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Ethnic Politicians and American Nationalism  
during the First World War: Four German-born  
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives

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W.P.A.

**Ethnic Politicians and American Nationalism during the  
First World War :  
Four German-born Members of the U.S. House of Representatives**

Willi Paul Adams

'He that cometh to God must believe, first, that He is; secondly, that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' ... (Hebrew XI:6)... So it is with the young man who bundles up his few belongings, turns his back to the Old World and faces the New. His faith must be unbounded in the Nation he seeks.

--Charles Lieb in the U.S. House  
of Representatives, July 28, 1916

### I. "Faith in the Nation"

In his sociological analysis of ethnic and national loyalties Arthur Stinchcombe has pointed out the fundamentally utilitarian element in nationalism and the commitment to a certain ethnic identity. He suggested that researchers ask "under what conditions the [nationally or ethnically defined] culture that a person learns will actually solve his or her life problems." Because "if an ethnic group or nation teaches a person techniques for making a living, defending his or her rights, marrying and raising children, and can make those techniques work for him or her, then there will be a direct tie between a person's identity and the group. This direct tie is where the energy of ethnic and national loyalty comes from. ... A person's loyalty to a group depends on the degree to which the person can control his or her own fate through action in the group. ... The more an individual's life problems have their solutions within an ethnic or national group, by use of group institutions, the greater the individual level of loyalty. ... The more solid an individual's enfranchisement in the group, that is, the greater the individual's rights and the less exploitation there is of that individual, the greater his or her loyalty."<sup>1</sup> More consciously than the sedentary part of the population, the millions of German as well as other immigrants in the United States did ask themselves, long before as well as during the First World

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Politics", *Handbook of Political Science*, eds. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Mass., 1975), vol.3, pp.602, 605, 606. See also Martin Grodzins, *The Loyal and the Disloyal: Social Boundaries of Patriotism and Treason* (Chicago, 1956).

War, which institutions were most helpful in solving their elementary "life problems".

The answer for most of them and their children was, as contemporary journalists and politicians could very well have guessed, not the Turnverein, Gesangsverein or the German-American Alliance with its culturally separatist politics, not to mention the idea of a German-American political party nobody seriously suggested. And yet, 1916 saw the most emotional and bitter "antihyphen" election campaign in post-Civil War politics. On the ethnic side, the National German-American Alliance with all the support it received from substantial parts of the German-language press failed to punish President Wilson for implicitly aiding Britain and France; it was unable to deliver a solid German vote to the less pro-British Republican candidate Hughes. Neither contemporary commentators nor historians with sophisticated election analyses have been able to demonstrate that a single vote in the electoral college was determined by a region's ethnically defined German vote. Even in the extreme situation of war threatening with their country of origin "the Germans had not voted solidly as a bloc, even though they had generally displayed a moderate preference for the Republican Hughes and favored Wilson less than they had in 1912."<sup>2</sup>

On the side of the national mainstream, President Wilson exaggerated for his own purposes when in the State of the Union message to Congress on December 7, 1915, he tried to whip up public support for a defense build-up by obliquely warning against "the gravest threats against our national peace and safety" emanating from citizens, "born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America, who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life." Wilson admitted that "their number is not great as compared with the whole number of those sturdy hosts by which our nation has been enriched in recent generations out of virile foreign stocks", but he insisted that "such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out."<sup>3</sup> The function of the speech was characterized in

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2 Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois, 1974), 194. Further election analyses in Paul Kleppner, *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893-1928* (New York, 1987). In greater detail than anyone else, Kleppner has tested the hypothesis of the predominance of ethnocultural or ethnoreligious factors in party choice. See also Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980* (New York, 1982); Richard Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870-1940", *Journal of American History* 74 (1988), 1257-1286.

3 Woodrow Wilson, "An Annual Message on the State of the Union", December 7, 1915, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed., Arthur Link (Princeton, 1980), vol.35, pp.306-307.

private by Colonel House as opening the President's "campaign", and its "note" as "a sort of 'Amerika ueber Alles' - an attempt to get a consciously united nation taking its own line without any dictation or interference from outside."<sup>4</sup> Congress, realistically, refused to be frightened into anything resembling a new edition of the alien and sedition laws. But when the phase of American formal neutrality ended on February 3, 1917, with the severance of diplomatic relations with the emperor's government, German-Americans as a group and without consideration of their electoral behavior experienced serious cultural repression.<sup>5</sup> Without waiting for an act of the legislature, the President in April 1917 established the Committee on Public Information, the first fullfledged federal propaganda machinery, which soon focussed its attention on the German Americans and "contributed immeasurably to the climate of intolerance."<sup>6</sup> The Creel Committee, as the agency came to be known after its chairman, in its war of words portrayed Germany "as the very antithesis of the American tradition" and presented German authoritarianism and militarism as a menace of American democracy.<sup>7</sup> The story of wartime hysteria on all sides, of the brutality of German submarine warfare, of low-key British and loud German and German-American partisan journalism, of diplomats' duplicity and Wilson's mediation efforts, need not be retold here.<sup>8</sup>

The point argued here is that serious consideration of the socio-economic interests and long-term political behavior of the vast body of voters of "German stock", to use the vague contemporary term, and of elected officials associated with them could have told the dispassionate observer to discount the claims of so-called professional German Americans as well as

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<sup>4</sup> *Wilson Papers*, vol.35, p.311, n.1.

<sup>5</sup> Luebke, *Bonds*, 1974), especially chapters 6-8. Luebke's is the most balanced full account we have of this emotional subject. Prominent examples of irresponsible rhetoric were Theodore Roosevelt, "The Hun within Our Gates" (1917) and William T. Hornaday, "Awake! America" (1918), both excerpted in David Brion Davis, ed., *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present* (Ithaca, New York, 1971), 214-218.

<sup>6</sup> Luebke, *Bonds*, 213.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1980), 61.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Luebke, *Bonds*, see Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War* (Columbus, Ohio, 1936); Clifton J. Child, *The German-Americans in Politics, 1914-1917* (Madison, 1939); Louis L. Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1964), chaps. 3-4. Reinhard R. Doerries, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908-1917* (Chapel Hill, 1989).

the dire warnings of partisan patriotic propagandists like the former president Roosevelt and his opponent presently in the White House. The following case studies deal with a special sample of such elected officials: the four German-born members of the U.S. House of Representatives who served during the war.

## II. German-born Congressmen

Being a foreign-born member of the House of Representatives was nothing very special. Between 1789 and 1945 there were 387 of them, constituting 4.9% of the total number of 7 866 representatives. Two thirds of them (69%) came from English-speaking countries.<sup>9</sup> The first German-born representative came to Washington from New Orleans during and partly because of the turmoil of the Civil War, and forty more followed him before 1914.<sup>10</sup> Only from the 1876 election on were several German-born representatives sent to Washington at the same time -- a fact well noted in the German-American press of November 1876. The maximum of seven German-born congressmen serving together was reached in 1883-85; the last year in which five German-born representatives served was 1903. Over these five decades they were elected in 17 states, representing almost equally rural and urban districts spread across the continent from Staten Island to San Francisco. They were almost evenly split between the two major parties; among those whose religious affiliation is documented, twice as many were Protestants than Catholics; five were Jewish. The careers of these congressmen spanned the full range of American political institutions, from city council and school board to state legislature to the respective national party councils. Almost all congressmen had occupied several public offices in their community or state before they were sent to Washington.<sup>11</sup>

By no means all of them were "ethnic leaders" when we define ethnic leadership somewhat strictly as including (1) the ethnicity of the constituency, i.e. a considerable number of German-borns in the electoral district; (2) involvement of German-American issues in their political careers; (3)

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<sup>9</sup> Calculated from the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (Washington, D.C., 1971) by William Kniep, my research assistant at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Not counted are the 15 representatives who were born on French, Spanish, Mexican and Hawaiian territory that became part of the United States.

<sup>10</sup> The Pennsylvania-German congressmen do not seem to have been accepted as representative of Germans outside Lancaster county. The history of the Lancaster seat is neatly documented in Edwin S. Eshleman and Robert S. Walker, *Congress: The Pennsylvania Dutch Representatives, 1774-1974* (Lancaster, Pa., 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Data from a monograph in preparation on German-American Congressmen.

concern with things German or German-American, historical or current, in their personal intellectual lives; (4) use of the German language in in family life and socializing with German speakers.<sup>12</sup> But the fact of these particular congressmen's election from 1876 on was repeatedly noted with pride in the German-American press. Albert Faust in his monument to filiopiety as well as of diligent scholarship, originally published in 1909, listed two pages of names of congressmen "born in Germany", as distinct from "the vast number of congressmen of German descent". Faust's motivation is clear from the context in which he presented this information: on almost eighty pages he sketched German political activists from Pastorius to the founders of the National German-American Alliance in 1899 in order to refute the generally held opinion that the "influence" of the Germans in American politics "has not been commensurate with their numbers." In the account that followed, no "German" state supreme court justice, governor or lieutenant governor went unmentioned.<sup>13</sup> By doing so, Faust as participant observer registered the attention his own and the previous generation of German Americans paid to officeholding as an indicator of the group's standing in multi-ethnic American society.

Faust's chronicling of German "contributions" to American life served an obvious purpose in 1909, when sensitive observers felt the crumbling of the foundations of proud "German-America". But why the fascination with "German-born" congressmen and, by way of comparison, with "born Irishmen, Scotsmen and Englishmen among the delegates in Washington"?<sup>14</sup> Clearly, a question was involved that in the minds of contemporaries went beyond mere ethnic interestgroup representation in Washington, for which the place of birth of its representative was, of course, irrelevant. By an act of symbolic politics, these men because of their place

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<sup>12</sup> W.P. Adams, "Ethnic Leadership and the German-Americans", *America and the Germans*, eds. Trommler and McVeigh, I, 148-159. These are stricter criteria than those applied by John Higham ed., *Ethnic Leadership in America* (Baltimore, 1978); the chapter herein on the Germans by Frederick C. Luebke focusses on the period 1915-1940. Luebke's "German Immigrants and American Politics: Problems of Leadership, Parties, and Issues", *Germans in AMERICA: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Randall Miller (Philadelphia: German Society of Pennsylvania, 1984), 57-74, systematically compares the political careers of German-born senators Carl Schurz and Robert Wagner of New York. Victor R. Greene's chapter on the Germans in his *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore, 1987) presents a gallery of memorable founding figures in religious life, publishing, and state politics.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States, with Special Reference to Its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence* (New York, 1927; 1st ed. 1909), II, 122-200, quotation p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Hermann J. Ruetenik, *Berühmte deutsche Vorkämpfer für Fortschritt, Freiheit und Friede in Nord-Amerika* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1888), 493.



of birth (and regardless of their political activities and personal intentions) could be defined as outstanding members of the ethnic group and their "success" could be used to demonstrate for the benefit of the group's members as well as for the American public at large the group's willingness and capability to participate. An investigation of the experience of these German-born congressmen can, therefore, open insights into two central and complementary issues of American 19th and early 20th-century social and political history: into how immigrants as individuals and as groups entered the political process, and how the political system coped with the immigrants. Hence appropriate case studies can contribute to answering the question central to much of American political history: How did ethnicity, democracy and nationality interact?

For an answer to this question German case studies are of particular importance because the Germans were the first non-English speaking immigrants who by their very numbers forced Anglo-American opinion leaders, motivated by growing pride in American democracy and American nationalism, to come to terms with an equally growing alien electorate that claimed full citizenship and cheerfully insisted on merely putting into practice the American ideals of 1776. In the end, the Germans achieved two things: They contributed much to forcing American society to accept as a consequence of its multi-ethnic composition the legitimacy and the Americanness of the very category of a permanent ethnic group.<sup>15</sup> Once in Washington, these congressmen found themselves in the mainstream of American politics trying to balance a parallelogram of four unequal forces: the strong push of local community and regional economic interests, intermittent calls for or accusations of ethnic group loyalty, the pressures of intraparty politics, the pulls of congressional compromising, and the imperatives of national government, including international trade and diplomacy.

### III. The Wartime Congressmen

The roles and attitudes of the four German-born members of the U.S. House of Representatives during the First World War could hardly

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<sup>15</sup> This idea is developed by Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity", *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History* eds. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia, 1985), I, 131-147. The tensions between consequences of immigration and American nationalism I have sketched in "Amerikanischer Nationalismus, ethnische Vielfalt und die Deutschamerikaner", *Geschichte zwischen Freiheit und Ordnung: Festschrift für Gerald Stourzh*, eds. Emil Brix et al. (Graz, 1990).

have been more different. Even this sample of four documents once more the proverbial heterogeneity of the German "element" that since 1683 had never succeeded in becoming one element, not even for the sake of greater political influence.

By 1914, the longest-serving German-born congressman was **Richard Bartholdt**, Republican publisher of a German-language daily in St. Louis, Missouri, who from 1893 to 1915 represented the heavily German district of the City and County of St. Louis. Since the death in 1906 of German-American figurehead Carl Schurz, Bartholdt acted as the self-appointed spokesman of organized "Germans" and their National Alliance. Unlike Schurz's unequivocal acceptance of Anglo-American fundamentals, Bartholdt went so far as to reject even a basic knowledge of English as a prerequisite for citizenship, because "we have a powerful German press which acts as an interpreting medium, acquainting the German immigrants with the laws and institutions of this country."<sup>16</sup> Bartholdt considered symbolic ethnic politics so vital that with great effort he succeeded in 1910 in getting Congress to approve placing a statue of general von Steuben ("the drill master of Washington's army") on Lafayette Square across from the White House. The American people, he piously proclaimed at the unveiling ceremony before President Taft, "nobly disregards national distinctions, and, by placing all on a common high pedestal of fame, lives up to the idealism of a common brotherhood under the flag of a free government."<sup>17</sup>

In 1914, Bartholdt's and the German-American National Alliance's dream-world of a permanently bicultural "German America" evaporated before the realities of antagonistic, exclusive nationalisms. In the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Bartholdt was isolated when on August 28, 1914, he demanded in the name of genuine neutrality that the Federal Government stop American merchants from selling arms to Britain. On December 7, 1914 he and Iowa's Democratic representative Henry Vollmer (the son of Catholic German immigrants) unsuccessfully introduced an arms embargo bill that would have crippled the British war effort.<sup>18</sup> The New

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<sup>16</sup> United States Congress. *Immigration Investigation: Hearing before the House Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization and the Senate Committee on Immigration*. 51st Congress, 1st Session (Washington D.C., 1890), p. 779.

<sup>17</sup> "Address of Hon. Richard Bartholdt", p.28 [December 7, 1910], brochure in the University of Missouri Library, State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Francis M. Wilson Papers.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp.14393 (August 28, 1914); 3rd Session, p.12 (Dec.7, 1914). See also Clifton J. Child, "German-American

York *Sun* thereupon attacked the two and their Democratic colleague Charles Otto Lobeck (born in Illinois and now representing Omaha, Nebraska) as "Congressmen of German descent" whose action had been "inspired" by the Kaiser's ambassador in Washington. The *Sun* chose to interview a New York lawyer specializing in international law and the conflict of laws who claimed that the 1913 German citizenship law allowed German emigrants to remain the Kaiser's subjects despite an oath of sole allegiance to the United States. The lawyer, Maurice Leon, himself a naturalized immigrant, went on to impute a "dual personality" and "dual nationality" of the German-Americans represented by "Herr Bartholdt, Herr Lobeck and Herr Vollmer." The campaigning newspaper succeeded in goading the Congressmen to defend themselves on the floor of the House the next day. Bartholdt's patriotic bathos matched the newspaper's slander. He was "for American against England, for America against Germany, for America against the world. ... If the Star Spangled Banner is not my flag, then I have no flag." An arms embargo would stop the war and reopen European markets to American cotton. Vollmer felt the debate had reached the level on which place of birth became an argument and declared, "I was born in this country in the good old State of Iowa." <sup>19</sup>

In his last speech in the House of Representatives Bartholdt once more pleaded the German immigrant's loyalty to the United States that would, however, have to stop short of "eradicating his regard for his native land." He pointed to mass meetings of "Germans" in favor of an arms embargo, several of which he himself had addressed, and explained "the prevailing excitement" among "Germans of this country" as a combination of "sympathy for Germany" and, even more so, of "injured pride and an outraged sense of injustice ... because of the outrageous prevarications of truth and the cruel misrepresentations of Germany, her people, and institutions contained in the manufactured news from England and reprinted in the American newspapers."<sup>20</sup> Bartholdt liked to speak of "the Germans" as the second largest ethnic group ("Volksguppe") outnumbered only by "the English"; he never asked how many of them actually shared the feelings voiced at the rallies he attended in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. Bitter

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Attempts to Prevent the Exportation of Munitions of War, 1914-1915", *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25 (1938), 351-368.

<sup>19</sup> The articles from the New York *Sun* and excerpts from the speeches are collected in the pamphlet *America and the War: Letters and Comments Written for Publication in the Press*, privately printed by the New York lawyer Maurice Leon (n.p., 1916), quotations from pages 2-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 3rd Session, pp. 4124-25.

with disappointment Bartholdt resigned to the realities of wartime emotions he himself had helped arouse with shrill pro-German speeches and gave up the dream of crowning his career with a seat in the U.S. Senate. "The war caused so sharp a division among our people," Bartholdt explained in his autobiography, "that, as I saw it, a man of German blood would have had about as much chance as a grasshopper in a coop of hungry turkeys. At least for the Senate."<sup>21</sup> But then, realistic self-assessment does not seem to have been Bartholdt's strength. Even as sympathetic a commentator as Albert Faust implicitly dismissed Bartholdt's qualities of leadership when in 1927 he looked back with nostalgia to the days of a Carl Schurz and added: "At no time did the German element in this country feel more painfully the want of political leadership than in the period of the great war beginning with 1914. There was a lack of sufficient representation in both houses of Congress, the newspapers of the country were with the exception of the German-language press entirely in the hands of the Allies' friends. To be sure there were men and women of true courage, not lacking in ability, whose voices rang aloud, but they were always in the minority and were readily shouted down. There was no national figure to advocate their cause, they had no spokesman, no great leader."<sup>22</sup>

The cause of Bartholdt's failure led his fellow Republican **Julius Kahn** to the greatest achievements in his congressional career. The former professional actor and lawyer represented the eastern half of San Francisco from 1899 to 1903 and 1905 to 1924. He called himself a "regular Republican" in opposition to Theodore Roosevelt's party-bolting Progressive Republicans. He accepted trusts as a sensible reaction to cutthroat competition and as an inevitable development in a free market society; but protective import tariffs he defended as in the American interest.<sup>23</sup>

As to his ethnic identity, Kahn wanted to be American and nothing else. Yet because of his foreign birth and Jewish faith he could not escape headlines such as "Kahn, Born in Germany, Tells Why He Is Out-and-Out American With No Hyphen"<sup>24</sup> And: "Zionism Found Unpatriotic By Con-

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<sup>21</sup> Bartholdt, *From Steerage to Congress*, 372.

<sup>22</sup> Faust, *German Element* (1927), vol.2, p.668-669.

<sup>23</sup> Speech in 1902, *Congressional Record*, 62nd Congress, 1st Session, pp.2032-40.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, August 12, 1917, Section VI, p.3.

gressman Julius Kahn"<sup>25</sup> After his first election in 1898 he was hailed as "the first Hebrew elected from the west of the Rocky Mountains". He became a member of the congregation of Emanu El of San Francisco and helped found the Jewish Education Society in California. In 1918, with the peace negotiations in sight, Kahn became concerned that Zionist activists preparing to influence President Wilson might do more harm than good, and in a letter on Committee on Military Affairs stationary in October 1918, he encouraged an initiative of rabbis who were as skeptical as he was of the wisdom and eventual success of "the Zion movement", complete with historical references to Zionism in Russia and Roumania, "which countries claimed that the Jew was not a citizen of their respective states but that he simply was an alien sojourning within the confines of those countries." "There must be no language open to similar doubtful construction inserted in the proposed treaty of peace at the end of this war.", Kahn warned.<sup>26</sup> Kahn told an interviewer for the *New York Times* in 1919 that the problem with Zionism was that "non-Jews will begin to look upon American Jews as having a lurking desire always to return to the so-called Jewish homeland - that the Jews will be accused by the non-Jews of being merely a sojourner in the United States." Kahn then headed the American delegation of prominent "Jewish Americans" (that was Kahn's preferred term) on their way to the Paris Peace Conference in March 1919. The group was to propose together with English and French Jews a guarantee in the peace treaties "of liberty for the Jews in every nation in whose midst Jews have formerly been denied these rights, and in every new country that will be constituted by the peace treaty."<sup>27</sup>

The same strong American nationalism and belief in the country's capacity to assimilate more European (not "Oriental"<sup>28</sup>) immigrants led Kahn in 1917 to vote against the literacy test that was passed (with the votes of all other California representatives) over Wilson's veto. European illite-

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<sup>25</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, February ? (illegible), 1919, clipping in American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College.

<sup>26</sup> Julius Kahn to Rabbi Dr. David Philipson of Cincinnati, October 1, 1918. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College.

<sup>27</sup> "Leading Jews Here Ask World Liberty", *New York Times*, March 6, 1919, p.4. See also "Most Jews Oppose Zionism, Says Kahn", *New York Times*, March 9, 1919, p.9; and Kahn's article "Why Most American Jews Do Not Favor Zionism", *The New York Times Magazine*, February 16, 1919, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Kahn repeatedly defended Chinese and Japanese exclusion, including segregated public schools in San Francisco, with the usual racist observations, see Congressional Record, 57th Congress, 1st Session, p. 3689; 59th Congress, 2nd Session, pp.3229-31; 63rd Congress, 3rd Session, pp.3229-30.

rates, Kahn had argued for years, should be welcome because they had to work with their muscles, whereas "the American native born ordinarily does not do the hard work of laying railroad ties and rails, of digging trenches, of balancing road beds."<sup>29</sup>

During the war, Kahn's patriotic ardor, anti-hyphenism and preparedness-campaign rivalled that of Theodore Roosevelt. He served on the House Military Affairs Committee from 1905 to 1923, chairing it since 1919. More actively than anyone else, Kahn helped pass the National Defense Act of 1916; realistically, he next advocated conscription against bitter opposition even in president Wilson's own party, and in 1917 he authored the Selective Service Act. "This is no time to listen to the vaporings of pusillanimous pacifists or disloyal pro-Germans", Kahn declared uncompromisingly in November 1917.

But what probably secured his reelections until his death in office was Kahn's "exceptional ability to secure legislation favorable to San Francisco and the state of California", as a biographical sketch after his death put it, especially mentioning "large appropriations for development projects and laws for the protection of fruit and other agricultural products from the ravages of insect pests", "preventing the closing of the San Francisco mint", and leading the campaign to bring the Panama-Pacific International Exposition celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 to San Francisco in 1915.<sup>30</sup>

Was there anything German about the adult Kahn (leaving aside the question of how "German" his Jewishness was)? Whether he really was a "master" of the German language, as an interviewer for the *New York Times* said in 1917, is doubtful; he left Baden with his parents when he was only five years old, and he attended no German schools. In any case, by August 1917 he was sufficiently secure of his American identity to receive that interviewer in his Washington office with "a big American flag streaming in the breeze of the electric fan, a fine picture of a battery of United States artillery at firing practice in California, two big patriotic recruiting posters of the War Department on the wall, and a little marble bust of Goethe on the desk." Maybe we should accept the journalist's instant interpretation: "The fact that Goethe was still there in these war days in this room of an American statesman who was born in Germany, symbolized a patriotism that had

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<sup>29</sup> *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp.2671-72.

<sup>30</sup> P.O. Ray, "Kahn, Julius", *Dictionary of American Biography*, 10 (1933),250-251.

no pettiness about it." Kahn himself, out of the traditional American voluntarist attitude toward nationality saw no need for psychological analysis to explain his feelings: "There is nothing psychologically difficult about that. You ask about the psychology of a man born in Germany who is doing what he can to defeat Germany in this war. I do not think the place of birth is such an important factor in a man's life as many credit it with being. Our love of a land, and therefore our allegiance to it, seems to me to be more intelligently determined by whether or no we find anything in it worthy of our support and sacrifice."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, Kahn had experienced American society as sufficiently open to European immigrants and sufficiently secular, with a clear legal separation of the spheres of government and religion, to allow for full political as well as economic integration within less than a lifetime -- provided the national creed, political institutions and the English language were accepted by the newcomer.

**Charles Lieb**, lumber businessman and contractor, represented the thriving Ohio river town of Evansville, Indiana, from 1913 to 1917. He was the only Democrat of the four German-born Congressmen, and a Lutheran. In 1916 he actively supported Wilson's "he kept us out of war" campaign. Nationalism, preparedness, military strategy, congressional porkbarrel and local boosterism neatly coincided when Lieb, in March 1916, argued in favor of establishing a Government armor-plate factory at a safe distance from the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts as well as from the Mexican and Canadian borders -- the ideal location being Evansville.<sup>32</sup>

In July 1916, Lieb supported Wilson in a well documented as well as emotional speech in the House. A million copies of the German translation were put at the disposal of the Democratic National Committee for nationwide distribution causing Republican counter-attacks for seeking "the hyphen vote" and appealing to German-speaking Americans, "identifying them as Germans first and not as Americans."

The opening sentences of Lieb's speech provided the archetypical patriotic immigrant biography: "Mr. Speaker, I was born in Germany. At the age of 14 years I came to the United States in response to a youthful conviction that freedom and success could be realized here as in no other land. I stood in the presence of God and swore allegiance to the land of my adoption. I did so without the least misgivings as to the wisdom of my decision

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31 Anonymous, "Kahn, Born in Germany, Tells Why He Is Out-and-Out American With No Hyphen", *New York Times*, August 12, 1917, section VI, p.3.

32 Congressional Record, 64th Congress, 1st Session (March 9, 1916), p.3872.

to give up all national ties with the country of my birth, thereby unalterably casting my lot with the greatest Nation in the world, the United States [Applause]." Referring to a "deluge" of letters and telegrams from his constituents requesting the United States stay out of the war, he praised the President's "patience and levelheadedness", "sagacity and courage" in handling the crisis, and especially his "impartiality" in condemning British as well as German violations of international law. " Wilson's course was the middle road.", he said, " We have all much to be thankful for that as true Americans and with allegiance to one flag, and one flag only." Lieb quoted from a constituent's letter he claimed to be representative of German-Americans in his district: "I am of German descent myself, but I am American first. Ninety-nine out of one hundred of your constituents who have German blood in their veins feel, I am sure, as I do. Of course we all want peace, but loyal Americans have not forgotten the heroism of the patriots at Yorktown, Valley Forge, and Bunker Hill."<sup>33</sup>

In opposition to Bartholdt's campaign in 1915 for a total arms embargo, Lieb also quoted Kuno Francke, the director of Harvard's Germanic Museum, telling Bartholdt: "The establishment of such an embargo would inevitably bring our Government into conflict with England and might drive us into war with England. As a man of German blood I might welcome the help which would accrue to Germany by such a conflict between the United States and England. But as an American citizen I can not possibly support a policy which would bring the terrors of war to our own country."

Lieb obviously shared Francke's rejection of Bartholdt's and the German-American Alliance's ethnic political separatism. Nothing, Francke had told Bartholdt in January 1915, "is more prejudicial to our position as American citizens than the clamor for recognition which is so often heard at German mass meetings. Nothing would be more fatal to our standing in the community than the insistence on racial contrasts and demands. We have every opportunity in this country to make felt what is best in German character and life. Let us continue to do so; let us continue to have prominent part in all endeavors for political, civic, and industrial progress; let us stand for the German ideals of honesty, loyalty, truthfulness, devotion to work; let us cultivate our language, our literature, and our art; let us fearlessly defend

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<sup>33</sup> Lieb's speech of July 18, 1916 in the Congressional Record is headed "Neutrality of the United States". 64th Congress, 1st Session, p.11253-59. The constituent's letter, dated Evansville, April 24, 1916, also describes grassroots political activism: "A few ultra partisans are passing postal cards out of the kind inclosed. They are using street cars, street corners, and every public place possible to get them into the hands of everybody in the hope that somebody will send them to you." p. 11255.



the cause of our mother country against prejudices and aspersions, but let us refrain from political organizations which would set Germans in this country apart as a class by themselves."<sup>34</sup>

Lieb in his personal conclusion articulated a clear insight into the relationship between immigrant psychology and American nationalism. In unexpectedly forceful religious language he described as analogous a Christian's fundamental act of faith in his striving for salvation and an immigrant's tenacious belief in his adopted nation as part of his struggle for worldly success: "When I set foot on American soil 50 years ago, I had no worldly possessions with which to start my life battle. I had only a willing heart, a firm determination, and a full appreciation of the possibilities that lay open in the land where freedom and opportunity stand forth as in no other land. I had left behind me in Germany my only kin. I had left behind the home in which my father and mother had given me my childhood instructions in honesty and fair dealing with mankind. 'He that cometh to God must believe, first, that He is; secondly, that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' ... (Hebrew XI:6)... So it is with the young man who bundles up his few belongings, turns his back to the Old World and faces the New. His faith must be unbounded in the Nation he seeks; he must believe that the Republic is reponsible as well as responsive to him who earnestly strives to the fulfillment of the highest aims of citizenship."<sup>35</sup>

Exactly why in addition to reasons of health the 63 year old had decided in 1915 not to run for reelection in 1916 is not clear from the record.<sup>36</sup>

**Edward Voigt**, successful attorney, was elected in 1916 as a progressive LaFollette Republican in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan and in five adjoining counties; he was reelected for four additional consecutive terms. Being "German" in heavily German eastern Wisconsin was being mainstream, did not mean representing a struggling ethnic minority. Voigt played down the prospects of war and draft in 1916; his votes against the prohibition amendment and legislation were probably motivated as much by a lawyer's skeptical, practical common sense as by his constituency's preference ( as was presumably also the case with Julius Kahn, who,

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<sup>34</sup> Kuno Francke to Richard Bartholdt, Cambridge, Mass., January 28, 1915, *ibid.*, pp. 11256-57.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11259.

<sup>36</sup> See also Darrel E. Bigham, *Reflections on a Heritage: The German-Americans in Southwestern Indiana* (Evansville, Indiana, 1980).

it is true, saw after the interests of California grape growers but also rightly reminded his colleagues in the House of Representatives that "prohibition ... has generally resulted in making men liars, sneaks, and hypocrites. If men want liquor, they can invariably get it." <sup>37</sup>).

Voigt also voted his lawyer's regard for freedom of speech in the ignominious case of the House of Representatives for years denying a seat to the first Socialist congressman, Austrian-born Victor L. Berger, who had been properly elected in 1918 and subsequently reelected to represent the neighboring Milwaukee district. "I voted to seat Mr. Berger because I believe that he had done nothing more than to make use of the right of free speech," Voigt wrote to one of Berger's supporters in Milwaukee in January of the election year 1920. "The greatest menace to this country today," Voigt added, "are pro-British and Wall Street controlled newspapers. The press does not control public opinion so much, but it does seem to control by fear men in public offices."<sup>38</sup> As a member of the Committee on Agriculture, Voigt in 1922 secured a pure milk law that served Wisconsin dairy farmers as well as consumers, but in 1924, 1926 and 1927 he opposed as economically unsound the McNary-Haugen farm relief bill that would have involved "pricefixing".

Traditional mainstream American regional interest legislation with results measurable in dollars and cents occupied this German-born congressman in the latter 1920s, not special regard to ethnic group identity or interests.

#### IV. Conclusions

As with most other politicians, we know little or nothing about what shaped these congressmen's political preferences and modes of behavior long before they were elected, beginning with their political socialization. They were fully aware children or young men when they arrived in the United States: Bartholdt was 17, Kahn 5, Lieb 14, and Voigt 11 years old. At those ages they can hardly have been unaware of their own and other family members' reactions to the new environment, including its language

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<sup>37</sup> Kahn in *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress, 3rd Session, p. 533.

<sup>38</sup> Edward Voigt to Robert Schilling, January 8, 1920, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Schilling Papers.

and modes of behavior.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, we cannot compare their ethnicity-related activities or attitudes in Congress to those of other Congressmen with "ethnic" characteristics because no comparable studies seem to exist.<sup>40</sup>

The careers and behavior of the four German-born Congressmen who served during the war reflected the proverbial heterogeneity of the German immigrants. The ethnic crusader among them, Bartholdt, gave up in 1916 because he sensed rightly that with wartime hysteria forcing a showdown of ethnic group loyalty versus national loyalty too few "Germans" would be following his and the National German-American Alliance's call to live in an ethnic ghetto called "German America". That was not what they or their forebears had come to America for. Lieb also did not continue after 1916 (possibly for personal reasons) but had the satisfaction to see his candidate Wilson reelected to the White House. Not ethnic separateness was his creed but full participation in mainstream (and that meant Anglo-American) politics; the immigrant, he felt, had a special desire to belong: "His faith must be unbounded in the Nation he seeks." Voigt, elected and reelected during the war, could afford not to be a crusading or defensive ethnic because he blended effortlessly with his heavily German constituency that in Eastern Wisconsin was no struggling minority but itself the mainstream. Kahn channelled potential tensions resulting from his twofold minority status as being German and Jewish into a forceful, politically productive American patriotism. He rejected "hyphanism" and Zionism as one of its forms. A Goethe bust on his desk and active in West coast Jewish organizations he combined cultural pluralism with uncompromising American nationalism, without fanning the cultural repression exerted by backwoods Americanism.

In all their variety the experience of these congressmen is further proof of the high degree of integration of German immigrants and their descendants into the American political as well as economic systems, of their acceptance of Anglo-American political culture and of their willingness and

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<sup>39</sup> See Fred I. Greenstein, "Personality and Politics" and David O. Sears, "Political Socialization" in *Handbook of Political Science*, eds. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Mass., 1975), vol.2, 1-154.

<sup>40</sup> See Robert U. Goehlert and John R. Sayre, eds., *The United States Congress: a Bibliography* (New York, 1982); Garrison Nelson, "Congress", *Encyclopedia of American of American Political History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York, 1984), I, 316-341. See also for confirmation of the gap in the literature Edward R. Kantowicz, "Politics" and Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Germans", both in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); Leonard Dinnerstein, "Ethnic Movements", *Encyclopedia of American Political History*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York, 1984), II, 535-545; John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, 1985), 197-205.

ability to pursue whatever ethnically defined interests they may have had just as any other legitimate regional or group interests. The high degree of their assimilation into the nationally defined political and social structures (and not the brutality of anti-Germanism in some areas) explains the quickness and finality with which most German Americans within little more than a decade after 1916 gave up institutions and even life styles that marked them as being separate and found comfortable compromises that allowed them to be Americans with incidental German "traits". The dream of a permanently bicultural "German-America" that had motivated some German American intellectuals and politicians since the 1870s would have ended with or without the Great War in another generation or two.

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