

Chad R. Fulwider. *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016. 288 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8262-2058-5.

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The study of propaganda during the First World War has a long scholarly history, but attention has often focused on both the British and American cases. Chad Fulwider sets out to change this with his *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I*, which examines Imperial Germany's attempts to sway US public opinion between the outbreak of war in 1914 and US entry into the conflict three years later. As Fulwider explains in his introduction, his volume "explores German reactions to American nonneutrality and Allied propaganda ... to assess the cultural impact of Germany's political mission within the United States" (p. vii). What he discovers is that Imperial German propaganda was on the whole unsuccessful, and that "this attempt to portray German-Americans as a coherent, organized, and well-financed group *actively sympathetic* to the German cause was a major mistake on the part of German propagandists" (p. 20). German propaganda efforts in the United States come across as a comedy of errors on the part of German officialdom: they initially focused only on the German-language press, did not fully grasp the importance of public opinion in the US context, and assumed that all German Americans implicitly supported the Kaiser and the German government, all compounded by the fact that when compared to the sophistication and reach of British propaganda,

German propagandists often found themselves trapped in a state of "perpetual reaction" (p. 74).

To reach this conclusion, the author divides his work into five thematic (and broadly chronological) chapters. The first explores the immediate German American response to the outbreak of war in August 1914, which included everything from attempts by German reservists (not often successful) to travel back to the Fatherland to the immediate reaction of the German-language US press against early British claims of German atrocities. Of particular interest here is Fulwider's look at the National German-American Alliance (NGAA), "dedicated to promoting German culture and interests within the United States as foremost an American organization, free from ties, financial or otherwise, to Germany" (p. 40). Chapter 2 "examines the creation of the formal [German] propaganda organization in the United States" (p. 48), principally official German creations such as the German Information Service and the War Press Bureau. The third chapter combines the themes of the previous two and brings them forward chronologically, looking at how German Americans responded to official and unofficial Imperial German attempts to maintain US neutrality. The NGAA is again a case study here, as is the tepid German response to the *Lusitania* sinking. These first three body chapters deal generally

with the war of words--Fulwider shifts in his next chapter to covert German action in the United States. This included everything from attempted sabotage programs run by the German War Intelligence Bureau in New York to the more well-known Bridgeport Projectile Company, set up by the German Information Service purposely to interfere with American materiel orders. The final chapter is brief and functions essentially as a conclusion.

Historiographically, Fulwider situates his work between Frederick Luebke's pioneering *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (1974) and more recent treatments such as the work of Stewart Halsey Ross and Tracie Provost. He also demonstrates a full command of the German-language scholarship on the issue. Where Fulwider makes his mark, by his own admission, is with his focus on (1) German-American responses to the war as a national rather than a regional issue and (2) the propaganda activities the Imperial German government, though hamstrung by US recalcitrance and the British blockade, were able to undertake in the United States before early 1917. Fulwider draws upon a broad and impressive archival base, including both US and German official records as well as the records of German American organizations such as the NGAA and the German Society of Pennsylvania.

There are some issues, however minor, with the volume. Fulwider's historiographic essay is concise and useful--but why is it confined to an appendix? Similarly, the work contains many lengthy and quite useful informational and historiographic footnotes. However, it would have been more convenient to find more of this material (especially historiographic material) within the text, particularly when considering the monograph checks in at less than 180 pages. It would also have been appreciated had the author included a more thorough examination of official German activity in the United States in the immediate run-up to the US declaration of war. As it stands,

the concluding chapter wraps up rather abruptly. The German American response to the Zimmerman telegram, to take one example, comes across as an intriguing research angle that is only briefly considered.

None of these issues detract from what is a well-researched, well-written, and historiographically significant project. Fulwider begins by stating that *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* focuses on "the experience of immigrants in American society, the impact of World War I on both American and European society, and the perception of American life in Europe" (p. vii). This is a bit too optimistic, particularly in regard to a fuller exploration of European society--what Fulwider has created is a very high-level political/diplomatic look at the role played by both German and German American public relations in the United States prior to 1917. That is valuable in and of itself, and Fulwider's work represents an important addition to the literature on the propaganda of the First World War. Researchers working on the British and American cases have long had full bookshelves to choose from. Those looking for a brief reference work on propaganda activities in the United States from a German perspective could not do better than to begin here.

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