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## German-Language Newspapers in America: Reactions and Reporting on Racism and Mob Violence towards Minority Groups in the Early 1900s

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GERMAN-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN AMERICA:  
REACTIONS AND REPORTING ON RACISM AND MOB VIOLENCE TOWARDS  
MINORITY GROUPS IN THE EARLY 1900S

By

Karmen Browitt

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GERMAN-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN AMERICA:  
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University of Nebraska, 2023

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This thesis examines the perspective of German-Americans through the lens of their German-Language newspapers during two significant moments in history when minority groups faced discrimination: anti-German Sentiment of World War I and the Red Summer of 1919, marked by violence against Black Americans. German-Americans were subjected of suspicion and hostility, being viewed as disloyal to the United States. Consequently, they experienced oppressive measures such as language laws, hate crimes, and attempts to completely erase the German language and culture within the United States. Meanwhile, in 1919, post-World War I tension between Black and white communities escalated as both communities competed for employment opportunities in Northern States. The tensions ignited riots across the nation, with this thesis focuses on the Washington D.C., Chicago, and Omaha riots. This thesis looks into the discourse found in German-language newspapers and examines how these newspapers discussed moments where their own community was targeted compared to incidents of discrimination against the Black community. It finds that while these newspaper report on a minority group to which they do not belong, they find connections between the discrimination experienced by both groups.

## **Introduction**

This thesis looks at the ranging perspectives of German-Americans as published in their German-language newspapers during two historical periods—anti-German hysteria that targeted German-Americans during World War I, and the Red Summer of 1919, defined by the targeted violence and lynchings of Black Americans. These events share evident connections that arise from the targeting of two minority groups and their direct association with the effects of World War I. The war itself fueled much of the frustration that led to the escalation of these movements. German-Americans were targeted for appearing to be disloyal to the United States, while tensions between Black and white communities intensified after the war, as they competed for jobs in the Northern States (McWhirter 19). Throughout, this thesis attempts to look at how German-language newspapers reported on these events and how they react to them in their opinion pieces. It is important to note that while both minority groups are involved, there is the difference in perspective that one minority group, namely German-Americans, authors the articles. Accompanying this written component is a website that provides a way to integrate German-language newspapers into a classroom setting and links to additional articles discussing these events.

## **Notes on Sources and Direct Quotes**

This thesis pulls direct quotes from newspapers, quoting them verbatim. It does not endorse the language that the articles use. Some readers may find the events discussed in this thesis disturbing and should use caution due to the content and language used in the articles referenced in the Red Summer section. Additionally, when discussing the events of the Red

Summer, this thesis chooses to follow the standards set out in The National Archives Catalog's article on reparative language ("Black Person").

## **Section I: Years of Anti-German Hysteria**

Throughout World War I, ultra-nationalist American citizens grew wary of ethnic groups that had ties to the central powers. Fear-mongering politicians created an atmosphere that made the US population "fear the hyphen" to further divide the nation, arguing that the hyphen in the names of immigrant groups signified a maintained connection with their heritage and immediately flagged them as disloyal to the United States. Even former President Theodore Roosevelt condemned the idea of "hyphenism," arguing that the hyphen in German-American "signified divided political loyalties" (Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty* 68). With this rhetoric, those in power were able to sway public opinion and enact laws that would push immigrants to throw away any connection they had to their homelands. This section will look at the experiences of German-Americans in the United States after the First World War by examining German-language newspapers from this time period. It will provide historical context and examine the discourse of German-Americans as they waded through oppressive language laws, hate crimes, and the attempted erasure of the German language and culture within the United States.

### **Historical Context: Before America Enters WWI**

Between 1850 and 1897, the United States saw a large influx of German immigrants coming to the states, resulting in the arrival of over 4 million Germans (*NARA - AAD - Fielded Search - Germans to America Passenger Data File, 1850 - 1897*). After arriving to the United States, many German-Americans chose to settle in the Midwest and were widely accepted across

the nation. While creating a home for themselves in America, they founded German-language schools, churches, social clubs, and newspapers. At the beginning of the war in 1914, prior to the United States' entrance, many German-Americans were largely supportive of Germany and echoed their support in their German-language newspapers. An opinion piece from the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne*, published August 3, 1914, writes about Germany declaring war with France and Russia, calling Germany “our old fatherland” (“Deutschland im Weltkrieg”).<sup>1</sup> Although referring to Germany as the “old fatherland” suggests that the writer(s) of this article have detached themselves from Germany, they end the article by showing immense support for Germany with unwavering hope that they will come out of the war victorious, resisting Russia and giving France “the chastisement it deserves for its betrayal of European culture” (“Deutschland im Weltkrieg”).<sup>2</sup> The next day, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* published an article titled “Many Germans rush to the flag.”<sup>3</sup> The article reports on the number of Germans-Americans wanting to register with Germany’s army and argues that “this shows that the German-American will do his duty to the old fatherland” (“Viele Deutsche eilen unter die Fahne”).<sup>4</sup> During the early years of the war, German-language newspapers continued to express support for Germany, though they faced criticisms from President Wilson and other prominent personages, like former President Theodore Roosevelt.

## Hyphenism

In October 1915, former President Roosevelt delivered a speech discussing Americanism—the idea that all people who live in the US should be whole-heartedly devoted to

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<sup>1</sup> „unser altes Vaterland...“

<sup>2</sup> „...für seinen Verrat an der europäischen Kultur die verdiente Züchtigung...“

<sup>3</sup> „Viele Deutsche eilen unter die Fahne.“

<sup>4</sup> „Es zeigt sich, das der Deutschamerikaner dem alten Vaterlande gegenüber seine Pflicht thun wird.“

America. He opened his speech by stating “there is no place here for the hyphenated American” (“Roosevelt bars the Hyphenated”). By saying this, Roosevelt is referring to immigrant groups like German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, etc. He argued that anyone who uses a hyphen is “bringing this nation to ruin” because they vote with their home countries in mind (“Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated”). In his speech, the former President used a strategic move of othering hyphenated Americans, referring to anyone who doesn’t use a hyphen when describing their nationality as a “naturalized American.” Ending his speech, Roosevelt called for unity among the nation and asks his audience to push Americanization. He argues that there are three essential factors that contribute to uniting a nation: finding a common language, having a “common civil standard”—similar “ideals, beliefs, and customs”—and having fair access to opportunities, and social and economic systems (“Roosevelt bars the Hyphenated”).

Following Roosevelt’s speech, President Wilson delivered a speech in October 1915 where he draws attention to “hyphenated” Americans. At first, President Wilson speaks highly of “foreign born citizens,” saying “Some of the best stuff of America has come out of foreign lands, and some of the best stuff in America is in the men who are naturalized citizens of the United States” (*Address to the Daughters of the American Revolution / The American Presidency Project*). Following this praise, he said “I am in a hurry for an opportunity to have a line-up and let the men who are thinking first of other countries stand on one side and all those that are for America first, last, and all the time on the other side” (*Address to the Daughters*). Like Roosevelt, Wilson suggests that to be considered a good American, one must drop all connection to their foreign identity. He continues his speech by discussing how public opinion can sway someone’s beliefs, ideals, and behaviors. He said,

We constantly discipline our fellow-citizens by having an opinion about them. That is the sort of discipline we ought now to administer to everybody who is not to the very core of his heart an American. Just have an opinion about him and let him experience the atmospheric effects of that opinion! (*Address to the Daughters*)

After the speeches from former President Roosevelt and current president Wilson, many German-language newspapers highlighted the harmful rhetoric within the speeches and condemned both men for their remarks.

The *Detroit Abend-Post*, a newspaper out of Detroit, Michigan, reported on Wilson's speech, writing that he declared war against the "hyphenated American." In turn, the newspaper rebutted some of the claims made by the President, writing that even the most radical of German organizations—specifically naming the Nationalbunde—had no intentions of voting with a "German-American mindset" ("Die Herausforderung wird angenommen"). They continue that the challenge needs to be accepted by all "hyphenated Americans" because, even though German-Americans are being targeted now, this rhetoric "may be directed tomorrow against all other citizens, whose birthplace was not in the United States" ("Die Herausforderung wird angenommen"). The article ends by saying, "The beginning must be made by Woodrow Wilson himself, whose advise to incite public opinion against the 'hyphenated Americans' betrayed more than ever how British-American he feels to the core of his heart" ("Die Herausforderung wird angenommen").<sup>5</sup> In this context, the *Detroit Abend-Post* is attempting to challenge the concept of hyphenism by noting that what Wilson presents as a neutral stance, is actually connected to another nation—Great Britain.

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<sup>5</sup> „Der Anfang muss mit Woodrow Wilson selbst gemacht werden, der mit seinem Ratschlage, die öffentliche Meinung gegen die "Bindestrich-Americaner" zu verhetzen, mehr den je verraten hatte, wie britisch-amerikanisch er bis ins Innerste seines Herzens fühlt.“



Similar arguments were made in an article from the *Nordstern* newspaper, located in St. Cloud, Minnesota when they call out President Wilson's hypocrisy and two-facedness. They write that "Finally, Mr. Wilson has dropped his mask... For a year, he has worn the mask of neutrality; now, at last, he has dropped it and shown his true character, shown what he is: namely, the poser in the highest place in American politics" ("Die Bindestrich-Rede des Herrn Präsidenten"). Across the nation, German-language newspapers echoed similar ideas, condemning Roosevelt and Wilson for their speeches ("Krieg den Bindestrich-Amerikanern;" "Roosevelt phantasiert;" "Wochen-Plauderei"). When the United States entered the war in April 1917, anti-German sentiment increased exponentially with German-Americans facing even greater pressure from the government and other Americans to drop all connection they had to German heritage.

Once the announcement was made about the US's entrance into the war, President Wilson made it clear that the enemy was Germany, rather than the people, their culture, and the German Language (Luebke, *Germans*, 34). However, this did little to calm the fears of the American population, as many still believed that any German-American was a potential spy. The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* reported on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1917, on the targeting of German-language newspapers from lawmakers in Washington. One lawmaker that they name is Senator Poindexter, writing he had "filed a resolution in the senate on Wednesday, to suppress the German daily papers of America. He demands that they be deprived of their postal rights, which would condemn them to certain death" ("Gegen deutsche Tageblätter").<sup>6</sup> They continue, saying that the injustice of his proposal is obvious and a direct counter to what President Wilson said.

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<sup>6</sup> "...hat Mittwoch im Bundessenat eine Resolution eingereicht, um die deutschen Tageblätter Amerikas zu unterdrücken. Er fordert, dass man ihnen das Postrecht entziehe, wodurch sie zu einem sicheren Tode verurteilt wären."

The article also points out the hypocrisy of the proposal, writing “By a course of action as that proposed by Senator Poindexter, it would at once be proved to the world that it is a hollow phrase and pathetic hypocrisy, for you cannot suppress here what you wish to liberate there” (“Gegen deutsche Tageblätter”).<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the *New Ulm Post* in New-Ulm, Minnesota reflects a different attitude telling its readers that it will no longer accept “submissions or inquiries containing criticism of the President or of Congress, or of policies deemed good or necessary by the Federal Government...” (“Briefkasten”).<sup>8</sup> They go so far as to ask their readers to show that they are devoted to America through action and a loyal attitude, always “conscious of what he owes to the United States” (“Briefkasten”). Introducing the open letters section with this was a strategic move. Not only are they showing loyalty to the US by refusing to accept open-letters that publicly criticize the US, but they push it a bit further by asking their readers to “pursue their civic duty ‘in civilian’ clothing or in Uncle Sam’s Uniform to protect the stars and stripes...” (“Briefkasten”). The *New Ulm Post* was not the only newspaper working strategically during this time.

On August 6th, 1917, four months after the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* article, the *Nordstern* published a declaration of loyalty in English titled “Our Country, Right or Wrong.” The declaration states that, though Americans of German descent may not agree with their governments foreign policy, they should “abide by the decision of the chosen representatives of our country” (“Our Country, Right or Wrong”). Unlike the article in the *New Ulm Post*, this article argues that it’s “wholly unnecessary for Americans of German descent to reiterate their

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<sup>7</sup> „Durch eine Handlungsweise, wie die vom Senator Poindexter vorgeschlagene, würde der Welt sofort bewiesen werden, dass es sich um eine hohle Phrase und erbärmliche Heuchelei handelt, denn man kann hier nicht unterdrücken, was man dort befreien will.”

<sup>8</sup> „...Einsendung oder Anfragen, die eine Kritik des Präsidenten oder des Kongresses oder der von der Bundesregierung für gut oder notwendig befundenen Politik...”

loyalty” because “they have the welfare of [their] country at heart as much as anybody, be he native born or of foreign descent...” (“Our Country, Right or Wrong”). They defend German-language newspapers, arguing that they strive to be an example of “true Americanism and patriotism” and that their purpose is to educate readers. Notably, the declaration refrains from using the term German-American, rather, it elects to use terms like “Americans of German descent/blood” (“Our Country, Right or Wrong”). This is significant because it could show the lasting effect from President Roosevelt’s hyphenism speech from 1915.

### **Eradication of the German Language**

After the United States entered the war, many organizations preyed on these fears and fed anti-German hysteria. Specifically, the Committee of Public Information and the American Protective League went to great lengths to spread their version of patriotism. The Committee of Public Information fostered German hatred by creating an aggressive movement that attacked dissent as disloyalty. Meanwhile, the American Protective League created a program that investigated domestic espionage. This program intensified anti-German sentiment as German-language churches, schools, and newspapers were attacked. Through these events, the German language was the number one target. Suddenly, objects with any hint of German influence were immediately ameriericanized or eliminated. “Sauerkraut” became “liberty cabbage”, “Bismarck” pastries were renamed “American beauties,” and “Dachshunds” were killed by superpatriots (Johanningmeier 35). German-language newspapers went to great lengths to show that they were loyal to the United States. They created sections written in English, included pledges of allegiance to the US, and even featured letters from government agencies such as The Committee

of Public Information, commending their faithfulness to the nation (“The Tribune’s English Section”; “America First!”, “The Tribune and the War!”)

The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* took several steps to declare their loyalty to the US. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918, they began including a short blurb at the top right of their front page—a few months later, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* added a picture of the American flag to accompany the declaration. The blurb stated that the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* was “an American newspaper” that “stands for American ideals and principles,” including that their audience is “American citizens who read German” (*Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* 1). Similarly, by June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1918, they also began publishing an English blurb in its opinion section that declares its loyal to America. A portion of it reads:

The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* is a strictly American newspaper, read by Americans with German blood. The Tribune recognizes the fact that no publication in this country has a right to exist if it does not devote its entire energy to the best interest of the United States of America, particularly the cause for which the United States entered this war. ... The Tribune is nothing else than an all-American newspaper. (*Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* 3)

Once again, they refer to German-Americans as “Americans with German blood,” avoiding using the hyphenated alternative and pushing that German-Americans are Americans first and foremost.

An article published on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918 in the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* writes about the struggles of German-Americans and makes two eye-opening observations. First, they begin by writing that they are criticized by both sides of their nationality—by Germans and by Americans. They write that “the Americans in America and the Germans in Germany have never understood us, they have never made a serious effort to understand us” (“Die Schicksalsstunde der

Deutsch=Amerikaner”)<sup>9</sup> Secondly, they end the article by writing that their children and their children’s children will have no connection to Germany and will have no “old and new homeland,” rather they will simply have “America,” to which “they can belong with their whole, undivided heart” (“Die Schicksalsstunde der Deutsch=Amerikaner”).<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, the *der Sonntagsbote und der Seebote* newspaper acknowledges that they must “fulfill [their] duties by observing the laws of the land and supporting [their] country in the struggle against the dangers from inside and outside” (“Die deutsche Muttersprache”).<sup>11</sup> However, they also argue that as Americans “it is [their] inviolable right to make use of the freedom granted to [them] and to cultivate the German mother tongue at home and in the family” (“Die deutsche Muttersprache”).<sup>12</sup> Though newspapers took steps to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States, lawmakers continued to target foreign languages.

In April 1919, Nebraska enacted a statute that would prohibit schools from teaching a foreign language or having any instruction in a language other than English, calling it the Siman Act. The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* reported on the effects of this law on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919. The article begins by discussing an appeal made by the different foreign language churches, including German Lutherans of the Missouri and Iowa Synods, Polish and Bohemian Catholics, and Danish Lutherans. These individuals argued that the Siman law was unconstitutional because “of its direct and indirect encroachments upon the constitutional rights of citizens to the free and unfettered exercise of religion and the inalienable rights of parents to the religious and moral

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<sup>9</sup> „die Amerikaner in Amerika und die Deutschen in Deutschland haben uns nie verstanden, sie haben sich niemals ernsthaft bemüht, uns zu verstehen.“

<sup>10</sup> „...dem sie mit ganzem, ungeteiltem Herzen angehören können.“

<sup>11</sup> „...erfüllen wir durch Beobachtung der Landesgesetze und Unterstützung unseres Landes im Kampfe gegen die Gefahren von innen und außen.“

<sup>12</sup> „Es ist unser unantastbares Recht, von der uns gewährten Freiheit Gebrauch zu machen und in Heim und Familie die deutsche Muttersprache zu pflegen.“

education of children” (“Der Prozess gegen das Simangesetz”).<sup>13</sup> The *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* argued that immigrants who came to America are “called by American freedom” and “are good citizens at heart” (“Der Prozess gegen das Simangesetz”). They argue that this law robs “them of their faith in this freedom” because “a law against the honored language of their fathers would be to stifle the germ of patriotism in their hearts” (“Der Prozess gegen das Simangesetz”).<sup>14</sup> The article highlights key claims from lawyers who were opposing the case. One lawyer argued that learning a foreign language was not only useful—often useful for specific jobs—but also a right granted to citizens of the United States. This article highlights the unconstitutional nature of the law. After Robert Meyer, a teacher at a parochial school in Nebraska, was charged with violating this law by teaching German to a student, the United States Supreme Court found it unconstitutional in its 1923 *Meyer vs. Nebraska* decision (Bernstein).

## **Section II: The Red Summer**

At the end of the first World War, Black soldiers returned home with a hope that what they had contributed to the war would be enough for the white community to begin to accept them in society. When speaking on the events of the Red Summer, an anonymous Black man is quoted saying “the injustice of the whole thing overwhelmed me. Had the ten months I spent in France been all in vain? What had I done to deserve such treatment?” (Ottley 177). It would be reasonable to expect that since Black Americans fought for the United States and proved their loyalty to their country, they would be enthusiastically welcomed home by their white

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<sup>13</sup> „...wegen seiner direkten und indirekten Eingriffe in die verfassungsmäßigen Rechte der Bürger auf freie und ungehinderte Religionsausübung und die unveräußerlichen Rechte der Eltern auf religiöse und moralische Erziehung der Kinder für verfassungswidrig ansehen.“

<sup>14</sup> „...ein Gesetz gegen die ihnen ehrwürdige Sprache ihrer Väter zu rauben, bedeute, den Keim des Patriotismus in ihrem Herzen zu ersticken.“

counterparts. Unfortunately, that is not what happened. Across the nation, tensions between Black and white Americans began to rise in part over competition for limited jobs and because of population growth in large urban spaces (McWhirter 19).

This tension peaked during the six-month span between April and November of 1919 when the United States saw an exponential rise in violence that targeted Black Americans. The riots and devastation that occurred within this time span were later termed as “The Red Summer” by activist James Weldon Johnson. Where the previous section looked at how German-American Newspapers responded to violence directed against themselves, this section looks at how German-language newspapers reported on the oppression of a group that they didn’t belong to and examines how they were reporting on the riots in Washington, D.C.; Chicago, IL; and Omaha, NE in their newspapers. The section ends with examining the opinion pieces posted in these newspapers in the aftermath of the riots, giving a closer glance at the positions the German-American population took when discussing the riots.

### **Washington D.C.: Rioting in the Capital City**

One of the biggest race riots broke out on July 19<sup>th</sup> in Washington D.C. after a white woman was allegedly attacked by two black men who tried to steal her umbrella. The police quickly arrested a Black man for the attack, but the flames were already stoked as the rumor of the attack circulated throughout the white community. Another rumor claimed that a black man had committed “at least a dozen rapes” between June and July (McWhirter 98). As the rumor spread, the number of alleged attacks grew, inflating the rage of the white community. As the riots raged on, newspapers across the nation began publishing stories of what was happening in Washington.

One German-language newspaper based in New-Ulm, Minnesota reported on these attacks in an article published on July 25<sup>th</sup>, writing “The race riots began in earnest Saturday after a series of attacks on white woman, various murders, robberies and general lawlessness “ (“Rassenkampf fordert Tote in Washington”).<sup>15</sup> (Though the *New Ulm Post* reported that women were being murdered, other German-language newspapers like the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* were being vaguer, simply writing that the riot began after white women had been attacked by black men (“Rassenkämpfe in Bundeshauptstadt”).) The *New Ulm Post* article carries on by describing the aftermath of the alleged attack that sparked the riots in Washington. “Several hundred soldiers, sailors, and marines had joined together Saturday night in tracking down a Negro who had attacked Mrs. Elsie Stepnick...” (“Rassenkämpfe in Bundeshauptstadt”).<sup>16</sup> In the midst of the riots, another German-language newspaper called *Der Staats-Anzeiger* based in Rugby, North Dakota wrote that “Soldiers, Mariners and sailors, police say, were leaders in riots “ (“Dutzende bei Rassenauflständen in Washington verletzt“).<sup>17</sup> The next day, the police released the man they had arrested because of an insufficient amount of evidence, which in turn enraged the mob even more.

Throughout the night, the mob terrorized Black people as they walked down the streets or rode street cars. These attacks continued with little resistance from the Black community, and the federal government refused to step in and help (McWhirter 99). On Monday morning, a report came in about a group of Black men in a “terror car,”<sup>18</sup> driving past the Navy Hospital and opening fire on the patients outside (McWhirter 100). McWhirter makes no note of whether

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<sup>15</sup> “Die Rassenkrawalle begannen in ernstlicher Weise am Samstag nach einer Reihe von Angriffen auf weiße Frauen, verschiedenen Morden, Räubereien und allgemeinen Gesetzlosigkeiten.“

<sup>16</sup> “Mehrere hundert Soldaten, Seeleute und Seesoldaten hatten sich am Samstag Abend zusammengetan, im einen Neger aufzuspüren, der Frau Elsie Stepnick ... angegriffen hatte.“

<sup>17</sup> “Soldaten, Mariners und Seeleute, so sagt die Polizei, waren die Führer bei den Aufständen.“

<sup>18</sup> A term coined to describe a drive-by shooting (McWhirter 99)



this claim is true or whether there were any official reports filed to verify the claim. However, newspapers across the nation reported on “terror cars.” The *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* made note of this in their article on Tuesday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, writing, “At an early hour today, several automobiles filled with armed colored men sped through the residential section of the city, challenging the whites to stand and fight, amid persistent jeering” (“Rassenkampf in der Bundeshauptstadt”).<sup>19</sup> The *New Ulm Post* and *Der Nordstern* made similar claims in their newspapers.

The rioting raged throughout the city as the white mob continued to attack Black people. The *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* reported that “A Negro was chased around the Treasury building and another attacked in front of the White House” („Rassenkämpfe in Bundeshauptstadt”).<sup>20</sup> Though most Black people were acting in self-defense, some newspapers wrote about cars filled with armed Black people, taunting white people. The *New Ulm Post* wrote on July 25<sup>th</sup>, “Early today, various cars filled with roaring blacks, many of them armed, still lead the way through the streets of better residential districts, bidding the whites ‘Come On’” (“Rassenkampf fordert Tote in Washington”).<sup>21</sup> The *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* also mentioned a car filled with five Black passengers, shooting at a marine hospital (“Rassenkämpfe in Bundeshauptstadt”). In the same article, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* reported that “A Negro mob numbering around 1,000 started moving from [7<sup>th</sup> and T streets] against the residential neighborhoods of the whites” (“Rassenkämpfe in Bundeshauptstadt”).<sup>22</sup> The article continues by discussing that the police tried

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<sup>19</sup> „Heute zu früher Morgenstunde rasten mehrere Automobile, die mit bewaffneten Farbigen angefüllt waren, den Residenzteil der Stadt und forderten unter anhaltendem Johlen die Weißen heraus, sich zum Kampfe zu stellen“

<sup>20</sup> „Ein Neger wurde um das Schatzamtsgebäude gejagt und ein anderer vor dem Weißen Hause angegriffen.“

<sup>21</sup> „Heute früh führen noch verschieden Autos mit brüllenden Schwarzen angefüllt, viele von ihren bewaffnet, durch die Straßen der besseren Wohndistrikte und boten den Weißen mit den Zurufen ‚Come on.‘“

<sup>22</sup> „Ein etwa 1000 Personen zählender Negerhaufe setzte sich von [der 7. Und T Straße] aus gegen den Residenzteil der Weißen in Bewegung.“

to stop the mob without drawing their weapons, but eventually shot at the crowd after some mob members drew their revolvers.

The Washington police force attempted to stop the violence and break up the mob. Most reports in the German-language newspapers said some 400 soldiers with the help of 700 of Washington's police were unable to stop the rioting ("Dutzende bei Rassenaufständen in Washington verletzt;" "*Der Staats-Anzeiger*;" "Rassenkampf fordert Tote in Washington"). However, on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* wrote "At an early hour today, peace and order were restored in Washington by troops. The situation is considerably better since the outbreak of the race war which began last Sunday between coloreds and whites" ("General Haan schafft Ruhe in Washington").<sup>23</sup> Fear spread as people worried that the rioting would start up again on Tuesday night. President Wilson had given the okay for soldiers patrol the city and break up large groups (McWhirter 109). The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* wrote that "Over 2000 soldiers found themselves in service, in addition to divisions of naval troops, 50 sailors and members of the citizen militia" ("General Haan schafft Ruhe in Washington").<sup>24</sup> For the next five days, troops patrolled the streets, ready to break up any riots that started. By July 27<sup>th</sup>, the remaining troops were removed from their posts and the city was seemingly back to normal.

When the riots ended, no one had determined a final number of deaths or injuries. McWhirter writes that conservative reports list the death toll at seven, with four Black people and three white people (McWhirter 110). However, still to this day, the final count of deaths is unclear, with estimates ranging from 15 to 40 (Sauer).

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<sup>23</sup> „Heute zu früher Morgenstunde wurde die Ruhe und Ordnung in Washington durch Truppen [...] wieder hergestellt. Die Situation ist bedeutend besser, wie zu irgend einer Zeit seit Ausbruch des Rassenkampfes der am letzten Sonntag zwischen Farbigen und Weißen begann.“

<sup>24</sup> „Über 2000 Soldaten befanden sich letzte Nacht in Dienst, dazu kamen Abteilungen Marinetruppen, 50 Matrosen und Mitglieder der Bürgerwehr.“

### **Chicago: Most Severe Riot of the Red Summer**

Two days after the troops were pulled from their posts in Washington D.C., another race riot was already developing. On Sunday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, thousands of Chicagoans flocked the beaches to avoid the summer heat. Little did they know that by the end of the day, a race riot would break out on those very beaches after a group of Black people tried to swim at a beach that white people used frequently.

On July 28<sup>th</sup>, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* began to report on the outbreak. They reported that the beach where the outbreak began was “strictly separated” between Black and white communities (“Rassenkämpfe in Chicago ausgebrochen”). However, McWhirter remarks in his book that the beaches of Chicago weren’t segregated by law, so the Black community was legally allowed to swim at this beach, though the white community saw this move as provocative (McWhirter 128). The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* article continues by reporting that a riot broke out seemingly without warning, causing two people—a Black person and a white person—to die (“Rassenkämpfe in Chicago ausgebrochen”). McWhirter goes into more detail about the events that took place at the beach in chapter 13 of his book. In short, a Black boy was killed after being hit by a rock for swimming at the white-claimed beach. After the search party recovered his body, the Black crowd at the beach called for officers who were stationed nearby to arrest the man who hit the boy, but the officers refused (McWhirter 127-130). Though the articles don’t go into that much detail about the events at the beach, they do report that the police showed up quickly to restore the peace, though there were several gunshots fired (“Rassenkämpfe in Chicago ausgebrochen”). Thus began the Chicago race riots.

The mobs quickly spread to Chicago’s South Side. The same *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* article reported that “white passerbys were assaulted and mishandled by Negroes” and that

“whites got satisfaction by dragging colored people off street cars and beating them miserably” („Rassenkämpfe in Chicago ausgebrochen“).<sup>25</sup><sup>26</sup> The reports published in newspapers shine a light on the harsh events of the Chicago race riots. The same article states that three Black men were hit over the head and that one Black man was taken to the hospital after being shot in the stomach. It also states that a white person was shot in the forehead by a stray bullet as they were watching the fighting out their window. The article writes that “As the city firefighters wanted to go to a fire that broke out near a fighting place, they were stopped by the mob and the Negroes tried to drag them from their seats, whereupon new fights broke out” (“Rassenkämpfe in Chicago ausgebrochen”).<sup>27</sup> A report from the *New Ulm Post* describes Black people shooting from the roofs of their homes at white people who were on the street (“Rassenkämpfe auf Chicagos Südseite”). Similar to the Washington riots, the Governor called on troops to help restore peace in the South Side of Chicago. *Der Staats-Anzeiger* reported that “four regiments were in the armory on the South Side...” (“24 im Rassenkrieg getötet“).<sup>28</sup> On July 30th, the *New Ulm Post* wrote that 1,400 military soldiers were ordered to Chicago’s South Side to help the 4,200 men already stationed there (“Rassenkämpfe in Chicagos Südseite”).

Near the end of the riots, newspapers began publishing the number of individuals who died during the Chicago riots. The *New Ulm Post* reported that “As of Monday evening, 21 people had been reported killed and more than 200 wounded. Among the last are many seriously injured” („Rassenkämpfe auf Chicagos Südseite“).<sup>29</sup> Both the *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* and *Der*

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<sup>25</sup> „Weiße verschafften sich Genugtuung, indem sie Farbige von den Straßenbahnen herabzerrten und sie jämmerlich verprügelten“

<sup>26</sup> „weiße Passanten von Negern überfallen und misshandelt wurden“

<sup>27</sup> „Als städtische Feuerwehrleute nach einem in der Nähe eines Kampfplatzes ausgebrochenem Brande fahren wollten, wurden sie von dem Pöbel angehalten und die Neger versuchten, dieselben von ihren Sitzen zu zerren, worauf sich neue Kämpfe entspannten.“

<sup>28</sup> „vier Regimenter waren in der Waffenhalle auf der Südseite...“

<sup>29</sup> „Bis Montagabend waren 21 Personen als getötet und über 200 als verwundet gemeldet worden. Unter den letzten befinden sich viele Schwerverletzte.“

*Staats-Anzeiger* reported the number of individuals who died to be 27 (“Chicagos Rassenkampf anscheinend beendet;” “Mehr Truppen für Chicago herangerufen”). The article from the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* also stated that “The number of injured is not known but is supposed be very large” (“Chicagos Rassenkampf anscheinend beendet”).<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, following the riot in Chicago, a Chicago-based, socialist newspaper called *Vorbote* gave their two cents on the events in their section titled “Plauderei.” The article calls out the heinous acts that were committed during the riot, while also not placing blame on either side, but rather places blame on capitalists, saying that if they can keep the Black and white communities fighting against each other, they can continue to “rob the people with impunity and unhindered” (“Plauderei”)<sup>31</sup>. They end the article by writing that though slavery has been abolished, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done and that the condition of the black communities living in northern states is not any better than those living in the south (“Plauderei”). Here, we see a German-language newspaper take a direct stand against the violence and injustices directed at the Black community.

### **Omaha: Rioting in the Great Plains**

Only a couple of months after the Chicago riots, another riot broke out, this time in the heart of the Great Plains. During the summer and into the fall, tensions were on the rise between the Black and white communities, specifically due to the increasing cost of living and job losses. Adding fuel to the fire, an English-language newspaper called the *Bee* reported that white women were allegedly being attacked by Black men. The racial tension came to a head on the evening of September 25th, 1919, with another reported attack taking place. The new report

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<sup>30</sup> „Die Zahl der Verwundeten ist nicht bekannt, soll aber sehr groß sein.“

<sup>31</sup> „...das Volk ungestraft und ungehindert weiter ausplündern.“

describes a couple being attacked by a Black man as they walked home. By the next morning, newspapers within Omaha had already publish reports on this alleged attack. Due to its proximity to the riots, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* closely followed the events and published several articles reporting on the riots.

The *Bee* was also behind the escalation of the racial tension and was even called out by the NAACP for contributing to the racial tension, yet the newspaper never responded to these allegations (McWhirter 193). After the alleged attack happened, the *Daily Bee* published an article, calling the Black man involved in the alleged assault a “black beast” (“Negro Assaults Young Woman”). The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* also reported on this alleged attack, calling it a “bestialisches Angriff” (“Neger vergewaltigt weißes Mädchen”). It's important to note here the difference in the rhetoric used between the *Daily Bee* and the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne*. While the *Daily Bee* refers to the young woman’s attacker as a beast, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* only uses the word “bestial/beastly” when referring to the alleged attack itself.

On Saturday, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* described the arrest of Will Brown, the man who allegedly assaulted the woman two nights prior. In the report, the author writes that after police found Brown at his house with his partner, they took him to the woman’s house to be identified (“Mädchenschänder wird von Polizei verhaftet”). Meanwhile, a large crowd grew outside of the house, calling for Will Brown to be lynched. The article reads: “No sooner was the news announced that the girl’s colored molester had been apprehended than a large crowd also gathered with the intention of lynching this beast in human form” (“Mädchenschänder wird von Polizei verhaftet“).<sup>32</sup> The article reports that, though the crowd swelled to hundreds of people, three officers were able to defend Brown until around a dozen officers arrived, taking Brown to

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<sup>32</sup> „Kaum wurde die Nachricht bekannt, dass der farbige Mädchenschänder dingfest gemacht wurde, als sich auch bereits eine zahlreiche Menschenmenge sammelte in der Absicht, dieses Bestie in Menschengestalt zu lynchen.“

the courthouse. The report continues by describing an armed mob of 200 employees of the Burlington train company that arrived shortly after Brown was taken to the courthouse, saying they were there to let “Judge Lynch” do its job. Unsatisfied with not finding Brown, the mob emphasized “Should such an assault by a Negro occur again, then one would hunt for the perpetrator” and continued by saying that if they were unable to find the alleged perpetrator then they would find another Black man to pay for the crimes (“Mädchenschänder wird von Polizei verhaftet”).<sup>33</sup> As the situation escalated, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* responded by dedicating their entire front page to detailed reporting on the riots, titling their report as “Der Mobteufel herrschte Sonntag nacht in Omaha!”<sup>34</sup> By naming the mob “mob devil,” it is clear that the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* disagrees with the mob violence that occurred over the weekend.

According to the reports, the mob crowded the courthouse, continuing the call for Brown’s lynching. As the mob became more violent and began burning the building, the officers released Brown to the mob. The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* writes, “The colored Brown, more dead than living from terror, was dragged from his prison cell and was hung on 18th and Harney street” (“Gefangene lieferten den Schwarzen aus”).<sup>35</sup> By describing Brown as appearing „more dead than alive” because he was terrified, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* is showing empathy toward him. The article then reports that after the officers handed Brown to the mob, he was beat up and hung. The *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* reported in another article that, with the help of military personal from Fort Omaha, peace was restored (“Militär beherrscht heute die Stadt”).

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<sup>33</sup> „sollte sich wiederum ein derartiger Überfall durch einen Neger ereignen, dann würde man nach dem Täter fähnden.”

<sup>34</sup> “The mob devil rules in Omaha Sunday night!”

<sup>35</sup> “Der Farbige Brown, vor Schrecken mehr tot als lebendig, wurde aus seiner Gefängniszelle geschleppt und an der 18. Und Harney Straße aufgeknüpft.”

## Black American and German-American Rapport

Up until 1919, German-Americans had long supported legislation that advocated for the rights of Black Americans. In the years following the Civil War, many German-Americans opposed the Democratic viewpoint, which was in favor of slavery. Walter Kamphoefner wrote that in post-slavery America there was evidence in German-language newspapers that support this idea, even among German-language newspapers who leaned democratic. He notes that the German-language newspaper *Katholischer Glaubensbote*, a “Democratic-leaning Catholic paper in a former slave state ... engaged in no essentialist arguments based on alleged biological inferiority of the Black race” (Kamphoefner 213). Rather, Kamphoefner found that this paper rejoiced the end of slavery and even criticized the injustices of treating Black Americans like objects.

Throughout the riots of the Red Summer, many German-American newspapers reported on general events of the outbreaks and, more importantly, provided opinion pieces that criticized the riots and called out people in power for not stepping in sooner to stop the violence. Following the riots in Washington and Chicago, an opinion piece featured in the *Tägliche Omaha Tribune* on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1919, reads, “It is time that congress faces this speck on our shield with the necessary corrosive acid and exterminate lynching laws, lynch lust, and persecution addiction” (“Rassenkämpfe in Washington und Chicago”).<sup>36</sup> Not only does this article call on congress to take action, but it also calls on the American public to intervene and fight for the persecuted Black community, writing, “It must lie on all reasonable and honest citizens of the land to see the colored minority justly and fairly treated so that occurrences like those in Washington and Chicago and in the lynching states eventually cease” (“Rassenkämpfe in Washington und

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<sup>36</sup> “Es ist an der Zeit, dass der Kongress dieses Fleck auf unserem Wappenschild mit der nötigen entgegentritt und Lynchgesetz, Lynchlust und Verfolgungssucht vertilgt.”



Chicago”).<sup>37</sup> This call for action echoed in other German-Language newspapers across the nation.

*Der Sonntagsbote und der Seebote*, another Midwest German-Language newspaper based in Wisconsin, commented on the number of lynchings that occurred in the South, detailing the lynching of Lloyd Clay in Mississippi (“Lynchmorde die Schande Amerikas”). This opinion piece reprimands and blames the governor for his lack of action. The piece ends by writing, “It is truly time for the federal government to step in, the southern states can’t or won’t do anything about the lynchings and its initiators” (“Lynchmorde die Schande Amerikas”).<sup>38</sup> After the Chicago and Washington riots, *Der Sonntagsbote* chimed in again, showing support for Black communities across the nation. The article reads:

“The proximate cause of the racial struggles in Chicago is the first-generation of the colored population there and the natural striving of the same for more elbow room, for better housing conditions. The deeper reason lies in an initial awakening of colored people’s sense of self and their natural conclusion and demand that what was presented as American principles and ideals and for which they had been called upon to fight should also apply to them...” (“Die Staat geht auf”).<sup>39</sup>

The support shown in this article is abundant and echoes the ideas of many Black soldiers who fought in World War I.

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<sup>37</sup> “Es muss allen vernünftigen und ehrlichen Bürgern des Landes daran liegen, die farbige Minderheit anständig und gerecht behandelt zu sehen, damit solche Vorgänge, wie die in Washington und Chicago und in den Lynchstaaten schließlich aufhören.”

<sup>38</sup> “Es ist wahrlich an der Zeit, dass die Bundes-Regierung einschreitet, die Südstaaten können oder wollen nichts gegen die Lynchmorde und ihre Urheber unternehmen.“

<sup>39</sup> Der nächste Anlass zu den Rassekämpfen in Chicago bildet das Erstarten der farbigen Bevölkerung dort und das natürliche Streben derselben nach mehr Ellbogenraum, nach besseren Wohnungsbedingungen. Der tiefere Grund liegt in einem Erstarten des Selbstgefühls der Farbigen und deren natürlicher Folgerung und Forderung, dass, was (continued from page 19): als amerikanische Grundsätze und Ideale hingestellt wurde und für das zu kämpfen sie aufgefordert worden waren, auch für sie gelte...

Similarly, an opinion piece published after Chicago race riots published in the *Der Staats-Anzeiger* out of Rugby, North Dakota titled “Die Rassenfrage, ‘gelöst’” criticizes Thaddeus Caraway, a racist Arkansas congressman, and the people who voted this congressman into office. The article begins by sarcastically praising Caraway for finding a “simple solution” to the race issue, which, as the article states, is what “the best minds of the nation have been racking their brains over for half a century” (“Die Rassenfrage, ‘gelöst’”).<sup>40</sup> The “simple solution” in questions refers to a bill the Caraway proposed which, if passed, would have barred black people from serving in the military. The article even calls Caraway “immortally ridiculous” and writes that it’s on congress to remove him and those who “have the same mind,” arguing that only through doing so would it “counteract the harmful effect of the proposal on the mood of the negroes” (“Die Rassenfrage, ‘gelöst’”).<sup>41</sup> Going even further, the article scolds Caraway for even proposing a bill like this because it could spark another race riot.

After the Omaha race riot, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne* published an article titled “Ursache und Lehre.” The article begins by blaming the police and city administration for not protecting Will Brown from the mob. They write, “...this terror of blood and fire became possible only through the complete incompetence, unconscionability and stupidity of our police and city administration,” arguing that the administration knew about the “impending danger” (“Ursache und Lehre”).<sup>42</sup> The article continues by stating that since the United States’ entrance into World War I, the “[the causes of the factitious spirit] has not only been tolerated by unofficial and official sources in our country, but has even been encouraged as a supposed

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<sup>40</sup> „...seit einem halben Jahrhundert die besten Geister der Nation vergeblich sich die Köpfe zerbrochen haben“

<sup>41</sup> „...der unheilvollen Wirkung des Antrags auf die Stimmung der Neger wirksam entgegenarbeiten“

<sup>42</sup> „Möglich geworden...ist dieser Terror von Blut und Feuer nur durch die vollständige Unfähigkeit, Gewissenlosigkeit und Dummheit unserer Polizei und Stadtverwaltung...“

patriotic spirit.”<sup>43</sup> They argue that this spirit of violence preys upon “blameless and defenseless citizens.”<sup>44</sup> They report that when Keith Neville, the Nebraska Governor at the time, was questioned to address the criticisms, he responded by blaming the victims, saying they “had only themselves to blame, that their behavior toward the government’s war efforts had not earned them a better fate.”<sup>45</sup> To counter this claim, the article notes that German-Americans who “had been citizens for years” and who “had taken their share of the war burdens upon themselves, were taken out of their homes in the night, tarred, and feathered.”<sup>46</sup> The article claims that in this instance, the “local, county, state, and even federal authorities” did nothing to help German-Americans, but rather, they were called “traitors to the national cause.” Closing the article, the author ends by calling out the press, arguing that they portrayed the instigators of Omaha’s riot “as the genuine patriots and their unlawful acts as patriotic acts.”<sup>47</sup> They end the article by arguing that in order to prevent mob violence, law and justice must be upheld for every American citizen, making an explicit link between the violence against the German-Americans and Black Americans.

A common thread among German-language newspapers is their consistent call to action directed at both federal and city leaders. Numerous opinion pieces criticized these officials for not addressing the issue of violence plaguing the nations and their failure to intervene during the riots. During the months of the Red Summer, German-language newspapers had a range of

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<sup>43</sup> „den Ursachen des Rottengeistes ... leider in unserem Staate seit dem Eintritt Amerikas in den Weltkrieg von unoffizieller und offizieller Seite nicht nur geduldet, sondern als vermeintlicher patriotischer Geist sogar ermutigt wurde.“

<sup>44</sup> „schuld- und wehrlosen Bürgern“

<sup>45</sup> „...seien selbst schuld, durch ihr Verhalten den Kriegsbestrebungen der Regierung gegenüber hätten sie kein besseres Los verdient.“

<sup>46</sup> „...Deutsche, die seit Jahren Bürger waren, die ihren Teil der Kriegslasten auf sich genommen, in der Nacht aus ihren Häusern herausgeholt und geteert gefedert?“

<sup>47</sup> „...diese Hetzer als die waschechten Patrioten und ihre ungesetzlichen Handlungen als vaterländliche Taten hingestellt?“

responses. Some newspapers, like the *Sonntagsbote* and the *Vorbote*, took strong stances against racism, criticizing the injustices against the Black community. Other newspapers, like the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne*, were cautious in their responses when condemning racism and mob violence, though, occasionally, they used racist rhetoric when reporting on the events. In the end, however, the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne*, would come to draw a connection between the violence done to their own community a few years earlier and to the Black community in 1919. Though there was a range of responses from German-language newspapers, many opposed racism and condemned mob violence.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis looks at the targeting of marginalized communities during World War I, specifically after the US entered the war. It delves into the German-American perspective of Anti-German Sentiment and the Red Summer of 1919, examining the way in which German-Americans discussed these events while simultaneously attempting to write these historical events as presented in the German-language press. Throughout the Anti-German Sentiment, German-American newspapers advocated for their right to publish in their native language, while also strategically including statements of loyalty to the United States to ensure their survival within the American press. During the Red Summer, many of the German-language newspapers presented in this thesis advocated for the rights of Black Americans, while some newspapers, like the *Tägliche Omaha Tribüne*, were slow to drop racist narratives. Eventually, however, they began advocating for the rights of Black Americans and making an explicit connection between the marginalization between the German-American and Black American communities.

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