

## America's True "Silent Majority"!

*More Americans trace their ancestry to Germany than any other ethnic or racial group within the United States. But how many Americans know that if you took a blood test of a composite American, the largest unit of his blood would be German? This demographic also excludes the millions of descendants of Austrian and Swiss immigrants among others who came here during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from German speaking lands and /or communities throughout Europe. Unlike their Anglo, Irish, Polish, Italian, Hispanic, Jewish or African American contemporaries, most German Americans today are hesitant to call attention to their ethnic heritage for the ghost of the Nazi holocaust still (irrationally and undeservedly) continues to intimidate them. Historically, however, German Americans had always found themselves in cultural shootouts with the reigning Anglo Saxon American establishment whenever and wherever they settled in America. It was upon the United States' entry into World War One, however, that the death knell of their once proud German American consciousness would first be sounded. This is German Chicago's experience at that time!*

### Recap from Part IV

As World War One ended most German Americans were emotionally numb after four years of severe stress on the psyche of the ethnic self identity. The government sanctioned, openly prejudicial psychological assault on their once proud German American consciousness left an emotional scar that has never completely healed. Tired of persecution and compromising situations that German ethnic identity might incite, the war hastened their assimilation, especially among the second and third generations. Intimidated by what had transpired during the war years and leery of calling attention to themselves as German Americans, many found it easier to drop the hyphen and get on with their lives.

### The War's Aftermath

Not only had Germany lost the war, it was being vindictively carved up by the Allies German Americans had been coerced to support under the guise of patriotism and Wilsonian idealism. The *Abendpost* in late November 1918 was quick to point out that now that Germany had been defeated, the Allies would prefer to push America and Wilson's peace program off to the side in order to pursue their own narrow self interests which had caused the war in the first place. While obvious to German Americans, Teddy Roosevelt and all the other

all they had supported was England's own national interests and the American bankers who had financed them. The wartime slogan "America for Americans" used to keep the hyphenates in line should be changed to "Americans for America" and our objectives, not the self serving interests of the Allies who could not have won the war without us.<sup>i</sup> Within a few short years of the war's end, many in the United States, aside from German Americans, began to look back with regret on the wartime hysteria their government and press had stirred up during the war, especially in light of the "peace" our Allies had concocted at Versailles and the unpopular treaty it drafted. The *Nation*, a popular national magazine, chastised the American press for not "admitting its share in the wholesale deceit of the American people" when certain wartime leaders later admitted that, "The press accounts leading us into the war were nothing but propaganda":

## Wartime Hysteria and the Psychological Assault on German American Consciousness in Chicago during WWI! Conclusion

Everybody realizes that the columns of most of our dailies were filled to overflowing with lies and poison propaganda during the war; these were inevitable concomitants of war, lying deceit, murder and crimes of every kind are war, but now that the war is over, is there not enough manhood left in the American press to record the historical facts as to the great struggle. We hoped there was when Sir Philip Gibbs brought out his recantation, his apology for his part in the campaign of deceit and suppression which brought the United States into the war. . . .<sup>ii</sup>

As the *Nation* indicated, the truth was not only the first casualty of the war, it would remain the last. Anglo Saxon Americans were loathe to see the damage to the German ethnic character undone. There was too much at stake. The smear job done on the Germans would not only suffice as an example to other proud hyphenated Americans, the unpopular Prohibition Amendment needed all the support it could get.

It would take some time for German Americans to marginally reassert themselves, and, in reality, they would regain only a fraction of their former, pre war confidence when the Nazi curse took hold in the fatherland. German language instruction, however, was again permitted in Chicago public schools, and German clubs and societies resumed their activities, but it was more due to the energy of the older generation who were active in the pre war years than from their sons and daughters.

Post war immigration under the National Origins Act (1924) surprisingly favored the Germans, and these immigrants, not having experienced the wartime hysteria themselves, would also bolster attempts to revive the German American spirit (some to excess, i.e. the pro Nazi *German American Bund*). However, as the Nazi debacle in Germany progressed into World War Two, and the horrors of the holocaust were revealed, German Americans were again forced on the defensive. This time around life on the home front during World War Two was markedly less harsh, though we now know there were forced deportations and internments of Japanese, German and Italian Americans. In the main, however, German Americans were far more cautious in displaying their partiality, for memories were still fresh, and there were less German born members of German American organizations. The second and third generations were thus further removed emotionally the old "fatherland."

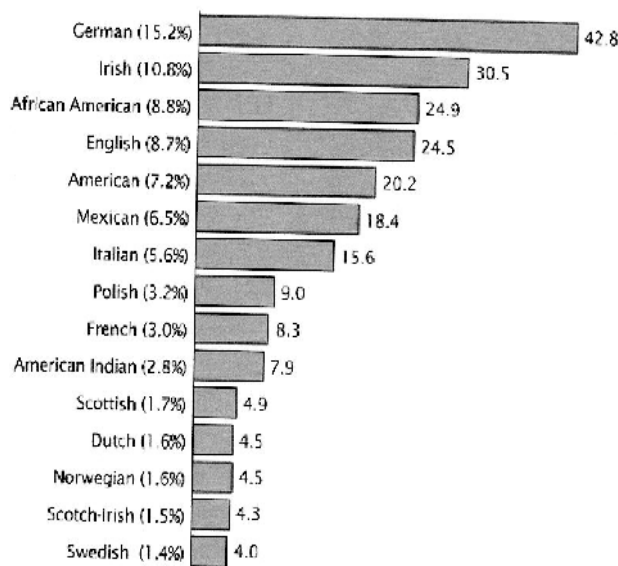
The "Vereins Kalender," a directory of all German American organizations within Chicagoland, which is posted in the *Eintracht*, Chicago's last remaining German language weekly, lists 64 active clubs, societies and associations (including the GADA). Of these, however, no more than a handful predate World War One. More over, even these, as the

overwhelming majority of the rest of those listed, are comprised predominantly of Germans who immigrated after World War Two. In other words, second, third and fourth generation German Americans are conspicuously absent from the membership rolls of these organizations.<sup>iii</sup>

The 2000 US Census (the 2010 Census is the first census not to record European ethnic ancestry), though, shows that German Americans are still the largest ethnic designation in America today. In Chicago itself, a 2007 a US Census Community Survey indicates that Germans are still only barely second to the Irish whose numbers though have been increased by new immigrants in recent years from Ireland. In Cook County, however, the Germans (11.4 percent) command a slight lead over the Irish (10.3) and Polish (9.7).

### Lingering Residue

These results may be surprising to many Americans and even to many German Americans themselves, for Americans of German descent are the least vocal, least visible and least likely to call attention to themselves of any ethnic group in present day "multi cultural" America. Today, when "hyphenism," as it was called a hundred years ago, or "diversity," as it is presently called, is rewarded, German Americans are silent: a far cry, indeed, from their heyday in pre World War One America. Now it is rare for German Americans to claim their heritage outside of census inquiries unlike their fellow non German citizens. There seems to be a subliminal fear, an unwarranted, knee jerk, guilt reflex or stigma linked to their German ethnicity that they are uncomfortable



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

with. A fear of being called "hun" or "Nazi" seems hard to overcome given the continuing preoccupation of the media with Germany's past. As former Chicago TV weatherman Harry Volkman reflected in an interview for a German American radio show in the Spring of 1993:

In my community, at my workplace, I'm surrounded by people who are proud of their background, their roots, where they came from, but I found so few people who own up to German background. This frankly aggravated me, when I found people who are sort of hiding or saying they were ashamed. . . . They

wouldn't come out to see a German parade or be happy of the fact they have German background. . . . I've suffered insults for no reason from people just because of my name. They think I fought for the Third Reich, while (in reality) I was in the American Army and my father served in the American Army in World War One. I resent that kind of thing! . . . . In my own way I just hold up the banner and say I'm proud. . . . We should emphasize the positive aspects, there is so much to offer, but I decry the putting down and I will not be intimidated by anyone who tries to throw up to me that I'm responsible for something bad!<sup>iv</sup>

Rarely expressed publicly, these comments are the residue of an anti German sentiment which originated during World War One, solidified during WWII and which, unfortunately, continues to plague the psyche of Americans of German descent today.

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