

Katja Wüstenbecker. *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen.* Transatlantische Historische Studien. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007. 428 pp. EUR 56.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-08975-3.



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Katja Wüstenbecker's exploration of the German-American experience in World War I ventures into well-trodden territory. But, as the author explains in her introduction, her consultation of archival sources from the national government as well as a greater differentiation between the situation of "enemy aliens" who retained their German citizenship over against German-American immigrants and ethnics who were U.S. citizens, sets this study apart from the older standard work by Frederick C. Luebke.[1]

This greater depth is compensated for by a restricted breadth; the Middle West is defined primarily as the four states of Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin, and often as merely the four big cities of Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. At other times, however, the book takes a more national focus, as when dealing with groups such as Amish, Mennonites, or Hutterites; with the latter, one would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of their numbers in the states and cities of focus. Besides the National Archives, the author has dug deeply in archives and

historical societies in the four selected states. Her bibliography also lists more than one hundred U.S. newspapers and periodicals, nearly forty in the German language.

Despite her consultation of additional sources, Wüstenbecker for the most part comes to very similar conclusions as Luebke. For example, she too finds that the arrogant and incautious remarks of some *Vereinsdeutsche* during the neutrality period fueled the hostility that all German-Americans faced once America entered the war. She also echoes Luebke's findings that the most harmless and apolitical German-American groups, such as Hutterites and Mennonites, were the ones who suffered the most severe persecution. And both authors come to similar conclusions on the voting behavior of German-Americans in the aftermath of the war—that it varied state by state, depending on which of the two major parties had been most offensive during the war. In fact, Luebke provides more detail on post-war voting than the present study. In contrast to Luebke, Wüstenbecker does find *Kirchendeutsche*

equally prone as *Vereinsdeutsche* to making impolitic remarks at the outset of the war that would come back to haunt them. And, drawing upon more recent research by scholars such as Reinhard Doerries, she places greater emphasis on German espionage and sabotage attempts in the United States and its repercussions for German ethnics.

As in most treatments of this subject, the lynching of immigrant Robert Prager in Collinsville, Illinois, receives considerable attention. However, Wüstenbecker is among the first to point out the obvious German ethnicity of two of the mob members, including their ringleader, Joseph Reigel, as well as various local officials involved in the trial.

One of the values of this regional focus is that Wüstenbecker can discern different degrees of tolerance in various cities and states, and explain them through the political and ethnic makeup of the areas, though she might have given more attention to instances where the anti-hyphen dog did not bark. Chicago stood out for its hostility to the German language and culture, renaming 82 of 115 streets with German names, while Cincinnati replaced only a dozen, and Milwaukee and St. Louis even fewer. Wüstenbecker cites the preponderance of Slavic subject nationalities of the Dual Monarchy in Chicago as the explanation, though she overlooks an article focused heavily on the city that would have strengthened her case.[2]

Along with a table of German street names in the four cities indicating their wartime fate, the book includes in its appendices a thirty-page English-language list of persons subjected to mob violence or criminal prosecution for antiwar activities in the four states of interest—including many people not of German origins—that provides much raw material for further investigation.

Errors of fact are rare and of no great consequence. House Speaker Champ Clark of Missouri is misidentified as an Illinois congressman. Although the Elmhurst College records were utilized

to good effect, the author apparently thinks that "Evangelical" and "Lutheran" are synonymous, as they are back in Germany. And one should hardly call the twenty-three years of German instruction in St. Louis public schools "halfhearted" (p. 261) when it encompassed all but five of the city's fifty-seven elementary schools. But these are very minor quibbles. In summary, scholars more comfortable in the German language will be well served by Wüstenbecker's book, but those more at home in English, though they may want to consult this study for local detail, can safely continue to rely on Luebke's overall interpretation.

Notes

[1]. Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

[2]. Jonathan Zimmerman, "Ethnics against Ethnicity: European Immigrants and Foreign-Language Instruction, 1890-1940," *Journal of American History* 88 (2002): 1386-1392.

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