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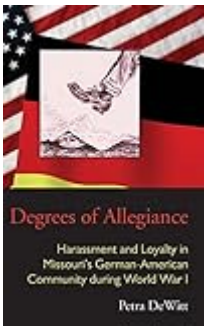
Petra DeWitt. *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouri's German-American Community during World War I.* Law, Society, and Politics in the Midwest Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012. x + 257 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-2003-4.



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Ghosts Everywhere

Petra DeWittâs *Degrees of Allegiance: Harassment and Loyalty in Missouriâs German-American Community during World War I* is a detailed account of local conditions leading up to and during the Great War, and their effect on German cultural identity and assimilation in that state. The first three chapters focus on a broad analysis of the condition of German culture, its distribution in Missouri around the Neutral Years (1914-17), and its place in the national context. The other three chapters drill down to three more focused case studies that examine the enforcement of loyalty in two rural counties and St. Louis.

This highly localized focus, coupled with a comparative approach meant to juxtapose rural and urban experiences of how the war shaped the German-American cultural experience, drives to the heart of DeWittâs larger purpose in this work. Taking aim squarely at the likes of Frederick C. Luebke and Leslie Tischauser, DeWitt aims to revise the common assumption that follows from their work: that during the strong wave of anti-German hysteria of World War I, citizens of German origin confronted persecution so intense that it âstruck a sharp and powerful blow at the German-American cultural community by erasing its distinct culture from the nationâ (p. 3). DeWitt proposes that by analyzing the âsocial, economic, and political relationships at the local level in Missouri,â her work âreveals a much more complex truth that does not fit well with the bleak portrayal of the German-American experience during the Great War.â While she does not suggest that Missouri Germans escaped charges of disloyalty altogether, DeWitt shows that they âwere not the subject of widespread hate crimes and ethnically targeted legislation [that] German-Americans experienced in midwestern states such as Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsinâ (p. 3).

Studying public documents and newspapers, the author found instances of âaccusations of unpatriotic behaviour, arrests under the espionage act, job loss, property destruction, and renaming of businesses or streets,â as well as efforts to push German language out of such spaces as churches, schools, and other institutions scrutinized by a loyalty-demanding public that was unsym-

pathetic to Germansâ desires to continue cultural traditions. However, DeWitt argues that the German-American experience was contingent on the alignment of âlocal relationshipsâ that âinformed definitions of loyalty, shaped prejudices and maltreatment during the war, and influenced the degree of acculturation after the war.â Where Luebke found that German-American âassociational structures were dismantled,â DeWittâs case study of Missouri shows that this population, âespecially those in rural areas, maintained German associations, even German language well beyond the warâ (p. 3). For DeWitt, this âraises the question whether community studies and the search for the origin of aggression and the meaning of loyalty in other states may not also find that the impact of World War I on German-Americans there was less devastating than previously thoughtâ (p. 167).

Chapters 1 through 3 offer a thorough survey of the years leading up to American entry into the Great War, giving readers a sense of the historical foundations for the divided opinions and growing suspicions that were manifested in demands for absolute loyalty in the neutral and wartime years. There is a great deal that can be gleaned from these early chapters, not least a synthesized overview of historical and geographical distribution, demographics, and movement of the German population in Missouri. True to the opening emphasis of the book, DeWitt is careful to emphasize the rural areas (by county)–in addition to the substantial German population in St. Louis–that became chief settlement areas for the German diaspora.

Curiously, after spending a substantial portion of the work mapping out the distribution of German settlers and immigrants in Missouri, DeWitt qualifies that âsimply plotting the numbers of German immigrants who settled Missouri by counties can be misleading because Germans were not evenly distributed in this so-called German beltâ; in other words, a strictly geographical view risks overlooking the heterogeneous origins and character of said settlements. As the author notes, the vigor with which certain communities adhered, for example, to religious or educational institutions anchored in German language and cultural customs, as well as the exposure that certain areas (especially rural ones) had to outside scrutiny and sociopolitical influence, was âimportant to German settlement, the success of these settlements, and the preservation of certain German cultural and social traditionsâ (pp. 16-17). This point exemplifies a subliminal tension that runs through the entire work: the tension between a social scientific method searching for generalizable conclusions and a sense that the experience of agents at the local level actually makes such conclusions untenable.

Of course, historians who study the European settlement of North America will benefit from the nuanced picture DeWitt uses to show that the process of acculturation is a âcomplex, multifaceted, and individual process of discarding old traditions, adopting new customs, and fusing several old and new traits into a new identityâ (p. 17). The early chapters offer a convincing, locally focused analysis that shows how many Missouri Germans gradually hyphenated their subjectivities, maintaining traditional religious or civic holidays, sports, and language, but melding, balancing, or adopting new ones to create new practices and customs that were more recognizably âAmerican.â This idea of the sociological contingency of immigrant and settler experiences gives the work an important depth.

Chapter 2 also convincingly shows how, by the time of the Neutral Years, even a hyphenated identity was increasingly insufficient for most German-Americans who were having to navigate the jingoistic, hypernationalistic terrain of that period. The proliferation of pro-British propaganda and popular support for the allies, as well as the rhetorical grandstanding that came with the presidential campaign of 1916 (when Theodore Roosevelt famously proclaimed hyphenated Americans as not âtrue Americansâ), generated a new scrutiny on German-Americansâ actions, cultivating suspicions about the potential threat that such a large population could pose to Anglophile interests, should it be unified in supporting Germany (p. 36). As DeWitt notes, while most German-American newspapers supported Woodrow Wilsonâs diplomacy and stance on neutrality, their cohesion around fund-raising efforts, coupled with the open dissent of a few high-profile political elites and labor organizations toward efforts for preparedness, âattracted unwanted attention and created an impression of ethnic unity that, although contrary to reality, influenced how Missourians perceived German-Americansâ (p. 44).

On this front, DeWitt offers an important look at how German-Missouriansâ near-universal opposition to Prohibition foregrounded their difference from the Anglo majority and helped construct them as a sleeping ethnic giant. Her work is at its most interesting when it describes how sensationalized news of saboteurs and antipatriotism from across the nation bred superstition, leading Missourians to âsee ghosts everywhereâ (pp. 52-53). In this context, the efforts of German-Americans to appear neutral rather than antiwar, whether through tem-

pered opposition to conscription or accusations that capitalists and commercial interests were pushing the United States into war, made them and their associations (particularly labor and the church) soft targets for hyper-patriotism.

Despite the authorâs emphasis on the ideal of loyalty as highly mediated by local conditions, chapter 3 takes a distinctly national view, focusing on the place of Missouri in mobilization after Wilsonâs declaration of war. While other historians have described an âAmerican Reign of Terror,â âconducted under the guise of patriotismâ and including pro-Entente propaganda depicting Germans as barbarians and legislation aimed at German spies and traitors, DeWitt proposes that Missourians rarely resorted to violence âto coerce conformity or teach perceived un-Americans a lesson in patriotismâ (pp. 59, 61). There were some close calls, but these were âthe exception, not the norm, in Missouri during the warâ (p. 61). Although she admits anti-German sentiment existed, DeWitt argues that the infrequency of violent events suggests that the hysteria and widespread fear of the enemy found (or assumed) elsewhere are overstated, overgeneralized, or both. Although it is possible some events were not reported, DeWitt proposes that the basically peaceful approach to dealing with disloyalty reveals that Missourians abided by and enforced the law, showed restraint, and limited vigilante justice.

DeWittâs boldest and most problematic argument follows from the observation above. Specifically, she proposes that âone factor in the lack of violence is the possible existence of a general sentiment of opposition to government interference in daily life as a result of war.... In contrast to many mid-westerners who held a more favorable view of government in general, rural southerners held a generally negative perception of the war effort. Despite a public perception of virulent southern support for war, southern populists, rural democrats, and socialists had opposed preparedness for war during the neutrality period, disapproved of apparent inequalities in exemptions from military service and rejected the financial profit of northern industrialists and financiers.... Many Missourians were less than enthusiastic about the war effortâ (p. 62).

As long as one did not overtly express pro-German thoughts and bring attention to an area, Missourians, regardless of ethnic background, initially left each other alone–at least until the United States entered the war as a belligerent. Moreover, DeWitt argues, even those apparatuses of the Missouri state government that were tasked with mobilizing for war, or with ensuring loyalty and patriotism, were less zealous in their duties than those in other states. To illustrate this difference, DeWitt describes the Missouri Council of Defense, which was âthe sole coordinating body between the national government, state departments, and citizens of Missouri during the warâ (p. 64). Because Missouriâs General Assembly was not in session during the war, its Council of Defense could only use powers delegated by the congressionally approved Council of National Defense; and even then, it had to rely on private donations to cover operating costs. This, DeWitt concludes, fit well into the stateâs political culture, which emphasized ââindividualismâ and âtraditionalismâ or a minimalistic government and preservation of traditional social and political orderâ (pp. 65).

DeWitt is right to note that Missouriâs laissez-faireism and anti-interventionist culture likely blunted the effects of interpersonal violence that was either underwritten by or goaded on by apparatuses of state government. However, the rest of the book, following after this substantial general observation, fails to flesh out the lessons and consequences of such a political culture built on a very de-stated, traditionalist social order. Instead, the next three chapters move to a comparative case study format meant to highlight the local variations or âdegreesâ of loyalty that developed in particular local contexts. Chapter 4 focuses on the case study of St. Louis, where the author notes that para-governmental and vigilante loyalty groups were established early, because, as a metropolitan center, the city was exposed to flows of people and ideas that rural areas were not. This exposure explains, for DeWitt, why âSt. Louisans defined the enemy within much sooner and in ethnic terms, were more easily frightened, and more likely to spy on each other, accuse neighbors of disloyal behavior, turn them over to the authorities, and use intimidation and violence to deal with perceived disloyal behaviorâ (pp. 84-85). This is how St. Louis became a major site of purges of German-named spaces, job losses, violence, and legal action in Missouri, as an âan oppressive climate of coercive patriotismâ quickly targeted any organization or customs that presented a âpublic image of unity and ethnic prideâ (p. 95).

Chapter 5 serves as juxtaposition to this stark urban experience, zooming in on the German-American populationâs efforts in Gasconade County to navigate the pressures of demands for 100 percent Americanism, loyalty, and patriotism. Unlike the German-Americans of St. Louis, those in Gasconade County did not experience

the same pressure to Americanize in the Neutral Years, managing to maintain many of their German traditions throughout the neutrality period. However, this resulted in even tougher scrutiny once the United States did declare war, when efforts to hang on to German culture in the county suddenly drew unwelcome scrutiny.

By contrast, the German-Americans of Osage–the focus of chapter 6–were early to embrace the super-loyalty cultivated by war. Geographically divided along ethnic and party lines by the time of the 1916 elections, and on the eve of Americaâs entry into the war, the partisan political environment there actually created conditions for a quicker acceptance of hyper-patriotism, as German-Americans were exposed to more hyperbolic expressions of patriotism and the concomitant fear of persecution should they not tow the loyalty line. Dewitt argues that the definition of disloyalty in Osage County during the first year of the war hinged on a number of factors: personal sacrifice through enlistment in military service, adherence to draft guidelines, food conservation, and bond purchases. All of these demonstrated Osage Countyâs patriotism and made it less of a lightning rod for accusations of disloyalty later.

Comparing Osage County with the other two case studies, DeWitt seeks to convince readers that regional differences in circumstances and events created different ideals and frameworks for what constituted patriotism and loyalty, so that âthe definition of patriotism at the local level shaped the treatment of opponents to the Great Warâ (p. 152). And *Degrees of Loyalty* succeeds in showing that history told with attention to local matters. However, some assumptions about power, and the relationship of the state to violence, are not adequately interrogated. In this sense, DeWittâs work is haunted by ghosts of its own–specters that deeply inform the direction and assumptions of the work, but that never seem to materialize through empirical examination. Chief among these assumptions is a particular hierarchy of violence, one that seems to treat interpersonal, *bodily* violence as a more egregious form of violence than the systematic structural violence that pressures segments of a population into military service, tracks loyalty through color coded card systems, systematically prosecutes people under the Espionage Act, or breeds a paranoia so intense that neighbors interpreted many banal German customs as shows of disloyalty.

This reader was left wanting a better explanation of how the âshow me,â and antigovernment intervention political culture of Missouri, despite all the local differences, might have translated into particular power dynamics that applied across locales. For example, what can be learned from the fact that Missouri relied so heavily on a para-governmental organization, like the Missouri Council of Defense, and never convened its General Assembly? How did the absence of such political apparatuses, and the reliance on âtraditionâ or âsocial order,â frame the contours of what constituted acceptable dissent for German-Americans? While the political culture may have made spectacular acts of interpersonal (i.e., bodily) violence (such as tarring and feathering) less common, what forms of *structural* violence and persecution were enabled by this political culture? The quiet control of social order can be just as violent as state-centered or state-sponsored physical violence, and in fact can work in more veiled and hegemonic ways, controlling antiwar discourse by more deeply entrenching existing elites and the apparatuses of society that are often beyond the influence of regular citizens.