

## Introduction

DURING THE early spring in 1918, Fritz Monat, a forty-two-year-old coal miner from Staunton, Illinois, was visiting family near St. Thomas in Cole County, Missouri. For several days, primarily during stops at taverns in Jefferson City, he boasted about having been born in Germany and expressed the hope that his birth country would win the Great War. A “Committee of Citizens” followed his movements throughout the city for several days to gather evidence of his disloyal behavior. On April 5, 1918, twenty-five committee members decided that Monat had expressed enough unpatriotic thoughts and that he should be punished. The incensed committee members nabbed him, took him to McClung Park, removed his shirt, threw several buckets of cold water on his back, and then “whipped [him] with a rawhide” until he apologized for his expressions and agreed to kiss the American flag. The group then took him to the Jefferson Theater and compelled him to kneel before a large audience, to apologize again for his remarks, and to kiss the flag. Members of the audience, who initially thought the incident funny and part of an act, quickly realized its seriousness when committee members warned the audience that they would deal in the same manner with other “disloyal utterances.”<sup>1</sup>

Local and regional newspapers reinforced this warning. The editor of the *Missouri Volksfreund*, the German-language newspaper in Jefferson City, suggested that people should not express opposition to the government during times of emergency and that the government would punish such actions more severely in the future. The *Tipton Times*, in neighboring Moniteau County, stated that Monat would realize now that “fealty to the Fatherland with an utter disregard for his adopted state and everything that a true American should hold dear is not in keeping with good citizenship.”<sup>2</sup>

At first glance this incident appears no different from any other incident in the widespread frenzy directed against German speakers living in heavily German-populated communities of the Midwest during the First World War. Frederick C. Luebke, still recognized as the leading historian on the subject, argued that during the “strong wave of anti-German hysteria” of World War I “citizens of German origin” experienced persecution and confronted “serious efforts . . . to eliminate German language and culture in the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Chicagoans, for example, “spied on, terrorized, investigated, jailed and discharged [German-Americans] from their jobs in an effort to produce ‘100% Americanism.’” Iowa’s governor W. L. Harding proclaimed that no person could speak German in public or on the telephone. Indiana’s State Teachers’ Association urged the elimination of German in elementary schools.<sup>4</sup> According to several historians this “hatred and persecution of German cultural manifestations” during the war struck a “sharp and powerful blow” at the German-American community by erasing its distinct culture from the nation.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of social, economic, and political relationships at the local level in Missouri, however, reveals a much more complex truth that does not fit well with the bleak portrayal of the German-American experience during the Great War. This case study of Missouri in the context of the Midwest demonstrates that aggression toward German-Americans during World War I occurred in communities where personal relationships and emphasis on local enforcement of national war effort guidelines, not ethnicity itself, created suspicions. (By “German-Americans” I mean those persons, whether U.S. citizens or not, who were born in Germany and those whose heritage included a parent or grandparent born in Germany. By “Americans” and “Missourians” I mean persons whose heritage is other than German.)<sup>6</sup> In-depth evaluation of anti-German sentiment in Missouri, such as accusations of unpatriotic behavior, arrests under the Espionage Act, job loss, property destruction, and renaming of businesses or streets, evidenced in public documents and newspapers, revealed that Missouri Germans did not entirely escape charges of disloyalty. Nevertheless, they were not the subject of widespread hate crimes and

ethnically targeted legislation German-Americans experienced in midwestern states such as Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.<sup>7</sup>

Missouri was unique in several ways. Its legislature did not meet during the war, and its governor did not perceive the need for an emergency session. Missouri's political culture, or "Show-Me" attitude, also encouraged individualism as well as minimal government interference in traditional social and economic structures.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the Missouri Council of Defense, the organization in charge of the war effort, advocated volunteerism, opposed any form of mob violence, and appealed to German speakers to turn hesitant German-Americans into enthusiastic patriots. At the same time, strong labor union and socialist traditions in St. Louis and a social and religious culture opposed to government interference in Missouri resulted in pockets of anti-war sentiment. Consequently, appearance of loyalty based on local expectations or definitions shaped behavior. For example, less than enthusiastic individuals, whom zealous supporters viewed with suspicion, often diverted attention from themselves by harassing persons who openly criticized the government and the war. Complicating the situation was the desire by several Americans of German extraction to impress their sense of patriotism upon their neighbors even if that meant reporting fellow German-Americans for disloyal behavior to the authorities. German-Americans in Missouri thus experienced harassment, not persecution, during the war, at times at the hands of descendants of German immigrants. Physical violence was limited to individuals, such as Fritz Monat, who flaunted disloyal behavior.

This work also revises the conventional wisdom that the so-called persecution of everything German resulted in the eradication of German culture. Evidence indicates that the acculturation process varied by locality and German-Americans in several Missouri communities were able to preserve aspects of their ethnic culture despite the war. In Missouri the war thus did not have the same devastating impact on German culture as historians argue it had in other midwestern states. Recent studies about Germans in Texas and New England found similar experience and results.<sup>9</sup>

This book not only offers new insight into the history of Missouri, the debate over the intensity of the anti-German sentiment and its impact on German culture in the United States, but it also encourages more nuanced community studies in the Midwest to better understand the events during the Great War and the treatment of minority groups in general. For example, Katja Wüstenbecker's recent study evaluates the German-American experience in several midwestern states by concentrating on urban centers, including Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis, but takes little note of events

in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> Historians should recognize that Americans and immigrants interact with each other everywhere on the local level—at work, during recreation, while shopping—and construct perceptions of themselves and each other through these interactions. Minorities are not homogeneous or united groups; instead, we need to understand relationships at the local level, within the ethnic group, and with the dominant culture before we can draw sweeping conclusions and apply them to the larger picture. Studies of ethnic soldiers in the United States military during the Great War, for example, have demonstrated that the military for pragmatic reasons was ethnically pluralistic and more tolerant than civilian authorities.<sup>11</sup> Such studies are also pertinent to the discussion of the legitimacy of dissent and its effectiveness during wartime, a subject that has resurfaced alongside ethnic scapegoating in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

Missouri is the perfect setting for a detailed study of the German-American experience during the Great War because it has many different German settlements, ranging from a large urban population in St. Louis to rural homogeneous town clusters such as Hermann in Gasconade County and Westphalia in Osage County. This allows the historian to compare and contrast various relationships among Germans, interactions between Germans, various ethnic groups, and the dominant culture, urban versus rural life, the complexities that informed the definition of loyalty, the reasons for distrust, and the multifaceted and complicated factors that contributed to the demise of German culture in some areas and its preservation in others.

The phenomenon of being one-hundred-percent American, that is, being absolutely loyal and devoted to the United States and no other country, had its roots in the years before World War I. German immigrants had been coming to the United States since the late seventeenth century, and the majority of those arriving in the nineteenth century settled in the Midwest, including Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Missouri. Although German immigrants and their children had experienced a brief period of nativism in the 1850s, Americans in general accepted them into society without opposition. Changes in migration patterns, however, changed that favorable pattern.

From 1897 through 1914, immigration numbers rose rapidly and so did the numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern European nations who settled in America. Americans were not willing to overlook these strangers because they differed in ethnic and religious backgrounds from the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants from northern and western Europe who had built the nation. In their minds, these “new” immigrants were not the independent-minded individuals who established businesses or the rugged farmers who subdued the soil in the West. Instead, they were unskilled laborers who worked

for lower wages, settled in tenement districts in industrial areas, and competed for jobs with the native born. American nativists singled out these foreigners as the causes for disruptive worker strikes, corrupt urban political machines, consumption of alcohol, and increasing squalor and poverty.<sup>13</sup> Progressive reformers thought that curtailing immigration and Americanizing foreigners would end alcoholism, corruption, poverty, and unemployment. Factories and cities throughout the nation established evening adult education classes to teach newcomers English, prepare them for citizenship, and Americanize them. Immigrants had to forsake the traditions of their homelands and adopt the language, ideals, and customs of their new country, the United States. By 1914, however, nativism had not yet been strong enough to influence immigration legislation and eliminate dual allegiance to the homeland and the United States.<sup>14</sup>

World War I and the fear that the enemy would destroy American democracy and liberty increased the anxieties and suspicions nativists harbored toward foreigners. The unprecedented mobilization of material and human resources demanded total loyalty and devotion to the nation and its higher purpose of ridding the world of German militarism. The slightest opposition seemed to hamper the war effort and to support the enemy. Nationalistic, or paranoid, citizens thought the only way to gain some sense of security was to make sure that everyone thought alike. Patriotism became a duty, and an individual had to subordinate personal rights and needs to the welfare and survival of the country.<sup>15</sup> In this context, Germans, who by 1917 still constituted the largest single nationality among the foreign born and who were related to the enemy, attracted what John Higham called “the plain and simple accusation in which every type of xenophobia culminated: the charge of disloyalty, the gravest sin in the morality of nationalism.”<sup>16</sup> Americans demanded an end to divided loyalties to assure America’s safety.

Searching for the roots of harassment and the meaning of loyalty during World War I in Missouri reveals how the language of patriotism and ethnic disloyalty concealed the real factors that contributed to mistrust and hostility during that war. Personal relationships and local circumstances, rather than ethnicity itself, were the factors that generated suspicions and superpatriotic activities such as the Monat incident. The event occurred in Jefferson City, the capital and seat of government of the state of Missouri. Because the Missouri legislature did not meet during U.S. participation in World War I, the governor and the Missouri Council of Defense, whom the governor had appointed upon the instructions of the National Council of Defense, represented authority in the state during this period. Governor Gardner, in order to

mobilize the state, called for “one people, one sentiment, and one flag; ready to cooperate, ready to sacrifice, ready to suffer.”<sup>17</sup> The council attempted to use the powers granted to it by federal officials to whip up support for the war. Impromptu rallies expressing community support for the war, financially successful Liberty Loan drives, and high membership numbers for the Red Cross indeed demonstrated patriotism and loyalty during the early weeks of the war.<sup>18</sup> As the number of complaints about disloyal behavior sent to the Council of Defense increased by late 1917 council members became aware of a “widespread lack of popular sentiment for the war.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, they reacted to problems within the state and encouraged more forceful approaches to preserve the state’s patriotic image.

The evidence also illustrates that council members, including Chairman Frederick Mumford and Secretary William Saunders, recognized that they were not all-powerful and knew their limitations. Council officials in their correspondence with county council members admitted that legally they could not force compliance with mobilization guidelines but had to rely instead on volunteerism, friendly coercion, and intimidation as tools to maintain the state’s patriotic image. The governor’s public announcements also informed county officials that they were in charge of ensuring compliance with government guidelines for the home front. Thus, local enforcement power relationships shaped the reaction to real and suspected disloyalty. Consequently, citizens of Jefferson City were likely to hear or read about the government’s task to unite public opinion in favor of the war and the council’s mission to carry out the war effort in Missouri. They also thought that it was their responsibility to assure patriotism at the local level because the state council had delegated such power to county councils.

Fritz Monat was born in Germany but so were many residents of Jefferson City, a community with a sizable second and third generation German-American population, and they did not experience public flogging.<sup>20</sup> Instead, his public and disloyal expressions marked him as a supporter of the enemy. Furthermore, he was a union member and suspected socialist from Staunton, Illinois. Residents of Jefferson City read St. Louis newspapers and probably knew about the mob activities directed against union workers in Staunton during the winter and spring months of 1918, that resulted in the tarring and feathering of two members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and hundreds of workers kissing the American flag.<sup>21</sup> “Loyalist vigilantes” there used war anxieties, the perceived need to silence pro-Germans, and the language of patriotism to justify this violent treatment of workers while covering up factionalism in the union and a long history of mistrust between labor

and management as the real reasons to eliminate the IWW and socialists in the coal-mining region of southwestern Illinois.<sup>22</sup>

On February 22, 1918, Jefferson City experienced its “first I.W.W. experience” when police had to save W. H. Edwards, a suspected “I.W.W. agitator,” from an angry mob after he gave a speech criticizing the work of the Red Cross, the YMCA and the government.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, six weeks later, concerned citizens viewed Monat not only as a bragging German but also as a union member from Staunton and thus as a real threat to the harmony and reputation of the seat of government for Missouri. They decided to act quickly and decisively to preserve peace and coerce conformity during the upcoming Third Liberty Loan campaign.<sup>24</sup> Monat’s punishment thus had dual purpose. Residents of Jefferson City, including German-Americans, saved the city from potentially violent labor or mob unrest and, at the same time, eliminated charges of disloyalty for the entire community. This one violent act, which newspaper editors including German-American editors supported, was enough to silence opposition. The relative tranquility during the remaining months of the war as well as the maintenance of local control also allowed German-Americans to weather the storm and preserve many aspects of their German culture in the city despite the war.