buckling militarists who forced this war upon a horrified world.'<sup>21</sup>

Another editorial reprinted in the Democrat from the Louisville Courier-Journal reflected a growing dissatisfaction with Germany's militaristic government. The editorial said that no other European appreciates the value of the American form of government more than the German. He said the "huge military expense and

proneness to avoidable war" was a "glaring defect" of Germany's monarchical government. At the end of the editorial, the German people were praised, and it said that "if the war brings America more German citizens, it cannot be said that the cloud is without a silver lining."<sup>22</sup>

This militaristic aspect of the German army was emphasized in war news that dealt with alleged German cruelty during the invasion of Belgium. All three papers featured several articles from London that revealed charges of alleged German brutality in Belgium. Most of these articles stated that German soldiers had killed and wounded people indiscriminately.<sup>23</sup> The French bitterly denounced the Germans, calling them "little short of barbarians" in their treatment of prisoners. Even the Austrians were accused of treating old men, women and children brutally.<sup>24</sup>

Germany was also admonished for its midnight Zeppelin attacks during the bombing of Antwerp, Belgium. A dispatch from London said: "For the first time in history a great civilized community has been bombarded from the sky in the dead of night." Officials from the Belgium government protested this "indiscriminate slaughter of sleeping women and children" by saying it was in violation of Article 26 of the Hague Convention of 1907. This article stated that "the commander of the attacking troops, before undertaking a bombardment, will, except in cases of open assault, do all that lies in his power to give warning to the authorities."<sup>25</sup>

At the same time that many editorial writers were denouncing the Zeppelin attacks as inexcusable violations of international law, the Davenport Democrat offered an editorial explanation-cum apology for Berlin's actions. The Democrat stated:

All the considerations of humanity protest against indiscriminate slaughter of an unoffending populace, and it is believed that it will not be the purpose of Germany to use its airships so that noncombatants and women and children, would be equal sharers in the death and maiming that might spread.

The paper concluded by stating that "the excursion against Antwerp" may have been intended as a demonstration of strength designed solely to scare its enemies.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this disapproval of Germany's methods of warfare, no evidence exists in these newspapers that any other aspect of German life or activity was frowned upon by Americans. In fact, many editorials deliberately stressed the positive attributes of the German culture. The Dubuque Telegraph Herald ran an article with the headline, "STUDENT GOES TO WAR-Loyal German Pupil of Local School Enlists for Service in the Kaiser's Army." This article stated that the Galena Gazette contained a story of "genuine loyalty and bravery" in which a "young patriot" made preparations to return to the "old country to fight for the Kaiser."<sup>27</sup> Thus, it appears that in the period of neutrality, it was acceptable for Germans to take a pro-German position. Such stands were far from being condemned or denounced. On the contrary, it was still possible for acts of bravery and patriotism to be praised, whatever the side.

This theme is also found in most editorials, which were quick to praise different aspects of German society. An editorial from the Herald said Davenport's large German population appreciated "the right principles of city building" more than most other nationalities. The article continued: "The German cities are unsurpassed for beauty, in their provisions for housing the poor, in their sanitation." The editorial concluded by saying: "Davenport and other cities set an example Dubuque will have to emulate if it is to keep its place in the march of cities." It seems obvious that Germans were held in high regard, and the paper was trying to counteract the anti-German news it was presenting to the public.<sup>28</sup>

During the first few months of the war, most Americans were quite contented to accept the fact that thousands of miles separated them from the European conflict. In his book, The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War, Ross Gregory

said that "there quickly developed in the American mind a sense of self-satisfaction, perhaps even superiority, that the United States was spared the turmoil of the Old World."<sup>29</sup> But in less than a year, America's newspapers stopped mentioning that much of their news was transmitted from biased sources. The German government's new policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, which was adopted in retaliation to Britain's economic blockade of the Central Powers, was viewed as a barbaric and uncivilized method of warfare. Dozens of ships would be torpedoed without warning during the next year. But the destruction of one huge passenger liner, which carried many Americans, would create another significant shift in opinion in the United States. Americans bristled at these stories of U-boat attacks, and many deeply resented Germany's deadly assault on America's right to travel the oceans.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Patrick Baron Devlin, Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson's Neutrality (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 136-138.

<sup>2</sup>James Morgan Read, Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 286.

<sup>3</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 16, 1914, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 13, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, August 18, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 14, 1914, p. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 23, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, August 14, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1914, p. 6.

- <sup>11</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 13, 1914, p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 23, 1914, p. 1.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., August 22, 1914, p. 9.
- <sup>14</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, August 24, 1914, p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., August 23, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 20, 1914, p. 4-5.
- <sup>17</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 16, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., August 16, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>19</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 16, 1914, p. 4, and August 18, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>20</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 22, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., August 16, 1914, p. 5.
- <sup>22</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, August 29, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>23</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 14, 1914, p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, August 23, 1914, p. 2.
- <sup>25</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, August 27, 1914, p. 6.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., August 26, 1914, p. 6.
- <sup>27</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, August 13, 1914, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1914, p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup>Ross Gregory, The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 2.

CHAPTER IV. THE SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA  
(May 7-20, 1915)

On May 7, 1917, the British liner Lusitania was torpedoed without warning by a German submarine while sailing off the Irish coast on its way to Liverpool, England from New York City. The huge passenger ship, thought to be unsinkable, carried 1,251 passengers (188 of whom were Americans) and a crew of 816. When the body count was finally totalled, the tragedy had claimed over 1,100 lives, including more than a hundred American citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The German government refused to accept responsibility for the incident, and Berlin said the Lusitania's munitions cargo was a factor in its decision to torpedo the passenger liner. The ship was in fact carrying 4,200 cases of cartridges which contained 10 or 11 tons of powder and 1,250 cases of shrapnel.<sup>2</sup> The Germans also claimed that the Lusitania's owners must take full responsibility for the situation since British and American citizens had been warned that Germany might be forced to attack British merchantile ships.<sup>3</sup>

Passage on the ship had been controversial since the German embassy had placed an ad in New York City newspapers on May 1st, the day before the Lusitania set sail, warning that passengers travelling from New York on British ships did so at their own risk. The notice read:

Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travelers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk. Signed Imperial German Embassy, Washington, D.C., April 22, 1915.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this warning, passengers were not discouraged from sailing on the Lusitania. Not a single ticket cancellation was made after the warnings were printed in American newspapers. Some passengers even received anonymous notes of warning, but no one was deterred from sailing.<sup>5</sup>

The sinking of the Lusitania quickly became an emotional issue that dominated newspaper headlines. This time the tragedy didn't deal with the lives of faceless Belgian citizens--it dealt with Americans. Newspapers gave stirring accounts of women searching through bodies that washed ashore in Ireland in the hope of finding a loved one. Many of the victims were reported to have been "helpless babies and children." As a result of this highly emotional coverage, public opinion became so inflamed that a war of revenge might possibly have been started had President Wilson been willing to abandon his diplomatic course and ask Congress for a declaration of war.<sup>6</sup>

Former President Teddy Roosevelt denounced the sinking as an act of "piracy," and he said it was "warfare against innocent men, women and children."<sup>7</sup> Although recognizing the seriousness of the incident, President Wilson took a more moderate tone and told citizens that "there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right."<sup>8</sup> Roosevelt roundly denounced Wilson's "too proud to fight" stand, and he issued a bitter attack on the "murderous offenses of Germany."<sup>9</sup>

All three newspapers examined in this study ran editorials from other papers across the country, and generally eastern newspapers were more impatient than those in the midwest. The Telegraph Herald ran an editorial from the New York World that said: "No single act of this conflict has so outraged American opinion or so riddled German prestige in this country as the sinking of the Lusitania." The paper

called the act "piracy against neutrals as well as against enemies..." It also said "modern history affords no other such example of a great nation running amuck and calling it military necessity."<sup>10</sup> The Hawk-Eye reprinted a powerful sentence from a New York Herald editorial that said in reference to the surprise attack: "Even the rattlesnake gives warning before striking."<sup>11</sup>

In a Chicago Tribune editorial published in the Herald, the Tribune wanted to know if all possible precautions were taken by Britain. The editorial said Wilson must decide whether or not to "address a cable to Downing Street carrying a protest against the careless handling of American lives." The Herald also reprinted a Minneapolis Journal editorial that said the Lusitania incident "shows that Germany intends to outdo the barbarians and to become the outlaw of nations." The editorial said Germany's conception of war was like "hell incarnate," and that since Germany has already resorted to fighting with poisonous gases, it was possible that they might "infect the water supply of whole cities with typhoid and diphtheria germs."<sup>12</sup>

The Davenport Democrat, on the other hand, only published mild and impartial expressions of opinion from other newspapers. This may have been the Democrat's way of trying not to offend its many German readers by printing harsh words about their Fatherland. A St. Paul Pioneer Press editorial is an excellent example of the noncommittal tone of these papers. The opinion piece said:

Whatever may be the opinion of the individual, there is nothing to be lost and everything to be gained by the preservation of national self control. There can be no more splendid American achievement at a time that may be critical than that cool self containment that is the first essential of clear vision and unerring judgment.

Another example of this type of neutral editorial was reprinted from the Chicago Evening Post. This editorial said that Americans shouldn't rush the president. "Give him time," the paper said. "Let him decide upon the next step in the

unvexed aloofness of his lonely walk each evening through the White House grounds."<sup>13</sup>

In general, the reaction of the Iowa newspapers examined in this study was one of patience and support for the Wilson administration. The Hawk-Eye indicated it was in favor of a diplomatic handling of the situation, although the paper was not immune from using strong language to assess blame for the incident. The day after the tragedy, the Hawk-Eye stated that the sinking was "contrary to international law, and the accepted rules of civilized warfare. It is an indefensible, cruel and unwarranted feature of this extraordinary struggle." The Hawk-Eye also noted that although protests from the U.S. and other neutral countries may avail nothing new, "a common humanity demands that the foundation be laid for the development of a higher moral code in the conduct of war."<sup>14</sup> Four days later, the Hawk-Eye adopted a more moderate tone, stating that although the administration was facing the most critical situation in its history, "there seems to be a general feeling of Thanksgiving among the American people that Colonel Roosevelt is not at the helm." Another editorial praised Wilson's actions and said that his "too proud to fight" stand was sane and timely because the American people do not want war. The Hawk-Eye also said it must be "conceded that his [Wilson's] handling of many distressing situations arising from the strife in Europe has been admirable, dignified and patriotic."<sup>15</sup> On May 15th, the Hawk-Eye repeated Wilson's plea for impartiality and stated: "Now, more than ever, our citizens should be absolutely neutral relative to the belligerent powers. Nothing is to be gained for any cause by inflammatory language or provocative acts."<sup>16</sup>

But unlike the Hawk-Eye, the Davenport Democrat and the Dubuque Telegraph Herald completely avoided strongly condemning Germany for its role in the Lusitania

tragedy. Although the Democrat was also pleased with Wilson's handling of the crisis, it focused most of its attention on warning readers not to engage in "passionate discussions as to whether the slaughter of non-combatants was justifiable or not."

The Democrat said:

When the history of the war is impartially written, note will be taken of the fact that the *Lusitania* carried contraband; that Americans had been warned not to take passage on the ship; will consider what of international law applied, what are the rules of war and what were the rights of neutrals on such a ship, and the verdict will be rendered.

The paper concluded by saying that in the meantime, citizens should await the action of the government, be prepared to endorse it, and to think and speak "in terms of pure Americanism." The paper said such a tragedy should make Americans one in sorrow and support of whatever steps President Wilson "may be constrained to make."<sup>17</sup> Two days later, The Democrat said that Wilson made it easy for Americans to follow him, especially when he spoke in terms that "unite mankind by those passions which lift and not debase." The editorial said that the "country could safely and wisely stand behind President Wilson in the present crisis."<sup>18</sup>

The Telegraph Herald also stated that there must be "no hasty judgment on the sinking of the *Lusitania*," and it warned citizens not to form conclusions until all the facts were revealed. "The problem is one that belongs to the administration," the Herald said. "There is no more level-headed man in America than President Wilson. Meanwhile, it is the part of good Americans to sit tight. Let us steady, not rock, the boat." On May 12th, the Herald reiterated this view by saying that it "speaks volumes for the sanity of the American people that there has been no frenzied demand for action, no disposition on the part of any considerable proportion of the public that the nation be precipitated into the European contest." The editorial summed up the situation with two words: "Reason reigns."<sup>19</sup>

All three newspapers printed Germany's official reaction to the incident, which was delivered in a dispatch sent from the German foreign office to the German Embassy in Washington. In this message, the German government expressed its deepest sympathies for the lives lost in the sinking of the ship, and it placed the blame for the incident on the British, whose plan of employing a blockade to starve Germans citizens had forced Germany to take retaliatory measures. The message also stated that despite Germany's efforts to halt submarine warfare, British ships continued to be armed and antagonistic toward its submarines. The message concluded by explaining that "in spite of its heartfelt sympathy for the loss of American lives, [the German government] cannot help but regret that Americans felt inclined to trust the English promises rather than pay attention to the warnings from the German side."<sup>20</sup>

The Herald seemed unsoothed by this expression of sympathy, for it countered in an editorial that Germany's regret that American lives were lost "does not restore life to the innocent victims of the Lusitania disaster."<sup>21</sup> The Hawk-Eye said: "If the German excuse that warning was given to the passengers on the Lusitania is held sufficient, we must conclude that the forty babies who went down with the ship virtually committed suicide."<sup>22</sup>

Editorials from Iowa newspapers were also given plenty of space. Under the headline "German Views of the War," the Herald printed several different Iowa views of the sinking. The Cedar Falls Record stated that the Lusitania incident was regrettable, but war "is not a pink tea affair..." and "Americans have no business poking their noses into forbidden places." The Iowa City Republican said people that chose to travel on a ship carrying the English flag had no reason to complain if the ship was attacked. It further stated that "When England announced its determination

to starve millions of German women and children in order to win the war, Germany had no choice but to fight fire with fire." The Atlantic News-Telegraph stated that the German embassy says England tried to use the passengers and crew of the Lusitania as a shield for a cargo of ammunitions, and if that was the case, "then the blame rests as much on England as on Germany." The Clinton Herald used stronger and more creative language to get its point across:

If the British campaign is successful, murder will result under conditions far less pleasant than drowning. England's methods bear about the same relation to Germany's that tuberculosis bears to the collapse of a sky-scraper--less spectacular but quite as deadly.<sup>23</sup>

England was also receiving a lot of negative press coverage in the U.S. for its reaction to German citizens living in England. Although many Germans living in Britain were arrested immediately after war was declared, the sinking of the Lusitania made anti-German feelings skyrocket to dangerously violent levels. German shops were ransacked in the East End of London, and several German businesses and stores were boycotted. Many British citizens and even British newspapers called for the internment of all Germans. As of May 1915, 19,000 had already been interned, but in response to public pressure, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith declared that all male German aliens who were still free would be interned, or if over military age, would be "repatriated" along with women and children.<sup>24</sup> Members of the English stock exchange even called for the withdrawal of all German members. All three Iowa papers examined in this study featured heavy coverage of British anti-German actions, including in-depth reports of how German shops were burned and German people had their clothes torn and were "more or less beaten" in the streets.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Davenport Democrat did not respond in its editorials to the mob

violence in Britain (perhaps because the paper wanted to avoid controversial issues and maintain absolute neutrality), the Hawk-Eye and the Telegraph Herald reacted strongly and denounced the mobs and the anti-German sentiment in England. The Hawk-Eye stated:

Mob force never does any good. It almost invariably hurts the cause it is championing. Those people in Great Britain and Canada, who have attacked English citizens of German origin, destroyed property and looted goods, have indirectly aided Germany. Their action is folly.<sup>26</sup>

The next day the Hawk-Eye stated:

It must be that the saner, more chivalrous Englishmen are in the army fighting the battles of their country, and that the weaklings and defectives and the cowards are at home--judging by the despicable conduct of the rioters and looters in London and other English cities...Rioting is not war, it is savagery. It is a spurious patriotism which does the country more harm than good.<sup>27</sup>

Two days later, the Hawk-Eye again felt compelled to state:

The mobs of England have shown the American people how not to do it. Now more than ever, our citizens should be absolutely neutral relative to the belligerent powers. Nothing is to be gained for any cause by inflammatory language or provocative acts.<sup>28</sup>

The Telegraph Herald said the British may be "pardoned for feeling indignant over the Lusitania outrage," but is said that the manner in which the British are expressing their indignation is "unfortunate and inexcusable." The Herald said:

Such excesses are comprehensible, when war spirit runs high, to anybody familiar with the frailties of human nature. They are humiliating nevertheless. For the sake of its own honor and dignity the British government should sternly repress them and make a special effort to deal with every nominal "enemy" within her borders.<sup>29</sup>

In the wake of this emotionally charged atmosphere, the British government released a report from a committee, chaired by Viscount Bryce, that revealed the results of an investigation of alleged German atrocities committed in Belgium. Bryce, the former British Ambassador at Washington, was very well respected in America, and among other things, his committee found that "murder, lust and pillage prevailed

over many parts of Belgium on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilized nations during the last three centuries."<sup>30</sup> At the time of its release, the committee and its report were highly regarded, and the work did much to reinforce the carefully cultivated British image of a brutal and aggressive German people.<sup>31</sup>

Harold Lasswell, in his book Propaganda Technique in the World War, said the British delivered "a stroke of genius" by appointing men with international reputations for truthfulness to the Bryce commission. He said the evidence and documents used for the report were so compelling that they were reproduced in many other forms. Even the CPI relied heavily on the Bryce Report for its brochure on "German War Practices."<sup>32</sup>

The Bryce Committee used extremely descriptive language throughout its report, and its conclusions were written in such a fashion that they only added fuel to America's growing indignation over the Lusitania incident. The major conclusions of the report appeared in the Dubuque Telegraph Herald as follows:

It is proved:

First: That there were in many parts of Belgium deliberate and systematically organized massacres of civilian populations, accompanied by many isolated murders and other outrages.

Second: That in the conduct of the war generally innocent civilians, both men and women, were murdered in large numbers, women violated and children murdered.

Third: That looting, house burning and the wanton destruction of property were ordered and countenanced by the officers of the German army, that elaborate provision had been made for systematic incendiarism at the very outbreak of the war and that the burning and destruction were frequently where no military necessity could be alleged being indeed part of a system of general terrorization.

Fourth: That the rules and usages of war were frequently broken, particularly by using of civilians, including women and children, as a shield for advancing forces exposed to fire, to a less degree by killing the wounded and prisoners and in the frequent abuse of the Red Cross and the White Flag.

In conclusion, the report stated, "We find many well-established cases of slaughter (often accompanied by mutilation) of whole families, including not

infrequently that of quite small children.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that Americans were receiving a negative picture of Germany, little or no evidence exists that German-Americans were actively persecuted at this time. There were some instances of mild discrimination, but the harassment and abuse of German-Americans was not a major problem during America's neutral period.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the newspapers in this study seemed to go out of their way to address the positive and loyal contributions of German-Americans, possibly to avoid alienating their German audience.

The Herald ran an editorial that discussed the question of hyphenated Americans, which referred to foreign people, such as German-Americans or Irish-Americans. The editorial said people had lost sight of the fact that of the 100,000,000 people claiming America as their home, only 412,516 were true Americans and not born of foreign ancestry. The editorial said the American Indian was "truly the only American of the lot," and that the last census revealed 12,944,529 people in the U.S. who were not born in America. And of this number, 2,501,181 were German. The editorial concluded by saying that America is an amalgamation of thirty racial stocks, out of which comes a distinctly American stock. "Ninety-nine per cent of this population is American first with what the hyphenated connection means a poor second."<sup>35</sup>

A letter in the "Hawk-Eye Hopper," a section "In Which Short Communications Will Be Ground Out for the Public Benefit," was written by Pastor K. Michels of the First Evangelical Church, Burlington, Iowa. Included with the letter, which was published May 12, 1915, were clippings that businessmen had asked the pastor to send to the Hawk-Eye with the intent that they would be published. The pastor's letter stated that since the paper had given the contra German viewpoint, the Hawk-Eye "as

a neutral, which you claim you are, you will no doubt cheerfully give the other side a chance. The 15,000 Burlington people of German descent demand of their morning paper to be fairly represented. We do not doubt that the editor is and wants to be fair." The letter was signed "Yours for real neutrality, K. Michels." The paper did print the accompanying clippings, all representing a pro-German viewpoint.<sup>36</sup>

On May 14, the Hawk-Eye ran a letter from a disgruntled Oakville, Iowa pastor from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Pastor H.W. Cannon stated that "Reverend K. Michels and his friends were strangers to real neutrality." The letter continued:

Their thought is not of America but "Germany over all." For them, Germany can do no wrong, though she kills scores of neutrals, and rejoices over the wholesale murder of innocent women and children. No wonder Mr. Roosevelt speaks of "piracy" and "murder on the high seas."

The pastor concluded by saying, "We cannot believe that many Burlingtonians of German descent will attempt to justify the Lusitania tragedy. Certainly a minister of the gospel ought not to."<sup>37</sup>

The Hawk-Eye issued a direct reply to the pastor's letter by stating that it was only human for German-Americans to try to shield their Fatherland from criticism and sometimes mistakenly to "try to condone or defend the acts of the Kaiser and the military policy of the imperial government." The editorial told how a successful Burlington businessman of German descent said: "O, that awful war, I am very unhappy." The man went on to explain how deeply saddened and depressed he was because many of his friends and relatives in the German army were killed or crippled in the war. The Hawk-Eye stated it was confident these troubled German-American citizens would never forget they are American citizens first--and as such, would proudly proclaim the slogan: "America first!"<sup>38</sup>

The only example of anti-German activity reported in the United States at this

time was published in an editorial reprinted in the Dubuque Telegraph Herald from the Chicago Herald. This editorial stated that some Chicagoans had chosen to boycott businessmen with German names, and it said this attitude should not be taken because it is indiscriminating and unjust, and it tends to "feed the flames of foolish passion and prejudice between citizens of a common country...."<sup>39</sup>

Although most newspapers were clearly not in favor of increasing anti-German sentiment in the U.S., another movement began to sweep across America. By the end of 1915, hundreds of stories were circulating in the nation's newspapers about German spies, bomb plots and conspiracies--all linked to Germans or German-Americans.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that these stories continued to flourish well into 1916, many German-Americans continued their outspoken activities in support of their homeland by holding rallies and sending letters to the editor to explain Germany's role in the war. America cast a suspicious gaze on the activities of its German citizens, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for citizens to remain neutral. Perhaps the Hawk-Eye unknowingly anticipated the future when it ran a small article on page one of the May 15, 1915 edition that stated the editorial opinion of the Cologne Volks Zeitung:

It may be taken for granted that the wave of anti-German feeling will mount higher. We deplore, but cannot prevent it. Anti-German feeling is a product of agitation. It slowly mounted and will also slowly subside.<sup>41</sup>

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 8, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>James Morgan Read, Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 9, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., May 13, 1915, p. 4.

- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., May 8, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup>Carl Wittke, German-Americans and the World War (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), p. 72.
- <sup>7</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 8, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 12, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>10</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 11, 1915, p. 4 and May 14, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>11</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 11, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 11, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, May 11, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 8, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1915, p. 4 and May 12, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>17</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, May 9, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>19</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 9, 1915, p. 16 and May 12, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., May 12, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>22</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 12, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>23</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 14, 1915, p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup>James Bishop, The Illustrated London News: Social History of the First World War (London: Angus and Robertson, Publishers, 1982), p. 59.
- <sup>25</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 13, 1915, p. 1.
- <sup>26</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 12, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., May 13, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 20, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup>Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 88.

<sup>31</sup>Michael Sanders and Phillip M. Taylor, British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914-1918 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 173.

<sup>32</sup>Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War, p. 88.

<sup>33</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 13, 1915, p. 8, 10.

<sup>34</sup>Frederick C. Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 150.

<sup>35</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 11, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 12, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., May 14, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., May 14, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, May 13, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 145.

<sup>41</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, May 15, 1915, p. 1.

CHAPTER V. THE ZIMMERMANN TELEGRAM  
(February 25-March 10, 1917)

On February 1, 1917, Germany reinstated its campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, and it announced plans to sink all ships travelling around the British Isles. President Wilson interpreted this announcement as a direct threat to American ships, and on February 3, he severed relations with Germany.<sup>1</sup> Less than three weeks later, another Cunard British liner, the *Laconia*, was torpedoed by a German U-boat. The *Laconia* carried 294 passengers, and although only 13 lives were lost, the attack was generally regarded in the U.S. as "another *Lusitania* case in principle." Ten of the thirteen dead passengers were Americans, and their deaths increased the public and political pressure on congress to protect America's rights at sea.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, congress was engaged in a lively debate over an armed neutrality bill that would allow President Wilson to arm American ships for protection against German submarines. The bill was viewed by many people as Wilson's last attempt to save face and protect America's rights at sea. The three Iowa newspapers examined in this study disagreed over whether or not congress should pass the neutrality bill. The Burlington Hawk-Eye was suspicious of the President's motives for proposing the measure, while the Dubuque Telegraph Herald and the Davenport Democrat supported the president's efforts and said the bill was a necessary step that would protect America's rights at sea.

The Herald stated in an editorial that the neutrality bill was not a declaration of war or anything approaching such a drastic measure. The Herald said the bill would simply give ships means to defend themselves if attacked. The editorial continued:

If we are to have a conflict with any nation at this time it will be because of no

fault of the administration at Washington or the American people, but because war-mad peoples of Europe continue to disregard our rights, to trample them in the dust as wholly unworthy of consideration.<sup>3</sup>

The Herald repeated its support for the president in another editorial that said "certainly no one imbued with the spirit of Americanism and right and justice can find fault with the stand taken by the administration...."<sup>4</sup> An editorial that appeared six days later pointed an accusing finger at Britain by saying that it was by far the most persistent violator of American rights at sea. The editorial said all countries should understand that if American ships are armed, their guns will be used against anyone who interferes with the passage of merchantmen. The Herald said that it hoped the government made it clear to England that international law was applicable to "no one set of nations but to all."<sup>5</sup>

The Davenport Democrat said the sinking of the *Laconia* emphasized Wilson's point that America should be prepared for such attacks. The Democrat stated:

President Wilson has been patient enough to suit the softest pacifist. Those who refuse to follow him now as he asks for a preparedness that will permit the protection of American lives and property certainly have failed to read the signs of the times.<sup>6</sup>

Although the above remarks seem to favor passage of the bill, the Democrat also recognized that the measure was a "perilous step" that could easily lead to open hostilities between the United States and the Central Powers.<sup>7</sup>

The Hawk-Eye, on the other hand, argued that Wilson "overstepped the necessities of the situation when he asked congress to clothe him with such extraordinary powers," and the paper said congress would be acting within its prerogatives by voting the measure down. "The ambitions of the president to take all the responsibility upon himself and relegate congress to the rear arouses distrust in his judgment and purposes in this crucial hour," the Hawk-Eye declared. "Congress is

wise in holding the check rein." <sup>8</sup>

Then on March 1, 1917, Wilson released to the public the contents of a telegram that had a monumental effect on the fate of the armed neutrality bill, and many would argue, the decision to declare war on Germany. This telegram was sent by Germany's Foreign Minister, Dr. Alfred Zimmermann, to Mexico's German Minister, H. von Eckhardt, and it contained an offer designed to tempt Mexico and Japan into an alliance with Germany against the United States if the U.S. officially entered the conflict. The telegram offered to give Mexico back its lost provinces of New Mexico, Texas and Arizona if it would declare war against Washington.<sup>9</sup> Coming as it did after a series of incidents such as the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the Zimmermann telegram was one of the final major events that resulted in America's decision to enter the war. The British had intercepted the telegram in early April, and its timely release was the crowning achievement of Britain's propaganda efforts in America.<sup>10</sup>

The publication of this telegram caused an immediate sensation in the United States. All three Iowa newspapers examined in this study ran the complete text of the note, and newspaper headlines called Zimmermann's offer a "Plot Against the United States" and a "Scheme for World Domination." A headline for an article in the Hawk-Eye called the note the "Latest Duplicity of Crazy German Monarch."<sup>11</sup> Public opinion was running so strongly in some areas against Germany that it seemed almost certain that America was on the brink of declaring war.

Despite the rising emotions immediately following the disclosure of Zimmermann's plan, the Hawk-Eye was skeptical about the importance of the telegram. The paper stated:

The scheme is replete with improbable, if not impossible factors. Sensational news could be good to arouse Americans to the importance of military, naval and

economic preparedness, and may also serve the more questionable purpose of bestowing greater power upon the president than is justifiable under the present circumstances.

The Hawk-Eye also warned that passage of the armed neutrality bill would be a mistake, and it also believed congress would be "carried off its feet under the spur of excitement and a genuine spirit of patriotic motive" and pass the measure. If this were to happen, the Hawk-Eye said the only course would be to "acquiesce in the action taken by its reps and stand by the flag...."<sup>12</sup>

The Telegraph Herald stated that if the propositions revealed in the Zimmermann telegram were true, the prospect of America keeping peace with Germany was "very gloomy." The Herald said that despite this feeling, Americans should remain quiet and tolerant and "hope that our country will not actually become engaged in warfare with Germany."<sup>13</sup>

On March 4th, newspapers revealed that Foreign Minister Zimmermann admitted sending the telegram, and the Hawk-Eye's premonition about congress running wild with emotion was fulfilled. Opposition to the armed neutrality bill in the House of Representatives faded, and the measure swept through the House by a margin of 401 to 13. The bill did not fare as well in the Senate, which failed on March 4th to pass the measure because of the work of what President Wilson referred to as "a little group of willful men." This group of twelve senators, most of whom were pacifists or socialists, organized a filibuster that forced the Senate to recess before a vote could be taken.<sup>14</sup>

Newspapers across America strongly criticized the Senate's failure to pass the armed neutrality measure, which was seen as America's only option short of declaring war. Many newspaper articles and editorials referred to the dissenting senators as "disloyalists" and "traitors." Iowa newspapers were also critical of the

senators' actions, especially since two of them, Senators Albert B. Cummings and William S. Kenyon, represented Iowa. All three newspapers examined in this study condemned the senators in unusually fiery editorials. Even The Davenport Democrat, which up until now had maintained a noncommittal editorial voice, said "this little group of a dozen senators, seeking only to humiliate the president, only succeeded in humiliating themselves and the nation which they are supposed to represent."<sup>15</sup>

The Telegraph Herald stated that the Senate's failure to pass the bill gave the world the impression that Americans were weaklings who would not defend their rights guaranteed by international law. The Herald stated:

Today the American nation stands humiliated before the nations of the world and all because of twelve senators led by La Follette of Wisconsin and ably abetted by Senator Cummins of Iowa who chose to oppose the will of the people represented by overwhelming majorities in both the senate and house of representatives. More, the country is not only humiliated, it is rendered practically helpless, regardless what any other nation may do to curtail our rights at home or abroad.<sup>16</sup>

The Telegraph Herald continued on March 7th to denounce the role Cummings and Kenyon played in the filibuster by saying Iowa's two dissenting senators would receive thousands of letters and telegrams chastising them for blocking the armed neutrality bill. The Herald stated: "There is not one individual in the state who wants the country to become embroiled in war with any nation, and there are few Iowans who would withhold from the president the means of protecting American rights and honor."<sup>17</sup>

In keeping with its promise to support the measure if it was passed by congress, the Hawk-Eye joined the bandwagon in criticizing the dissenting senators. In close proximity to the headline, "Little Short of Treason," the Hawk Eye printed the names of all twelve senators in bold typeface. In that same issue, the Hawk-Eye stated in an editorial that Iowa's senators denied American citizens safety on the high seas by voting against the measure, and it said their votes "advertised to the world that

Iowa was not standing with Wilson in the present crisis." The Hawk-Eye stated:

Their action is regrettable, and the best answer to their astounding behavior is Iowa's splendid history during the crisis that confronted Abraham Lincoln. With a population much less than it is today, at the time she sent forty-eight regiments to maintain the union. Her patriotism is as stalwart today, the two gentlemen from Iowa in the U.S. Senate to the contrary.<sup>18</sup>

The next day, the Hawk-Eye said Cummings and Kenyon cast their vote against the armed neutrality bill because they thought this would please their many German constituents. The paper said that while these constituents "naturally favor Germany as against the Allies," they would just as naturally favor the U.S. when the rights of its people are jeopardized by Germany. "They [Iowa's German constituents] are able to recognize palaver in people in high places," the Hawk-Eye stated. "They are also able to discriminate between strong men and weaklings. And they and the remainder of Iowa will do so when the opportunity is presented."<sup>19</sup>

In order to assure that a filibuster would not occur in the future, the Telegraph Herald and the Democrat called on the Senate to revise its rules so that a handful of men would not be able to block Congress from passing important legislation.<sup>20</sup> In response to overwhelming public and political pressure, the senate voted 75 to 3 on March 9, 1917 to discard unlimited debate rules in favor of a two-thirds vote to decide time for action on measures. At the same time, Wilson recognized the need for immediate action, and he appealed to his attorney general to issue a statement saying that he had the authority to arm American merchant ships without the consent of congress.<sup>21</sup> Less than a week later, Secretary of State Robert Lansing issued such a statement, and Wilson acted on his executive authority and ordered the arming of American ships.<sup>22</sup>

With America's decision to protect itself at sea, a new climate of suspicion gripped the country. The Zimmermann note provided irrefutable evidence that

Germans were plotting a possible attack on America, and conspiracy stories flourished. Dozens of spy stories and tales of alleged German intrigue filled Iowa's newspapers, and almost all pointed an accusing finger at native born Germans or German-Americans.

An example of a much publicized conspiracy story that appeared in all three newspapers involved the arrest of an Eddystone Mmunition Company employee in Pennsylvania. George Koob, an inspector at the plant, was arrested on the suspicion that he was a German spy. A private detective said Koob allegedly passed imperfect shells while working at the plant, and when police caught up with him, papers were in his possession that "justified his arrest." The article also said Koob claimed he was a native American, but police revealed that he "was born in Germany."<sup>23</sup>

The Hawk-Eye reported the details of another alleged "spy" story which it called a "New German Conspiracy." The article said an "agent of the Kaiser," Fritz Kolb, was arrested at Hoboken, New Jersey with two bombs in his possession, and police believe they foiled his scheme to blow up munition plants in the U.S.<sup>24</sup> Two days later, the Hawk-Eye reported that Kolb had spent a couple of days in Ft. Madison, Iowa during the summer of 1914 trying to convince the Grand theater to show a film about the German army. The article said Kolb "showed an exceptionally keen interest" in the Mexican situation and often engaged in discussions about the war.<sup>25</sup>

As this fascination with spy stories gradually manifested itself in the midwest, protective measures were taken at the manufacturing plant at the Rock Island arsenal--just across the river from Davenport. All employees were given identification passes, and guards were posted at surrounding gates. A high fence laced with barbed wire was also erected around the plant. Guards were also placed outside Des Moines plants that manufactured articles used in the production of war

munitions. These precautions were taken "in view of the tense international situation." <sup>26</sup>

Despite the increased climate of suspicion surrounding German citizens, no evidence exists at this time that Germans or German-Americans were the victims of physical abuse or harassment, although it's possible that many were falsely accused of engaging in "spying activities." <sup>27</sup> During these last few weeks of American neutrality, no evidence exists in the newspapers featured in this study that Germans or German-Americans were slipping from their highly respected status in Iowa communities. Local public sentiment was by no means anti-German, and the Hawk-Eye, the Herald and the Democrat made many overtures to calm the minds of their readers and act as a friendly buffer between the German community and the ominous threat of war.

But as events during the spring of 1917 began to climax, German-Americans found themselves the target of intense scrutiny from fellow citizens, who were ready and willing to report disloyal activities and utterances to the proper authorities. While the Lusitania incident showed that war could directly affect the lives of American citizens, the Zimmermann telegram revealed for the first time that Germany was thinking of the U.S. as a potential enemy of the Central Powers. The goodwill that Americans had expressed toward their German neighbors was quickly fading as a new climate of suspicion and fear prepared to take its place. Americans were frustrated and indignant over the actions of the German government, and Washington's decision to break off relations with Germany and arm American merchant ships moved the U.S. perilously close to declaring war. But despite all the political maneuvers, America had only just begun to mobilize itself for the long fight ahead.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ross Gregory, The Origins of American Intervention in the First World War (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 120-121.

<sup>2</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, February 27, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, February 28, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., March 4, 1917, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., March 10, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, February 25, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, March 1, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Carl Wittke, German-Americans and the World War (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), p. 118.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Sanders and Phillip M. Taylor, British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914-1918 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 183-185.

<sup>11</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, March 1, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, March 2, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, March 6, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, March 5, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, March 6, 1917, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., March 7, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, March 6, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, March 7, 1917, p. 6 and Davenport Democrat and Leader, March 5, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, March 9, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Frederick Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 204.

<sup>23</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, February 25, 1917, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, March 6, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, March 8, 1917, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, March 2, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 150.

CHAPTER VI. AMERICA DECLARES WAR  
(April 2-15, 1917)

Washington was a sea of color. From every rooftop, from every street car, from every jacket lapel, the nation's colors of red, white and blue were enthusiastically displayed. Old glory was flying high and proud, for its nation's leaders were about to officially enter a war that the president said would "make the world safe for democracy." The efforts of pacifists, who flooded the capital city by the thousands, had been unsuccessful in their attempt to persuade congress to stop America from declaring war. From here on out, it was only a matter of days before the inevitable happened. America was going to war.

On April 2, 1917, President Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress and asked that the United States declare a state of war with Germany. In his speech, Wilson said "armed neutrality had become ineffectual" and the U.S. must enter the war to vindicate the principles of peace and justice against "selfish autocratic power." The debate in the Senate grew heated, especially after word was received that an armed American freighter, the *Aztec*, had just been torpedoed by a German submarine.<sup>1</sup>

Emotions were running so high that a group of pacifists, seeking to persuade Senator Henry Cabot Lodge to vote against the war resolution, became involved in an argument that mushroomed into a front page story for most American newspapers. After calling Lodge out of his office, Alexander Bannwart asked the senator to refuse to vote for the war measure. When Lodge said he would support the war resolution, Bannwart called him a coward. The senator replied by calling Bannwart a liar, and before more words were exchanged, Bannwart doubled up his fist and struck Lodge, "who despite his sixty odd years, launched a blow that sent Bannwart sprawling on the hard tiles of the corridor." Bannwart was then "pummelled" vigorously by a

bystander, and then turned over for yet another beating by a "half grown telegraph messenger." With blood dripping from his face, Bannwart was taken away by police and arrested on assault charges. He was released from jail the next day after he had reportedly read Wilson's war message and decided to support America's war effort. Meanwhile, Lodge had become an instant hero, and after entering the senate floor, he was greeted by scores of senators who welcomed an opportunity to shake his hand.<sup>2</sup>

The Herald was the first of the three Iowa newspapers to speak out against such arguments occurring among the general public. Although it felt the incident with Senator Lodge was a "practical exhibition of Americanism which all America admires," the paper stated in an editorial that mob violence was "repulsive to American civilization." The paper warned:

Although you may believe you can curb yourself in the heat of an argument about international and national affairs, passion sometimes springs up when least expected and many times is responsible for the doing of things which would not be done in cooler moments. Avoid arguments on the question. You cannot settle the matter.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time that Senator Lodge was being applauded for his actions, another senator was making headlines for less noble deeds. Senator Robert La Follette, an outspoken pacifist from Wisconsin, had managed to delay the Senate's vote on the war resolution for one day. Despite his efforts to block action on the bill, the war resolution was passed by the Senate, 82 to 6, on April 4, 1917. Two days later, the measure was passed by the House by a vote of 373 to 54.<sup>4</sup>

After the war was officially declared, Americans began to fall in line and support the cause. The nation's newspapers pointed out that America's decision had been made and it was every loyal citizen's duty to support the president. The newspapers in Iowa seemed to reiterate this notion. All three papers reprinted

patriotic poems and verse to inspire readers. Hints and rules for displaying the flag were also featured, and the public was encouraged to openly display loyalty to America. A huge patriotic meeting, featuring dozens of speakers, took place in Davenport, and the Democrat urged all citizens to attend to the meeting. City janitors even distributed 400 flags to the offices of county buildings so that a flag could be posted at every window.<sup>5</sup>

Dubuque also had a patriotic rally, and in an editorial, the Herald attempted to explain the purpose of the meeting:

It should be remembered and solemnly impressed that this proposed demonstration is to be an American demonstration, that it is not to be anti-anything, especially that it is not to be a demonstration against natives of Germany or descendants of natives of Germany who are residents and citizens of America. Impress this on your mind today and keep it impressed there. Impress it on the minds of others. Have it understood, and fully, that it is to be a strictly American demonstration.<sup>6</sup>

In recognizing the necessity for supporting the war effort, The Davenport Democrat stressed in its editorials that the U.S. was forced to enter the conflict. The Democrat told readers the war did not just pit the Allies against the Central powers or the Americans against the Germans, but featured a struggle of democracy versus autocracy. The paper said this was the central issue that had gradually drawn neutral nations into the conflict, and that when faced with such a choice, there was but one side which America could take.<sup>7</sup> The paper reinforced this attitude on its editorial page the next day by saying: "And it is imperative that we should stand together. We are being forged into a new unity amidst the fires that now blaze throughout the world...."<sup>8</sup> The Hawk-Eye and the Herald ran similar editorials. None of the three papers had been pushing actively for the U.S. to enter the war. But they stated that since it was official, all good and loyal Americans must support their government's decision.

All three papers examined in this study made an effort to stress that German-Americans were going through a rough time, but their loyalty could be trusted. The Telegraph Herald reprinted part of the text of Wilson's speech which read:

We are, let me say again, the sincere friends of the German people and shall desire nothing so much as the early re-establishment of intimate relations....We shall, happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and actions toward the millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy who live amongst us and shape our life, and we shall be proud to prove it towards all who are in fact loyal to their neighbors and to the government in the hour of test. They are, most of them, as true and loyal Americans as if they had never known any other fealty or allegiance.<sup>9</sup>

As it might be expected, all papers paid special attention to the plight of German-Americans now that hostilities had been officially declared with their Fatherland. The Democrat and the Hawk-Eye both reprinted a letter to the editor by C. Kotzenabe, a German citizen, that had originally appeared in the Chicago Tribune. The letter ran as follows:

My emotions tell me one thing at this awful time, but my reason tells me other things. As a German by birth it is a horrible calamity that I may have to fight Germans. That is natural, is it not so? But as an American by preference, I can see no other course open....

I do not want to see the allies triumph over the land of my birth. But I do very much want to see the triumph of the ideas they fight for. It sickens my soul to think of this nation going forth to help destroy people many of whom are bound to me by ties of blood and friendship. But it must be so. It is like a dreadful surgical operation. The militaristic, undemocratic demon which rules Germany must be cast out. It is for us to do it--now.

The Democrat stated that the spirit of this letter reinforced the fact that the loyalty of America's German citizens could be counted on during the trying times ahead.<sup>10</sup> Two days later, the Democrat ran its own editorial stressing that "practically every German-American citizen of Davenport" was ready to "endorse this country's war upon the imperial German government." They echoed Wilson's words that America had no quarrel with the German people, and the paper recognized America's

great debt to the Germany of "real culture, of science and music and art and scholarship." The editorial stated America was fighting "German militarism as a menace to the future peace of the world and a system that has fastened upon the German people a burden which they will have to carry for decades to come."<sup>11</sup> Two days later, the paper said the extent of disloyalty in the U.S. had been greatly exaggerated and that most citizens of foreign birth or descent were sincerely and whole-heartedly in support of the government. The Democrat concluded:

Let us have no divided opinions to where the right lies in this contest of democracy vs autocracy. Certainly with this country at war there can be no hope other than that the war may be brought to a speedy termination and that the forces represented by the Stars and Stripes shall prevail.<sup>12</sup>

Although the president and America's newspapers tried to make a distinction between the German people and their government, many efforts were starting to bloom in the U.S. that seemed to miss the point. At a special meeting of the Chicago Hotelkeepers' Association, plans were being discussed to change the names of several dishes that bore "enemy monickers." Such dishes as "German pancakes" would now become "American pancakes," and "German noodles" would be referred to as "American noodles." The article ended with a small discussion about less obvious name changes--"There is some doubt as to just how the toothsome wiener schnitzel should be classed."<sup>13</sup> An article on the same page stated that while Chicago just thinks about it, Kansas City eating house managers have "officially dethroned the German nomenclature" and actually changed the names of some German dishes. Kansas City residents now order "American" pot roast instead of "German" pot roast, and "American" fried potatoes instead of "German" fried spuds. Even the most popular hotel in Chicago, the Kaiserhof, decided to get into the act by changing its name to the Hotel Atlantic. The owners said a new name had been selected because the old

name "might be misinterpreted on account of the present international conditions."<sup>14</sup>

In an editorial about these name changes, the Burlington Hawk-Eye called them silly and childish and unworthy of the American people. The paper lectured that actions such as these did not exhibit patriotism, but instead displayed "crass stupidity" on the part of the perpetrators.<sup>15</sup>

The Herald was also quick to denounce people whose actions or words bore traces of anti-German feeling. The paper featured the following quote from Mother Jones, a leader among America's miners: "That old blood sucker, the kaiser, ought to be kicked off his throne, and if he ever starts anything with this country we will lick hell out of him if I have to raise a regiment of 10,000 women myself." The Herald said her words were spoken with good intentions, but her language was scarcely to be commended. "The kaiser has lost prestige in America, but it is not abuse of this kind that appeals to thinking Americans."<sup>16</sup>

Stories of German agents and German spy plots were also extremely prevalent in the Iowa newspapers examined in this study. Some of the more intriguing spy stories involved allegations that German agents were working in the south to incite anti-American feelings among negroes. Local federal agents in Birmingham, Alabama were said to have confirmed rumors that this was happening, and steps were being taken to put a stop to it.<sup>17</sup> The Hawk-Eye's version of this story said rumors were circulating that the Ku Klux Klan was to be revived to meet "possible uprisings or disaffection," but confirmation of these reports was unavailable. Organized German movements were also said to be taking place in Louisiana and Mississippi.<sup>18</sup>

Other articles told of German reservists or "ringleaders" who had been arrested in connection with plots to hamper America's war effort. That same article told of

15,000 and 18,000 other young German reservists who were under surveillance by government officials as potential sources of trouble.<sup>19</sup>

A story that commanded many front page column inches involved an explosion at an Eddystone munitions plant, owned by the Russian government, in Pennsylvania. The explosion killed 112 persons, most of whom were reported to have been women and girls. Rumors of German plots were alluded to in all accounts of the blast, although lack of confirmation prevailed. One company representative, who was described as responsible although he declined to have his name printed, said the explosion "was the result of a diabolical plot, conceived in the degenerate brain of a demon in human guise." Another official said he believed the blast was caused by the deliberate work of "a fanatic or an employee who believed he was doing a patriotic duty for a foreign nation now at war." Many other sources were convinced the tragedy was the work of "enemy aliens." Officials later discovered the blast was the act of a disgruntled former employee who perished in the blast.<sup>20</sup>

In the midwest, the Rock Island Army Ammunitions plant was placed under constant guard to protect the plant from German spies. The Arsenal was slated for a million dollar expansion project, and was to be "ranked as one of the leading and best producing arsenals the U.S. government possesses." Several area bridges were also placed under guard. Two men were arrested for allegedly trying to blow up the Dubuque bridge, the largest railway bridge that crossed the Mississippi. Mystery also surrounded a strange fire that was discovered at the an armory located in Clinton, Iowa.<sup>21</sup>

The Herald ran an editorial complimenting the U.S. Secret Service for its work in collecting the names of persons whose utterances and activities may not be in the best interests of America. Being ever conscious of offending German readers, the

paper said:

It is to be regretted, however, that the great majority of German-Americans are placed in a bad light by the activities and utterances of a treacherous few. Suspicion is naturally cast upon those who have connections, no matter how distant, with an enemy country, but this can easily be overcome by expression of loyalty at every possible opportunity. America looks upon her German-American population in general with admiration and respect and expects the great majority of their attitudes in the present situation to remove the stain from the designation "German-American."

The editorial also said loyal Americans could do their country no greater service than to report to the proper authorities "instances of traitorous conduct."<sup>22</sup> An editorial printed two days later explained to the Herald's readers what treason was and why they should be familiar with the term--especially since "this is a time when acts and words inoffensive and little thought of may constitute crime." The editorial repeated the story of a Clinton, Iowa woman who hung a German flag outside the window of her apartment. The Herald said:

Regardless of whether she is punished or not, the instance should serve to call attention to others to what small things may be regarded as treasonable. It is the hope of truly loyal American citizens everywhere that there be a marked absence of those things that might be considered as even bordering on treason.<sup>23</sup>

An article in the Democrat, under the headline "BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU DO AND SAY," stated that Police departments in every important city in Iowa were working with federal officials to prepare for possible spying activities in the state. Officials were told to take all necessary precautions and policemen and detectives were being recruited for federal secret service work.<sup>24</sup>

The three Iowa newspapers also ran a curt warning issued by Attorney General T. W. Gregory. The notice said:

No German alien enemy in this country, who has not hitherto been implicated in plots against the interests of the U.S., need have any fear of action by the Department of Justice so long as he observes the following warning: Obey the law; keep your mouth shut. Respectfully, T.W. Gregory, Attorney General.<sup>25</sup>

The Department of Justice also issued a threatening notice to aliens about

abusing the American flag. This notice said that any:

...alien enemy tearing down, mutilating, abusing or desecrating the United States flag in any way will be regarded as a danger to the public peace or safety within the meaning of regulation 12 of the proclamation of the president, issued April 6, 1917, and will be subject to summary arrest and confinement.<sup>26</sup>

The Democrat said in an editorial that Wilson's war proclamation, which said that there would be no concentration camps for aliens who behave themselves, was exactly what it expected from a country such as America. The Democrat said that all German citizens, "whether alien or not," would be judged by their "conduct" and not by their "blood."<sup>27</sup>

The Hawk-Eye also stated in an editorial that "no well-behaved subject of a Central Europe power in the U.S. need have any worry about his personal safety or the security of his property." The paper said the New York World tersely and correctly stated his status:

The subject of Germany or of Austria-Hungary or of Turkey is safer in the U.S. than he would be at home, on one condition. He must respect the laws of the U.S. and unless he chances to be truant or criminal, nobody will cross his path. There is a single test for all foreigners in this country to-day, and that is good behavior.<sup>28</sup>

But apparently good behavior in those days did not include expressing an unpopular opinion. Michael Zimmermann, a German, was given a prison sentence by a police magistrate in New Jersey after two of his countrymen testified that he had made derogatory remarks about President Wilson. Despite the fact that Zimmermann pleaded intoxication, he was still sentenced to a six month term. The headline of the article read: "KNOCKED THE PRESIDENT--GERMAN WHO USED TONGUE TOO MUCH SENTENCED IN NEW JERSEY."<sup>29</sup>

Within days after America's declaration of war, many American minds blurred Wilson's distinction between making war with the German government and not with the German people. Incidents of the abuse of Germans and German-Americans were

starting to occur, and the victims of this abuse were often young. A twelve year old German girl, Lillian Ziegenhagen, was dismissed from school in Peoria, Illinois, for refusing to stand and sing "America" during class. About 300 or 400 "public spirited" citizens of Dunlap, Iowa were so agitated by the alleged burning of two American flags by a German resident of their community that they forced him to carry the flag to the local train station and leave town for an unknown destination. The unwilling traveler, Henry Hansen, had been a resident of Dunlap for 12 years.<sup>30</sup>

The attitudes of the three Iowa newspapers examined in this study were friendly toward German-Americans, but the actions of the people reading the papers in many other areas of the country revealed another story. It can be speculated that Iowans retained their friendly attitude toward their German neighbors in part because Germans were plentiful and well respected citizens of many Iowa communities. Up until this point, Iowans had never been forced to doubt the patriotism or motives of German-Americans, but in the next few months, America's involvement in the war would cast a different light on Americans of German descent. No specific cases of abuse were reported in Davenport, Dubuque or Burlington, although many cities were taking measures to protect their ammunitions plants and bridges from German saboteurs.

America's war effort was only in its infancy during the spring and summer of 1917, but suspicion and intolerance were already coming of age. The Committee on Public Information hadn't even begun its campaign to rally Americans to the cause, but in just a few short months, the anti-German movement in the U.S. would flourish. Newspapers and government pamphlets would begin referring to Germans as "Huns and barbarians," and a suspicious eye was cast toward any citizen bearing a German name or accent. And exactly one year after war was declared, anti-German hysteria reached a chilling and deadly climax with the lynching of an Illinois man accused

of disloyalty.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 3, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 3, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 204.

<sup>5</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 10, 1917, p. 6 and April 11, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 15, 1917, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 3, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., April 4, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 4, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 3, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1917, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 8, 1917, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 9, 1917, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 12, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 3, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 4, 1917, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 5, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 7, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 11, 1917, p. 1 and April 12, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 5, 1917, p. 15 and April 10, 1917, p. 2.

- <sup>22</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 12, 1917, p. 6.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1917, p. 6.
- <sup>24</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 6, 1917, p. 8.
- <sup>25</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 10, 1917, p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 10, 1917, p. 12.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1917, p. 6.
- <sup>28</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 10, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1917, p. 2.
- <sup>30</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 9, 1917, p. 10 and April 10, 1917, p. 2.

CHAPTER VII: THE LYNCHING OF ROBERT PRAGER  
(April 5-18, 1918)

His last words were : "All right, boys, go ahead and kill me, but wrap me in the flag when you bury me." Shortly thereafter, Robert P. Prager was hanged from an elm tree just a few miles south of his home in Collinsville, Illinois. A group of drunk, angry men were responsible for the murder, and the events that took place in the early morning hours of April 5, 1918 would soon make headlines across the country.<sup>1</sup>

Prager's murder brought anti-German hysteria in America to a deadly and unprecedented climax. The details of Prager's life reveal that he was a controversial figure from the moment he set foot in America after immigrating from his native Dresden, Germany at the age of seventeen. After working as a baker for several years in St. Louis, Missouri, Prager moved in 1917 to Collinsville, located in the southwestern corner of Illinois just twelve miles east of St. Louis, to find work at a mine in nearby Maryville. Blind in one eye and of limited intelligence, Prager often started arguments with his fellow miners, and he was annoying and persistent in his efforts to convert some of his fellow workers to socialism. Prager's outspoken views, many of which were judged as derogatory toward President Wilson, made him an unpopular member of an overly paranoid community that lived with the constant fear that German spies would try to blowup the local mine where Prager worked.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly before his death, Prager applied for membership in the local miner's union, but his application was denied. Donald Hickey, in an article entitled "The Prager Affair: A Study in Wartime Hysteria," speculated that Prager's application was turned down because of his outspoken socialist views and not because of his classification as a German alien (Prager's citizenship papers were pending). Hickey also pointed out that many members of the mining community were Germans, and

that this did not seem to jeopardize membership into the union. Upon hearing that his application was rejected by the union, Prager became even more outspoken, and after several heated arguments with mining officials, the union president called him a "spy and a liar." In reaction to his these attacks, Prager posted handbills in Collinsville and Maryville that denied he was "disloyal" and asserted his allegiance to America. These handbills angered many of the miners, and they decided it was time to teach Prager a lesson or two. On April 4th, a group of miners grabbed Prager and made him march barefoot through town, often forcing him to kiss the American flag. Prager escaped this first ordeal, only to return to his home for some short-lived peace. Later that evening, another group of miners that had been drinking at a local tavern decided it was again time to make Prager pay for his "un-Americanism." The miners dragged Prager into the street, ripped off some of his clothes, and forced him to march through the streets barefoot and covered by an American flag. Local police rescued Prager, and placed him in the Collinsville jail in protective custody.<sup>3</sup>

Later that night, a crowd gathered at the jail and demanded that Prager be handed over to them. The town's mayor eventually succeeded in dispersing the mob, but hours later, the crowd gathered again and asked to see Prager. The mayor lied to the group, telling them that he had been taken by federal officers to East St. Louis. An argument followed, and the mayor finally granted permission for one man to enter the jail to search for Prager. As the two men entered the building, the group stormed the doors of the jail and a wild, frantic search for the disloyalist was on. After a thorough combing of the building, two men found Prager hiding under some tiles in the basement.<sup>4</sup>

The angry miners dragged Prager from the jail, and law officers did nothing to prevent his removal. As soon as he was taken outside, Prager was knocked to the

ground and forced to take off his shoes for another barefoot walk through town. After walking just outside of the city limits, Prager was questioned for nearly twenty minutes before he was allowed to say a prayer and write one last note to his parents. Moments later, a rope that was secured around an elm tree was tied around his neck and he was hoisted up in the air. But the mob forgot to tie Prager's hands, so he was able to grab at the rope to prevent himself from choking. Members of the crowd then lowered him back down so that his arms could be securely fastened behind his back. The second attempt to hang Prager was successful, and shortly after his body was again hoisted up into the air, Prager died of strangulation.<sup>5</sup>

The national press overwhelmingly denounced the mob's action, and they were unanimous in their demands that the guilty parties be punished.<sup>6</sup> The event was discussed in Wilson's cabinet meeting the very next day, and the government expressed concern about the lynching's effect in this country and possible reprisals that might be made against Americans in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Many government officials felt the lynching reflected the failure of congress to act upon legislation that would give the government more power to deal with citizens accused of disloyalty. Although the Trading-with-the-Enemy and Espionage Acts were already in effect, a impending amendment to the Espionage Act was seen by many as the solution to the violence problem. This measure, called the Sedition act, would impose heavy fines and imprisonment for the publication or writing of "any disloyal profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government of the U.S. or the Constitution, military or naval forces, flag or the uniform of the army or navy of the U.S." It also would punish any "intended" language that would bring the above into "contempt, scorn, or disrepute." The measure passed the Congress and became law on May 16, 1918.<sup>8</sup>

But despite the fact that Prager's murder was deplored by a majority of Americans and the press, President Wilson chose not to speak out against mob violence until July 26, 1918, nearly four months after the lynching. A more timely statement by the president may have lessened the likelihood of mob action in America, for his remarks were delivered after much of the hysteria had already subsided. Though powerful, Wilson's statements merely echoed what many newspapers had said months before when they asked law officials to put an end to the violence. Wilson called the mob's actions "a disgraceful evil," and he said:

No man who loves America, no man who really cares for her fame and honor and character, who is truly loyal to her institutions can justify mob action while the courts of justice are open and the governments of the states and the nation are ready and able to do their duty.

Wilson's remarks concluded by saying that if America claims to be the proud champion of democracy, her citizens need to "see to it that we do not discredit our own."<sup>9</sup>

The reactions of the three Iowa newspapers examined in this study were varied. The Hawk-Eye was the only paper that strongly condemned the lynching. The newspaper said in an editorial that the actions at Collinsville constituted murder, and that Prager was denied a fair trial. The Hawk-Eye also said "too many incidents of this character are occurring in various parts of the country," and it called this type of activity "rank treason and a deadly enemy of government of the people, by the people and for the people." The paper continued:

Such proceedings are always outrages upon modern civilization and never ought to be condoned or tolerated. The Collinsville case is no exception. It is wholly indefensible and a blot upon our nation. The men who engaged in it under the false assumption that they were loyal and patriotic and were "standing by the flag and the government," were in fact, in open rebellion against the government of the United States and trampling under their feet, in effect, the flag and the principles of liberty, justice, law, order and fealty which it symbolizes. No recognized authority of the United States from the President to the congress, no supreme court and all other

authorities, national or state, will sanction the conduct of that mob.<sup>10</sup>

Four days later, the Hawk-Eye stated that mob violence was a world weakness. "America has the opportunity for distinction over all other countries by cutting out that weakness," the editorial said. "Collinsville, Illinois will hardly appreciate its place in history."<sup>11</sup>

Although not specifically mentioning the Prager lynching, the Dubuque Telegraph Herald stated in an editorial that it hoped congress would adopt an amendment to a pending bill that would recommend thirty years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine for "whoever shall by word or act support the cause of the German empire or its allies in the present war or by word or act oppose the cause of the United States therein." The Herald said that the proposed penalties were necessarily drastic because "the evil which it is aimed to crush" was "very great." The Herald also said the government had been too lenient with German propagandists, spies and traitorous Americans during the first year of the war, and now the public was demanding drastic measures, such as those mentioned above, to control the actions of disloyal people.<sup>12</sup>

While the Telegraph Herald spoke only indirectly about the Prager lynching, the Davenport Democrat neglected to comment at all on the subject of mob violence. At the time, the city of Davenport was preoccupied with a battle to supposedly eliminate party politics from city government. The paper devoted a great deal of editorial and news space to articles endorsing candidates from the Citizens' Party. This new party was formed to rid the city of partisan politics, and its ranks were filled with men who had declared themselves as 100 per cent loyal to America. The chief opponent of the citizens' party was the socialist ticket, which, the paper said, contained men that were America's enemies and must be defeated in their bid to win

offices in Davenport's elections. This type of political movement makes it clear that the pressure to promote patriotic causes and ideas was intense--even in local political circles.

In an editorial discussing the upcoming election, the Democrat stated election day would be a dark blot on Davenport's history if a socialist ticket were elected. The day could be a bright spot in the city's history if the town cast its vote for the Citizens' party. The paper said this would put responsible men in office who had been "called to public service by an impressive popular mandate."<sup>13</sup>

But this impressive popular mandate turned out to be a not so impressive victory for the Citizens' Party. Although its candidate for mayor, C. Littleton, was elected, he was victorious by only 24 votes. The party's other candidates also won by narrow margins, and two lower ward aldermen were elected from the Socialist ticket. The Democrat reacted harshly, and it called the narrow margin a "disgrace that will not be wiped out for many years." The Democrat also reprimanded the city's German voters, and said that "we have a large element here which sympathizes with Germany in the present war and took the opportunity of recording this fact in the secrecy of the voting booth...." The paper also blamed people who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates because their votes divided:

...the portion of our citizenship that should have been undivided in its unqualified Americanism, standing as firmly against pacifism and disloyalty in this city as the boys we have sent to France are standing against autocracy and frightfulness as it is exemplified by the kaiser's hordes that threaten to sweep their way across the fair fields of France.<sup>14</sup>

Also making headlines in newspapers, perhaps because of its timely launching in accordance with the first anniversary of America's entrance into the war, was the Third Liberty Loan campaign. Unlike the preceding two efforts, this campaign to raise funds for America's war effort was extremely well organized. For the first time,

recruiters used a color-coded card system where the names of those who refused to subscribe and those that "under subscribed" were recorded. A quota system was also developed where each person was to donate a certain percentage of his income and property holdings. Secretary of Treasury William McAdoo set the tone for the fundraising in a speech he delivered at a "kick-off" ceremony for the third liberty loan drive. The Secretary said:

Germany is the champion of lust and dominion. She literally seeks to dominate the world. America is the unselfish champion of right and freedom. Traitors within our gates have precipitated strikes and spies have done their poisonous work hampering progress. A strong and resolute hand is being put on them. We must be remorseless with traitors and spies.<sup>15</sup>

In an editorial, the Democrat stated that the third loan would be the most successful because the government had authorized the use of real pressure toward unwilling or lazy subscribers. The paper said it had received word that most districts in Scott county were going to come through with 100 per cent subscription, and that not a pink card for undersubscription or a yellow card for refusal to subscribe would be turned in. The article warned that the city "will have a squadron of cavalry in reserve that bears the significant name of the "mopping up" squad," and that when the group finished working with local slackers, Davenport's "packet of yellow cards would be so thin as to be invisible to the naked eye."<sup>16</sup>

The Hawk-Eye even broke with tradition by editorializing on the front page to mark the beginning of the Third campaign. The piece was entitled, "If You Can't Go Over--Then Come Over" and in it, the Hawk-Eye said, "The government is not asking much. Just a small loan--just a bit of your surplus. Show to the world that you are a good patriot, that we are all good patriots, by lending the government more than it asked for."<sup>17</sup> Iowa's governor, W.L. Harding, was quoted in a Liberty loan kickoff meeting as saying: "If a man who is financially able refused to buy a Liberty bond, he

is a slacker; if he refused, after having his attention called to it, he is a contemptible traitor."<sup>18</sup>

The Democrat featured dozens of half and full page ads paid for by local businesses, some of which bore German names, that used highly emotional appeals to recruit money for the loan drives. An ad sponsored by Newmans, "a store for ladies," featured a silhouette of a little girl and asked the question: "Is this worth fighting for?" Another ad featured a smiling little girl clutching a liberty loan. The copy said: "My Daddy bought this for me. Did yours?"<sup>19</sup>

The M.L. Parker Company even managed to advertise a "Third Liberty Loan Clothing Sale." Under the heading "Store Editorial," an article signed by M.L. Parker informed the public that by refusing to buy government bonds, citizens were withholding from the government the only means by which the war could be won. Parker said, "When you withhold from purchasing the things you normally buy, you are retarding business and when multiplied by thousand of others, this becomes serious, closing mills, factories and stores."<sup>20</sup>

The Liberty loan campaigns were also responsible for some of the most potent advertising produced by the CPI. One such ad, published in cooperation with the Scott County Liberty Loan Committee, was paid for by J.H.C. Petersen's Sons Company of Davenport. The ad featured an official photograph of a large club with spikes sticking out from it. The ad said the club was one of 32,000 recently confiscated that had been used by Germans to "finish off" wounded Italian soldiers. The copy read: "You can have your share in America's answer to German Savagery. The Third Liberty Loan is your opportunity. It is the most direct blow that can be struck at German military supremacy. Save Civilization, save America, your own family and your own home."<sup>21</sup>

The government's plea for the purchase of bonds reached citizens at almost every turn, and as a result, the pressure to buy liberty bonds was immense. Ministers urged people to buy bonds during their church sermons.<sup>22</sup> Along with the pressure to buy bonds came urgent appeals to support the Red Cross and YMCA. In many cases, alleged pro-Germans were rounded up by local vigilante groups or summoned to appear before local district attorneys for a lecture on patriotism. Germans were also expected to state their worth in dollars and the percentage of their money they had contributed to liberty loans or the Red Cross.

Disloyal utterances could also prove to be quite costly. In New London, Iowa, Will Flam was suspected of making disloyal remarks, but he managed to spare himself from being tarred and feathered by signing an affidavit in which he admitted his disloyal remarks and promised to be a loyal American. The note also promised he would turn in anyone whom he heard making disloyal statements. And for good measure, Flam was forced to purchase \$100 in bonds and War Savings Stamps, and he made an additional donation of \$10 to the Red Cross. The article said he also took out a \$1 Red Cross membership, and had intentions of subscribing to the YMCA war fund.<sup>23</sup>

It was also not uncommon for newspapers to publish the names of loan "slackers" and how much they earned. A Waterloo, Iowa manual training teacher, A. F. Bond, was charged with disloyalty by a local vigilante organization, which asked the school board to discharge him from his teaching position. The article stated Bond refused to buy liberty bonds or thrift stamps, was unmarried and earned \$120 a month. The article also stated that his parents live in Ankeny, Iowa and "came from Germany."<sup>24</sup>

Pressure was so intense that the Herald reported that a farmer from Waterloo,

Jessee Immings, hanged himself in a neighbor's barn, apparently because he was brooding over not being able to afford a liberty bond.<sup>25</sup> The Hawk-Eye carried this same report, and said in an editorial that there must have been something radically wrong with Immings's mental makeup.

If he had his heart set upon becoming a bond owner, he would have found friends to help him. And if he was under such circumstances that he was actually unable to invest, then no one would have blamed him....Someone must have given the poor fellow a wrong impression, and the fear of being termed a slacker appears to have driven him to his death.... No one would have considered him a slacker if he had been unable to buy a bond. But he appears as a slacker, so far as his duty to his family is concerned, in not bearing his troubles like a man and remembering that he had a duty there which must not be shirked. It is only charitable to believe that his mind must have been unhinged.<sup>26</sup>

The pressure to conform and support America's war effort was running strong in all corners of the country. Fiery rhetoric by public figures, administration officials and travelling speakers addressed the question of disloyal slackers and pro-German sympathizers. Henry J. Waters, editor of the Kansas City Star, told a meeting of Polk county farmers that the days of making "Kaiser lovers" kiss the flag were over. Waters said "that is an insult to the old flag." He also urged farmers to do the following: "Every farmer in Iowa should plant an acre of hemp, which should be carefully harvested and woven into enough rope to hang every pro-German in the country."<sup>27</sup>

Iowans were also aroused upon learning of the horrible death of the first Iowa boy to die in the French trenches. A letter written to Cedar Rapids, Iowa by another Iowan driving an ambulance in France said that the body of soldier Merle Hay was severely mutilated by Germans. The letter said the body "contained seventeen bayonet wounds and that the head was almost severed from the body, indicating the Germans had used a knife or an extremely sharp object to inflict the neck wound."<sup>28</sup>

Stories of other German horrors also greeted citizens in movie advertisements.

The Democrat ran a series of ads that lured readers to go to the American Theater in Davenport to see the "Beast of Berlin," a Rupert Julian screen production that recounted the dirty deeds of the Kaiser's army. One advertisement said that viewers would "scream their heads off" as a heroic young lieutenant "smashed the Kaiser on the jaw." The ad promised: "You'll scream along with thousands of your fellow citizens to KILL THE KAISER!"<sup>29</sup> The excitement was apparently too much for one viewer who upon seeing an impersonation of the Kaiser on the screen, jumped from his chair and screamed, "If I can't get you in Germany, I'll get you here!" The man then pulled a gun from his hip pocket and fired two shots at the screen. The police quickly arrested him, and as he was taken from the theater, movie patrons cheered his exit.<sup>30</sup> The would-be assassin, identified as traveling salesman E. J. Kelly, was released moments later when theater owners declined to press charges. Kelly said he fired the shots because "I just became so mad I could not help doing what I did." An article in the Democrat used a tongue-in-cheek lead to tell Kelly's story. The lead read: "Kaiser Wilhelm II, emperor of all the Huns, author of ruthlessness in warfare on sea and land, was assassinated last night. He was shot twice through the left lung. Death is reported to have been instantaneous."<sup>31</sup>

Another East Dubuque man, E. W. Coyle, was also overcome by a burning patriotic desire. After being told that the German State bank of East Dubuque was pro-German, Coyle "accordingly proceeded to mete out punishment." An article in the Herald said:

A large sign in front of the institution with the name, German State bank, caught his eye, and with one strong pull, he disconnected it from its moorings. With the sign on the sidewalk, he had started to break it to pieces when he was interrupted by Officer Duffy.

The Herald reported that after the incident was "threshed out," it was discovered

that Coyle had acted on rumor, and after apologizing for his behavior, he was released. The article also stated that the German State Savings Bank of East Dubuque was "100 per cent American," and that anyone who had ever dealt with the bank would be "willing to vouch for its loyalty." It said the rumors about the bank were probably the product of "some practical joker's limited brain," although the foundation for the rumor was thought to have been the bank's name, which the Herald said officials had been contemplating changing for some time.<sup>32</sup>

A number of Iowa banks had already dropped the German word "Spar Bank," meaning savings bank, from their display and advertising material.<sup>33</sup> Even the largest bank in Iowa, the German Savings Bank of Davenport, took what the Democrat called "a patriotic stand" and voted to change its name to the American Commercial and Savings bank. Bank President G. N. Voss said officials were "confident that the patrons of the bank, in many cases people of German blood, would consider the change in the right spirit as loyal Americans."<sup>34</sup>

Not only were German names in question, but German music as well. The Tri-City Symphony Orchestra dropped a chorus from Wagner's opera "Tannhauser" because members of local patriotic organizations in Moline, Illinois objected to having a German composer appear on the orchestra's May festival program. Another selection was substituted after the Moline and Scott County Councils of Defense issued a formal protest to the Tri-City Orchestra. An article in the Democrat said:

At last Monday evening's concert of the Tri-City Symphony Orchestra...three composers, Wagner, Beethoven and Strauss, were included in the program. There were quite a number of vacant seats at this concert. Noticeable among the absentees were a number of season ticket holders. Their absence is attributed to the German aspect of the program.<sup>35</sup>

And along with the scorn for German music and names came a tremendous rise

in the number of incidents of the physical abuse of German-Americans. At least a half dozen incidents were reported in all three Iowa newspapers each day. Many if not most of the cases of abuse were violent physical attacks on Germans. One of the more pathetic cases involved a 74 year old pastor of the German Lutheran church in Conant, Illinois, a German community. After allegedly making disloyal remarks during one of his sermons, the Rev. F. A. Myers was taken from his home by a group of men and tarred and feathered. Several days later, the elderly reverend disappeared, and it was thought that he was in a hospital in St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>36</sup>

In Mt. Pleasant, Iowa a committee of local citizens entered the home of music teacher Julius Winters while he was playing in a moving picture theater orchestra. The committee confiscated two pictures of the Kaiser from Winters' belongings, and then proceeded to find Winters, escort him out of the theater and march him to the town square. Once at their destination, a crowd of 150 people forced Winters to pour kerosene on the pictures and set them on fire. An article in the Hawk-Eye said: "The resulting bonfire was greatly enjoyed by all present, with the possible exception of the professor. After the flames had done their work, Winters was urged to say "To hell with the kaiser," and "Hurrah for Wilson." Which he did."<sup>37</sup>

In Athens, Illinois, John W. Rynders, a grocer, had a flag tied around his neck by "loyalists who forced him to kiss the emblem and to swear allegiance to the American cause." The article stated that Rynders was told if he removed the flag, he would suffer "serious consequences."<sup>38</sup> Citizens of Kenny, Illinois, near Clinton, "administered a severe beating" to William Heiserman, a wealthy farmer. The group also nailed two big American flags to his house, and told Heiserman he would be given a coat of tar and feathers if he removed the flags. The article said the "drubbing" took place in front of the Kenny postoffice and was "the result of alleged

anti-Americanism."<sup>39</sup> A house in Vinton, Iowa was given what an article in the Hawk-Eye described as "a good coat of yellow paint," because its owner, a native born German, was accused of making disloyal statements. The article also reported that the "accused disloyalist" was so frightened that he remained in the house while the men took a brush to it.<sup>40</sup>

Abuses like the ones described above continued for many months, despite the furor created by the lynching of Robert Prager. The number of articles in the three Iowa newspapers that reported the abuse of "disloyalists" declined after the spring of 1918, although it's difficult to say if this actually reflected a decline in the number of cases of abuse. Newspaper headlines became less inflammatory, and fewer references were made to "Huns" in article headlines. But with the signing of the armistice just six months later, the harassment continued in many areas, and a new concern was voiced over German spies and propaganda agents engaging in "postwar work" in America.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Donald R. Hickey, "The Prager Affair: A Study in Wartime Hysteria," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 62 (Summer 1969): 117, 122.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Hickey, "The Prager Affair: A Study in Wartime Hysteria," p. 118-119

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 119-120.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 121-122.

<sup>6</sup>Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 5, 1918, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 623-624.

- <sup>9</sup>New York Times, July 27, 1918, p. 7.
- <sup>10</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 6, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>12</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 7, 1918, p. 16.
- <sup>13</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 6, 1918, p. 18.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1918, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>17</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 6, 1918, p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 7, 1918, p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 10, 1918, p. 10.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1918, p. 16.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., April 10, 1918, p. 2.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1918, p. 16.
- <sup>23</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 7, 1918, p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1918, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 5, 1918, p. 14.
- <sup>26</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 11, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>27</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 7, 1918, p. 28.
- <sup>28</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 11, 1918, p. 2.
- <sup>29</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 7, 1918, p. 9.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., April 8, 1918, p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., April 8, 1918, p. 14.
- <sup>32</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 9, 1918, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 9, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 8, 1918, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1918, p. 8 .

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1918, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 10, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, April 5, 1918, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, April 5, 1918, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 9, 1918, p. 3.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ARMISTICE  
(November 10-23, 1918)

The news was transmitted over the Associated Press wire at 2 o'clock in the morning on November 11, 1918. Word spread like lightning, thanks to telephone operators and factory whistles, which blew long and hard to announce the event to the public. The Davenport Democrat and Leader vividly described what happened in Davenport:

Covers were thrown back and Davenport pattered out into the chilly bedroom barefoot. Feverish haste urged chilly fingers to fasten bulky buttons. Clothed after a semblance, Davenport rushed into the night and downtown. People appeared in the streets as if by magic and the trickling of streams of humanity rapidly swelled into Niagaras of people frantic with joy and who surged toward the newspaper offices shouting themselves hoarse.<sup>1</sup>

Armistice had arrived at last, and pandemonium broke out in spontaneous waves in many parts of the world. After nineteen months of bitter fighting and sacrificing, Americans now had the right to celebrate their success as victors of the first world war. This good news was especially welcomed in the wake of a deadly Spanish influenza epidemic that made public meetings illegal and forced the closing of schools, churches and theaters. Quarantines were being lifted for the first time in weeks, and Americans could now gather together and celebrate in good conscience.

The Dubuque Telegraph Herald reported that the city went "bug house" during the wildest celebration in its history. Businesses, factories and schools closed so citizens could take part in the victory celebration. A huge downtown parade featured over 800 members of the Dubuque College soldiers and hundreds of students from the Army Training Corps. The Reserve Officers band played patriotic songs while thousands of pedestrians joined the march. People searched city streets and alleyways for anything they could find that would make noise--whether it be a

garbage can lid or a kitchen pan. Men rolled garbage cans down streets, horns were blown and guns were shot into the air. Groups of children and adults dragged dummies of "Willie Hohenzollern" through the streets, and screams and cries of joy filled the chilly November air. The Herald said "the rich mingled with the poor, and the good church woman was not too good to march arm in arm with the outcast of the street." Even "kindly faced women who never said a bad word in their life wore placards in their hats" that announced to the world: "To Hell with the Kaiser." This same article described the scene like this: "Women hurled themselves in shrieking abandon into the maelstroms of the down-town corners and staid businessmen outrivaled street urchins in fantastic capers."<sup>2</sup>

In East Dubuque, alcohol apparently got the best of many citizens. The Herald reported that "riotous outbursts that knew no reasonable limits" forced city officials to close all saloons after 5:00 p.m. The Herald said the mobs that crowded the streets were literally "wetted down" long before noon, and fights and loud arguments were occurring with "monotonous frequency." Women were also reportedly "drunk and disorderly," and were often the first to gather to watch a fight. In many cases, the stock of liquor in saloons had been depleted long before the 5 o'clock closing order. As a result of such overindulgence, city jails were crowded to capacity early in the afternoon. One article described a typical fight scene:

The usual method of starting a free-for-all might be described something along this order:

"You're a D---- Pro!"

"Let's get 'em! Come on boys!"

And the fight was on. The victim of the fray usually emerged much the worse for wear unless he was rescued by the marshal or his deputies. Unfortunately, the man attacked was seldom guilty of pro-German tendencies.<sup>3</sup>

Many Dubuque residents took advantage of the free day to harass suspected pro-Germans. A mob of Dubuque residents painted Henry Sussman's bakery black

and yellow, later breaking his store's front windows and setting fire to his bakery wagon. The article stated Sussman had allegedly made pro-German remarks in the past, and when a group of celebrators tacked a small American flag on his door, Sussman tore it down and stepped on it. Police officers kept the mob from going inside, but after the crowd dispersed and police left the scene, a group of men returned--this time carrying cans of paint. The article speculated: "...just what will be done with the offender [Sussman] is not known, but it is possible that some of the rumors about him will be investigated." No mention was made of charges being brought against the vandals.<sup>4</sup>

Sussman was not the only victim of such abuse. A large crowd also gathered at the home and business of Henry W. Kruse. Along with painting black stripes on his store's windows, the crowd painted the words "Pro-German" on his door. Before leaving, a few of the men smashed some of the painted windows. Kruse later said he never made any disloyal remarks, and he could see no basis for the assault. He added that he always purchased his share of Liberty bonds and War Stamps, and that the crowd must have been misinformed and "allowed their patriotism to get the best of them."<sup>5</sup>

In summing up the toll of its largest celebration, the Herald announced that Dubuque had sustained two deaths, a half dozen automobile accidents, two fires and some property damage that was the result of "isolated cases of rowdyism."<sup>6</sup> One of the deaths occurred when a band member fell down a flight of stairs after playing in a victory parade, and the other involved a man that was killed when his automobile "turned turtle."<sup>7</sup>

In Davenport, the celebration was equally as big, but cases of abuse of alleged pro-Germans or German-Americans were not reported. The Democrat reported "not a

drunk was seen on the streets," most likely because much of the city's "booze" had been finished off during a premature victory celebration that took place one week earlier. But another article in that same edition said fourteen drunk celebrators were taken into custody and placed in county jails, where they would await a trial. One of the men arrested was a soldier, and he reportedly "wept bitterly" because he didn't get a chance to go to war.<sup>8</sup> The Democrat praised the city's conduct in an editorial, stating that residents struck "just the right balance of spontaneity and good management." The editorial said there were no accidents despite the intense crowding of the streets with people and automobiles.<sup>9</sup>

Burlington also celebrated the Armistice in a grand fashion, and its mayor, James A. Bell, announced plans to proclaim November 11th a city holiday. Bell said the proposed day would be observed as "Liberty Day" in Burlington to commemorate "the end of the greatest of all wars." The article said this action would put Burlington in line with other cities that have created a holiday to commemorate "the bowing of the Hun," and it was speculated that this would be the only holiday to be recognized by every nation in the world.<sup>10</sup>

An editorial in the Hawk-Eye said that all the world should take note of America's celebrations because they would serve as a "warning to others not to disturb our peace, not to provoke us beyond endurance." The opinion piece also said that "the world may now hope to rest in peace of mind, freed from its fears of military ambition and thirst and conquest." Another editorial proudly proclaimed: "Our participation in the world's greatest war was not for conquest or material advantage over other peoples, but purely for the national defense and "to make the world safe for democracy." Our noble purpose has been achieved...."<sup>11</sup>

But although the mood on November 11th was generally one of happiness and

rejoicing, not everyone was prepared to "forgive and forget" the actions committed by Germany. All three Iowa papers in this study eventually stated in strong terms that Germany would have to pay for its uncivilized actions throughout the war, and any notion of lightening the terms of the Armistice agreement was met with harsh words.

The Davenport Democrat stated that the Kaiser and his "creatures, who made war on women and children," should be brought before a court of justice to answer for their crimes.<sup>12</sup> The next day, the paper said November 11, 1918 would go down in history as "the day when the evil powers of the world yielded finally to the forces of righteousness, and the pall of war was lifted from a world which had cause for rejoicing such as those now living had never seen." German militarism was blamed for pushing the world into an era of destruction, but now that the war was over, a new era of construction would take its place.<sup>13</sup>

But the Democrat's tone became more forceful the next day when it said Germany owed the world reparation for its war crimes, and it should be punished. It said Germany's new government would try to make people forget that its country was the same one that "assaulted the world, that poisoned and gassed and drown women and children and the old and the feeble...."<sup>14</sup>

The Telegraph Herald also started out with a moderate approach toward Germany's reconstruction. It reminded readers in a rare front page editorial that the war was fought against the autocratic power that controlled Germany and not against the German people. Now that the conflict was coming to a close, the Herald stated a settlement could be negotiated and Americans could lend a hand toward Germany's rehabilitation. "We can forgive, if some cannot forget," the Herald said. "We can be just and avoid revengefulness. Victors can afford to be magnanimous."<sup>15</sup>

But a definite change of tone occurred two days later when the Herald used unusually strong words to state that Germany must pay for all the atrocities it committed during the war. The paper said of Germany:

She must pay for every ship torpedoed, for every cargo sunk unlawfully, for every house blown up by a Zeppelin or airplane bomb, for every building shattered for her "stafe" guns, for every town burned, for every church and cathedral destroyed, for every farm house razed, for every bridge smashed, for every piece of machinery wrecked, for every piano broken and picture slashed, for every book and rug and tablecloth torn and defiled, for every well polluted, for every orchard cut down.<sup>16</sup>

The editorial also said Germany must pay for the "wholesale maiming, enslaving and murdering of non combatants." It concluded by saying:

However much the Germans may pay, the innocent victims of their perfidy and cruelty will never obtain adequate compensation for their losses. They and their children will suffer unto the third and fourth generations. Let those who caused the suffering also suffer, if need be, unto the third and fourth generations.<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, the Herald's editorial on November 17 stated that American culture was "unselfish and humanitarian," and that war established the principle of tolerance and taught the value of varied cultures."<sup>18</sup>

The Hawk-Eye also expressed harsh reactions to appeals to lighten Germany's war reparations. Its strongest editorial focused on letters written to Mrs. Woodrow Wilson by women from Germany. These letters were asking for her help in seeking a modification of the terms of the Armistice.<sup>19</sup> In one article's headline, the Hawk-Eye called their pleas "whines," and in its editorial pages, the Hawk-Eye stated:

It is hard for civilized people to turn a deaf ear to an appeal in behalf of little children and women, even if these women did applaud their men while the latter were raping and murdering the women of other nationalities, but it is not necessary to give the Hun any better terms than he has been given. The allied nations will see that his women and children do not starve, providing he can curb his lust for wanton destruction sufficiently to carry out the terms of evacuation without further indulgence in his favorite passtime.

The Hawk-Eye also wrote a letter that it said was a truthful representation of

what the German women really had to say. A passage from the letter read as follows:

German women, who for years have seen their sons educated to be brutal toward all weaker creatures; German women who went wild with joy when the Lusitania murders were committed and read with glee of the rape and maiming of women in Belgium; German women who gladly learned of the brave deeds of the armies of the fatherland in murdering and torturing little children and calmly gave thanks that the victorious armed forces were able to so thoroly starve the inhabitants of Poland; now, foreseeing entire famishment and mutiny for their country, urge the American sisters (who we recently called swine and desired to treat as Edith Cavell was treated) to intercede for us as we had no idea of interceding for others so long as our armies were victorious.

The letter was signed, "Greeting you heartily now that we think we can profit by it, etc."<sup>20</sup>

Hostile opinions were also echoed in articles and editorials from the national scene. Stephane Lausanne, editor of the Paris Matin and member of the French high commission, was quoted in the Hawk-Eye as saying in a New York speech that it was ridiculous to speak of the "good German people," for these were the same people who "shouted with glee in the streets of Berlin" when the Lusitania was sunk with its cargo of "little American children." He was also quoted as saying: "There are no 'good German people' except those that are dead." The Hawk-Eye also reprinted remarks that C.W. Barron wrote in the Wall Street Journal in which he said that "criminality in the Hun was a mental state," and was the result of a long education in "kultur." He spoke of moral decay in Germany where boys of twelve were allowed to become murderers and little girls were often thieves. Barron also reported an "astonishing outbreak of sexual degeneracy" in which hotels in Berlin were set aside for "nameless vices."<sup>21</sup>

The Hawk-Eye was not the only paper to print such anti-German rhetoric in its editorial pages. The Herald featured several articles by Anson MacNaught in which he said Germany must be "taught a bitter lesson, and must be purified by much

suffering." He urged the public not to buy German goods because Americans have come to know "the makers of those goods as heartless murderers and fiends who worship only the gods of material gain and brute lust."<sup>22</sup> In another editorial, MacNaught warned Americans not to expect too much from Germany's new government. He said :

For more than forty years the German people have been schooled in the ways of barbarism. Their moral sense has been dulled from the cradle. The autocratic government did everything possible to make the Germans a nation of liars, cut throats and thugs.<sup>23</sup>

An article reprinted in the Democrat from Popular Mechanics warned readers not to buy German-made toys for their children for Christmas. The article stated that America had trainloads of its own toys that were made by "clean hands," and it said contact with German toys "contaminates and leaves upon the touch of babyhood invisible clots of blood." The article concluded by saying, "Let those who would invite fearsome ghosts into the home to hover round the Christmas tree buy German toys."<sup>24</sup>

There was also some evidence indicating that articles were still being sent from Britain that showed the extent of "Hun cruelty." The November 15 issue of the Herald published a story from the London Morning Post that described how British soldiers, upon entering a town recently occupied by German soldiers, discovered a kitten hanging from a door with nails in its paws. As a British soldier sought to help the suffering kitten, an explosive was set off when he removed the nails. His "mutilated and dismembered body was flung across the street," and the article said the "retreating Hun had laid his trap" by calculating that "such an appeal to British humanity would be irresistible; and he was right."<sup>25</sup>

Along with these stories of German cruelty came more stories of spies operating in this country. The Democrat reported a classic story that involved Hugo Theurich, a

former employee of the Rock Island Arsenal and an alleged German spy. While working at the arsenal, Theurich made a panorama of photographs of its interior that was a "work of art." Government agents said this was the most "damning piece of evidence" they had against Theurich. In addition, German books were found in his room; one of the books discussed methods for picking locks and making keys and wax impressions. A dagger, a blackjack and a flashlight were also found. A grand jury was expected to indict him, and the article stated that the "espionage act will more than likely be used against him."<sup>26</sup>

Spy paranoia was still operating in this country, and an editorial in the Democrat said Americans should not relax protective measures. The editorial said that until peace terms were put into effect, German propaganda would be more "insidious" than ever, and "the number of German agents in the U.S. may multiply if the fate of a spy is lessened." It said the American Protective League, which aided officials in dealing with slackers and disloyal people, should not be disbanded until the enemy has been forced to make good on every promise. The League "made the path of disloyalty a rough and troubled one" in Scott county.<sup>27</sup>

And evidence exists that now that the war was over, some people who formerly had pro-German feelings were expressing them in public. The Democrat warned readers not to voice these feelings because Americans haven't heard a "syllable from Germany to show that that country has had a change of heart; not a word of regret for its assault upon the liberties of the world." The paper suggested the motto: "Once an American, always an American" for all people living in this country.<sup>28</sup>

This pro-Germanism, as it was called, was apparently not a problem in Burlington. The November 15th issue of the Hawk-Eye reported that Deputy U.S. Marshal Shepard had received no reports of its existence, although in many cases

throughout the country, pro-Germans were asking for leniency in the settlement for Germany and berating England and France for their role in the war. The article said these pro-Germans were acting like the restrictions against their speech had been lifted now that the war was apparently over.<sup>29</sup>

With the signing of the Armistice, Americans could settle back and begin the "return to normalcy" that their leaders promised them. Many attempts were made to forgive and forget, and gradually the anti-German hysteria that was created shortly after the U.S. declared war faded away.<sup>30</sup> Despite a decline in the frequency of incidents of harassment and abuse after the Armistice was signed, the war left a lasting mark on many aspects of German life and culture in the United States. German-Americans had become "Americanized," and many aspects of their culture were either abandoned or intentionally dropped. In May, 1919, the Steuben Society was organized by German-Americans with the sole purpose of Americanizing whatever "Germanism" remained in America so that anti-German sentiment could never rise again.<sup>31</sup>

The war also forced the closing of German theaters, and many German lodges and singing societies were told to use English rituals and songs or suspend their activities. Hundreds of other German organizations had been dissolved during the war, and many were never resurrected. German-Americans tried to rebuild their image in the community by making a strong showing in the "Victory Loan" of 1919.<sup>32</sup>

The teaching of the German language, which had been banned by many states in public and private schools, was not reinstated until 1923, when the Supreme Court declared such state laws unconstitutional. The number of German-language newspapers in the U.S. declined to 278 by the end of the war, and only 26 of these were daily papers. The number of newspapers continued to drop to 172 in 1930. By

comparison, there were 600 German-language newspapers in the U.S. in 1904, and 78 of these were dailies.<sup>33</sup>

The causes of this anti-German hysteria were many, and it's unfair to say that a definitive list will ever be made. What we do know is that World War I gave the world its first opportunity to utilize newspapers, a mass medium, to mobilize the public to fight a war. Different countries mounted propaganda campaigns, and governments entered into the news managing field. Atrocity stories became a steady source of compelling copy for newspapers, and propaganda writers and artists helped simplify the conflict into terms that the average citizen could understand and support. Countless cases of harassment and abuse occurred under the name of patriotism, and whole nations became engulfed by a blind passion to fight for what they felt was the only just and righteous cause.

Germany had definitely lost a part of its culture and self-respect during the war, but fortunately the hysteria of wartime faded as Americans tired of war talk and tried to piece their lives back together. The United States had asserted itself as a world power, and there was no turning back. The world would never quite be the same again.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, November 11, 1918, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, November 12, 1918, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., November 13, 1918, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, November 13, 1918, p. 3.

- <sup>8</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, November 11, 1918, p. 3, 10.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>10</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, November 13, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, November 10, 1918, p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>15</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, November 12, 1918, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 6
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1918, p. 6
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., November 17, 1918, p. 16.
- <sup>19</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, November 15, 1918, p. 1
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., November 14, 1918, p. 1 and November 17, 1918, p. 18.
- <sup>22</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, November 15, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>24</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, November 10, 1918, p. 14.
- <sup>25</sup>Dubuque Telegraph Herald, November 15, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>26</sup>Davenport Democrat and Leader, November 10, p. 12.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., November 13, 1918, p. 6.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., November 17, 1918, p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup>Burlington Hawk-Eye, April 15, 1918, p. 6
- <sup>30</sup>Carl Wittke, German-Americans and the World War (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Furer, ed., The Germans in America 1607-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1973), p. 73.

<sup>32</sup>Wittke, German-Americans and the World War, p. 208.

<sup>33</sup>Furer, The Germans in America 1607-1970, p. 74-75, 66.

## CHAPTER IX. CONCLUSION

The three eastern Iowa newspapers examined in this study maintained moderate editorial views during the war. The newspapers remained neutral, if not a little pro-German, in their editorials, and many opinion pieces stressed nothing but the most positive aspects of the German race and culture between 1914 and America's declaration of war in April 1917. Throughout the neutrality period, the pages of the Dubuque Telegraph Herald, the Burlington Hawk-Eye and the Davenport Democrat and Leader acted as a forum for German-Americans to express their views of the war. All three newspapers wrote editorials that were against U.S. involvement in the war, but a marked change of tone occurred after congress officially declared war with Germany. Each paper decided that the only sensible course of action was to back the president and proclaim loyalty to the Stars and Stripes.

The Burlington Hawk-Eye was the most outspoken of the three papers, often using strong language to condemn the sinking of the Lusitania, the anti-German mob violence in England and the lynching of Robert Prager. The Hawk-Eye was also skeptical about President Wilson's armed neutrality bill and the authenticity of the Zimmermann telegram. The paper was not afraid to speak strongly about controversial issues, and it seemed to take each event of the war and judge it separately and objectively according to the available information.

The Dubuque Telegraph Herald adopted a middle-of-the-road editorial stand during this time period. One trend that did develop concerned an anti-British tone that surfaced during the armed neutrality debate. The Herald strongly denounced Britain's role as the number one violator of America's rights at sea. This anti-British feeling could be explained not only by Dubuque's sizable German-American

population, but also by its large number of Irish Catholics who themselves had reasons to oppose and even hate Great Britain.

On the other hand, the Davenport Democrat was the least outspoken of the three papers, often choosing to refrain from using harsh words about Germany, its people or the behavior of its soldiers. For most of the war period, the paper also chose not to reprint portions of editorials from eastern newspapers that contained inflammatory war rhetoric. Perhaps this was so that it would not offend its German audience--the largest in the state of Iowa.

Incidents of physical harassment and abuse of German-Americans were reported in all three papers, and Germans were referred to as "Huns" throughout America's involvement in the war. Despite this highly emotional atmosphere, the editorial writers from the Davenport Democrat and Leader, the Dubuque Telegraph Herald and the Burlington Hawk-Eye tried to maintain a calm and rational voice in their communities.

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