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American Nazism: Whiteness and the German-American Bund

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Abstract

The German-American Bund of the 1930s represents the peak of the American Nazi movement. This paper investigates the organizational history and cultural position of this group, and sites its story within a broader narrative of whiteness and immigration in the United States. The German American Bund was neither ideologically marginal nor a serious threat to the social order. I contend that the GAB represented an highly visible version of endemic American white supremacy. Their insistence on their own whiteness and the unfitness of non-whites is an example of a deeply American phenomenon, that of a recently-integrated immigrant group aggressively patrolling the borders of a whiteness into which they themselves are only provisionally incorporated. I contend that reactions against the Bund were characterized by the language of pathology and difference, and that the American mainstream viewed the GAB as a specifically foreign, invasive, immigrant group, rather than as a product of the American context. Anti-Bund activity was fueled by ideas of the alien, the un-American immigrant, and the foreign invader as much as by any strongly anti-racist ethical stance.

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Introduction and Research Outline

It is tempting to begin an account of the German American Bund with a dramatic account of the day that represents the peak of its influence and visibility. Many authors have done so. The facts of the occasion, a ‘Monster Mass Rally’ at Madison Square Garden in New York City, certainly provide a frisson of consternation when related in vivid prose. This much is agreed upon: on February 20th, 1939, three months after Kristallnacht, some 20,000 people rallied in Madison Square, cheering the speeches of a Nazi orator. Waving flags, exchanging the Hitler salute, and singing the Horst Wessel song, the crowd was boisterous and rowdy. Uniformed stormtroopers clashed violently with dissenting observers. The speakers delivered promises of a Jew-free nation with strict immigration controls, dominated by “racially pure” Aryans, who were hailed as “true patriots.” For many Americans, this little-taught segment of history would appear as a vision from a dystopian carnival-mirror, a disturbing inversion of the national self-image. Of course, we prefer to view ourselves as the liberators of the death camp victims, the heroes who won World War II for the forces of democracy and human rights. A home-grown Nazi movement complicates that image, and the mere fact that the Monster Mass [Nazi] Rally happened in New York and not Berlin is sufficiently provocative to justify an investigation of the German American Bund. However, insofar as the image offers an ostensible contrast between the dark days of the past and the enlightened post-racist United States of today, it may reinforce the idea that racialism is a disruption, rather than a foundation, of American society. And insofar as the image conjures over-simple analogies

between 1930s New York and Nazi Berlin, it is not germane to an understanding of the particularly American facets of the German-American Bund. I wish neither to reassure that racism and anti-Semitism have disappeared, nor to unnerve with scare stories about a possible United Nazi States of America. Today, as the racial valences of the national discourse are conveyed in cloaked terms like “urban” and “criminal,” it may be difficult to imagine an openly racist and anti-Jewish political organization gaining much prominence on the national scene. Suggestions of racialism and eugenics now evoke death camps, and have largely been banished from the polite public mainstream. However, this must not blind us to the fact that eugenic programs that later became associated in the popular imagination with Nazism were done first, done bigger, and continued for much longer, in the United States than in Germany. Racialism is not an intruder into American politics and culture, it is in fact fundamental to the construction of our society.

The German American Bund was neither ideologically marginal nor a serious threat to the social order. I contend that the GAB represented an highly visible version of endemic American white supremacy. Their insistence on their own whiteness and the unfitness of non-whites is an example of a deeply American phenomenon, that of a recently-integrated immigrant group aggressively patrolling the borders of a whiteness into which they themselves are only provisionally incorporated. I contend that reactions against the Bund were characterized by the language of pathology and difference, and that the American mainstream viewed the GAB as a specifically foreign, invasive, immigrant group, rather than as a product of the American context. Anti-Bund activity was fueled by ideas of the alien, the un-American immigrant, and the foreign invader as much as by any strongly anti-racist ethical stance.

The GAB themselves, and subsequently many who have written about them, emphasize the Bund's German-ness at the expense of de-Americanizing them. I do not wish to reproduce these assumptions. I will view the GAB as a domestic cultural formation, the legitimate offspring of American culture. Its hybridity is native to the United States context, and cannot be properly understood as a simply transplanted Germanism. To this end, I will highlight the differences – of ideology, of policy, of composition – between the GAB and the NSDAP. Though early accounts of the Bund tended to assert, with little solid evidence, that the GAB was a front organization concealing an infiltrating force of Nazi spies, it is now clear that the GAB was most often perceived by German Nazis as detrimental to their interests. Hitler himself was occasionally willing to humor the egos of Bund leaders who wished to be photographed with him, but of course had little patience for indigenous fascist or Nazi movements in any country. So, rather than emphasizing ties between the GAB and their German coreligionists, I will focus on the Bund as an American phenomenon, and their immigrant origins as appropriate to the task of exemplifying cultural tendencies in a nation of immigrants. I believe that the history of the Bund can be useful as a lens through which to view the construction and contestation of American white identity during the difficult early twentieth century.

In researching the Bund, I have looked for shifts in their rhetoric, identity markers, and ideology. A nuanced look at the cultural implications of the GAB requires not only examining the context of racialism, but juggling contradictory and confusing messages from within the Bund and without. Bundist rhetoric indicates that members considered themselves patriotic Americans yet loyal to the German Fuehrer; militaristic yet anti-revolutionary; an embattled minority yet part of the American mainstream. Susan Canedy

characterizes Bundist philosophy as “triadic...in part, it is strongly American, but it is also vehemently National Socialist and liberally Germanic. The Bund had no trouble reconciling the inherent differences.”¹ It is my position that the point of this triad are not as ‘different’ as they may at first appear, and that where differences do exist, they are hardly ‘inherent,’ stable, or assured. Additionally, such apparent contradictions were far from restricted to Nazi racialists. The American discourse on race was, and remains, divergent and difficult. American reactions to the GAB were ambiguous, when analyzed across the culture. Although the GAB was under constant scrutiny by hostile government agencies, members of Congress gave speeches which were just as venomously anti-Jewish as those delivered at the Mass Monster Rally. Although Bund events were picketed, attacked, and broken up by neighbors and counter-protesters, many of those protesters were themselves operating as patrollers of whiteness and Americanism by expelling what they saw as an immigrant threat. Although the press roundly denounced the Bund, news articles of the day both dismissed the Bundists as a powerless lunatic fringe and reviled them as a dangerous destabilizing force. I aim to probe these ambiguities as sites of cultural meaning. It is my hope that this cultural approach will offer some modest potential for finding new meanings in the well-trod story of the American Nazi movement.

In the first chapter, I will review the literature drawn upon in this endeavor, make explicit the theoretical approaches I have adopted, and sketch an outline of the relevant material I have had to exclude due to constraints of time and scope. In the second chapter, I will elucidate uses of critical whiteness studies in formulating a theoretical framework. The third chapter is a brief explication of a story that has been told in greater detail

¹ Canedy, *America's Nazis*, p. 75.

elsewhere: the basic chronological history of the GAB's organizational lifespan, in order to orient the reader within specific moments that are pertinent to this discussion. Chapter Four constitutes what I see as the theoretical heart of the paper, in the application of whiteness theory and immigration theory to normalize the apparently anomalous American Nazi movement. Here I hope to demonstrate that the GAB was, in many ways, exemplary, not exceptional, and to locate its racism within American traditions. After demonstrating that racism and anti-Jewish vitriol did not alone constitute extremism in the context, through comparisons between the treatment and activities of the Bund and of more mainstream racist groups. In conclusion, I will attempt to move some of the ideas and trends I've described into the national conversations of today.

American public rhetoric has often denied the legitimacy of claims made by those perceived to be on the extreme edges of the political spectrum. The GAB and the American Communist party were, tellingly, the major targets of the House Un-American Activities Committee. We frequently view these so-called extremes as outside the spectrum entirely, as un-American. But rejected ideas can illuminate something about the country's core. In that spirit, I wish to analyze this small, impotent, short-lived organization, not to exaggerate its importance, but to learn something about the century and the country that comprised its home. America spawned, and then rejected, the GAB. As far as anything can be called 'truly American,' both aspects of this story are true expressions of the national culture.

Literature Review and Critical Framework

One of the great joys of academic exploration is discovering (and re-discovering) that there are many, many different ways to tell a story. The discipline of history offers particularly rich potential for inter- and cross-disciplinary work, as writing history requires a jack-of-all-trades skill set: a little bit of sociology; a little bit of anthropology; knowledge of literature and the arts; some statistics; economics; and scientific theory; as well as some degree of narrative aptitude, at the very least. Sometimes it seems as though the greatest challenge is finding the edges of the story, the limits of what will be told. Perhaps this is why one never feels quite satisfied that enough has been done – either in any particular subgenre of the field, or in one’s own preparatory reading and research. The literature review included here is far from comprehensive, given the fascinating array of disciplines and literatures that rub together in the short story of the GAB. I have relied on several major corpora, but naturally leaned most heavily on a few texts in each area, those that became the foundations of my thought on the subject. I reviewed most, if not all, of the book-length works that focused on the GAB itself, and sought out chapters and articles as well. After reading a great deal on nationalism, conflict dynamics, free speech, sociology, and espionage history, the area that provided a theoretical underpinning turned out to be critical whiteness studies, a newly defined area that seems to me, to have very rich potential. Other than that, I have benefitted immensely from work on the specifically

German-American experience of immigration,² from some excellent cultural histories,³ and from a few masterful general histories for the broader context.⁴ In this connection, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Detlev Peukert, whose incisive studies of the Weimar⁵ and Nazi⁶ periods in Germany provide excellent models for the practice of history. The large majority of primary source material was drawn from the General Records of the German American Bund, housed in the U.S. National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Other rich primary ore was mined from the racist theory in professional journals of anthropology, sociology, and criminology; from newspaper archives and those of the Congressional Record, and from books published during the lifespan of the Bund.

² Among the acknowledged foundations of this subfield are the works of Frederick Luebke – see Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974)., and *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999). The area is becoming increasingly illuminated by newer works, as well. See, especially, Joseph McVeigh and Frank Trommler, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, Vol. I, II vols. (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); ; John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001). Works which feature, without highlighting, German-America are also plentiful. For example, see Berquist, James M., “Germans and German-Speaking Immigrants,” in Elliot Robert Barkan, ed., *A Nation of Peoples: A Sourcebook on America's Multicultural Heritage* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp. 233-247. Immigration history is, of course, deeply intertwined with labor history. A helpful volume is A.T. Lane, *Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants, 1830-1924* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

³ Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy 1920s - 1950s* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).; Christina Codgell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).; Ragnhild and Ursula Lehmkuhl, eds. Fiebig-von Hase, *Enemy Images in American History* (Providence, Rhode Island: Bergahn Books, 1997).; [add note to :George Orwell, *Essays*, Everyman's Library, ed. John Carey (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).:] Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000).; Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁴ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Pimlico, 2001).; Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914 - 1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

⁵ Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

⁶ Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans.

Literature that takes the GAB as its specific focus is somewhat scarce. This, of course, presents more opportunity than difficulty. The works that do exist are of immeasurable value in piecing together the GAB's timeline and cast of characters. Sander Diamond, Susan Canedy, and Warren Grover⁷ have contributed solid, thoroughly researched works that provide the chronology and institutional history of the organization. While these texts are invaluable to the project of learning about Bund activities and, to some extent, doctrine, they focus rather on political history than the cultural variant. In some sense, it could be charged that the current literature perpetuates the assumptions of early-century journalists, in that the menacing aspects of the GAB are attributed to their German roots, while the anti-Nazi reactions are cleanly apportioned to the influence of American democracy. Nowhere in my reading did I see Bundist racism linked with, or even compared to, racism in the broader American context. Diamond's book, the oldest of the examined works, relies on a standard materialist analysis, positing competition for jobs during the Great Depression as an economic impetus for the pronounced racism of the Bund. Canedy disputes the Great Depression as a primary causative factor, but still keeps economic competition squarely within her analysis. Her theoretical contribution lies in her emphasis on alienation and radicalization following the anti-German hysteria whipped up by domestic propaganda for World War I. While immensely valuable, these works do not much attend to the American racialist context. Both Canedy and Diamond, for example,

Richard Deveson (New Have, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987).

discuss Detroit as an incubator of the fledgling Bund movement. Both link the relative success of Nazism with the unemployment of recent immigrants during the automation of car factories, most notably those of the Ford motor company. Neither chooses to note, for example, the confluence of immigrant Nazism with Henry Ford's own well-known anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, evidenced by his publication of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. That fraud, which is still circulated as gospel among white supremacists, reached an estimated 700,000 readers through Ford's newspaper, the Independent.⁸ This is a particular example of a general trend within the literature. The Bund is treated as an essentially German group that happened to operate on American soil. Very few works draw explicit pictures of the American racialism that influenced, encompassed, and even sanctioned the Bund's activities. While no book can encompass all aspects of an historical situation, the exclusion of American racism from a discussion about racism as practiced in America seems like an obvious entry point for new work.

It is not a new observation that historians have not always paid overt attention to issues of race. Immigration history is not an exception, although recent scholarship in that sub-discipline (and many others) is certainly addressing this. Even very nuanced observers can become uncomfortable when trying to put their fingers on the mysterious quality that made German-American assimilation so much easier than that of other immigrants.

⁷ Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, California: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990). Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003). Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974). A fourth book, by Marvin D. Miller, is also exhaustively researched and therefore useful, but rendered unpalatable by a stilted, prolix writing style: Marvin D. Miller, *Wunderlich's Salute: The Interrelationship of the German-American Bund, Camp Siegfried, Yaphank, Long Island, and the Young Siegfrieds and their Relationship with American and Nazi Institutions* (Smithtown, New York: Malamud-Rose, 1983).

⁸ Charles Y. Glock and Quinley, Harold E. *Anti-Semitism in America* (Transaction Publishers, 1983.) p. 168.

Luebke, a subtle and perceptive thinker, becomes positively convoluted as he avoids calling German-Americans ‘white.’ They are, rather, “indistinguishable in appearance from dominant elements of American society” and “persons of Christian heritage who spoke a language closely related to English.”⁹ So, while many do not directly address the concerns of racialism that move this work, immigration historians have produced a rich and varied body of scholarship on the particularly German-American experience.¹⁰ These range from unabashedly boosterish works,¹¹ to sensitive and critical readings attuned to shifting cultural standards and values.

American immigration history, as it has been practiced since the early twentieth century, relies heavily on a few tropes that were established quite early in the discussion. It is not necessary here to detail all of the competing models – melting pot versus salad bowl, integration versus assimilation, etc. Throughout this paper, I will focus instead on the aspects of immigration discourse that were predominant during debates around the GAB, particularly the much-maligned phenomenon of the ‘hyphenated American.’¹² Gary Gerstle

⁹ Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 54.

¹⁰ For a detailed and interesting late-nineties historiography of immigration, focusing on the rise and fall of the assimilation model, see Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans”, *The Journal of American History* (Organization of American Historians) Vol. 84, No. 2 (September 1997): 524-558.

¹¹ The enthusiastic, well researched, but unblinkingly one-sided works of Don Heinrich Tolzmann are an example of this tendency. He frequently slips into referring to German-Americans as a monolithic, and uniformly beneficent entity: “By 1934, German-Americans decided it was time to take a firm stand against the Bund...” although, of course, German-Americans themselves also comprised the membership of the group. (See Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German-American Experience* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 322.)

¹² This term was popularized, but not coined, by then-ex President Theodore Roosevelt, during a speech in which he condemned German and Austrian ‘interference’ with munitions factories, and decried labor agitation as un-American, advocating instead for a system of “universal service.” “I would have the son of the multi-millionaire and the son of the immigrant who came over here in the steerage sleep under the same dog-tent and eat the same grub. It would help mightily to a mutual comprehension of life.” - *New York Times*, “Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated,” October 13, 1915. The same speech declares rich people who take advantage of immigrants by paying low wages as far worse than the

proposes that the major theoretical divide within immigration scholarship separates, roughly, those who believe in a malleable American identity that immigrants fashion for themselves, and those who believe in some degree of economic, social and cultural determinism that constrains or eliminates possibilities for self-invention.¹³ I join Gerstle in locating my own standpoint somewhere between these two poles, although I am a little more convinced of personal autonomy than he seems to be. I hope to avoid the pitfalls of either a pie-in-the-sky literary postmodernism or an overweening Marxist determinism. Whiteness studies, as well as histories and historiographies of race, provide a theoretical foundation which, for me, seems an appropriate amalgam of rigorously historicist research with attentiveness to the ephemeral and elusive effects of culture.

‘hyphenated.’

¹³ Gary Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans," *The Journal of American History* (Organization of American Historians) 84, no. 2 (September 1997): 524-558.

Whiteness as Object of Study

The complete historiography of race and racialism has never been written, and never truly could be. As that is not my task here, I will restrict myself to the broadest and most recently prevalent trends in writing about race. These can be roughly divided into economic and psychological schools. Many of those who would posit an economic explanation of racism are Marxist in orientation. A very brief distillation of the complex scholarship would be that Marxist analysts attribute racism in the working class to the imposition of capitalist competition for employment. Racism, like sexism and nationalism, is a fragmentation of the working class. Roughly, it is a symptom of false consciousness. Advocates of a psychoanalytic explanation utilize Freud, and, later, Lacan as the fundamentals of a psycho-social view that foregrounds people of color as the distressing Other in white consciousness. In this psychodrama, non-white people, especially black people, are cast as the discomfiting, disrupting agents that overthrow white peoples' assumptions and force collective re-examinations of core beliefs. This psychoanalytic school has been highly influential in the fields of post-colonial studies, subaltern studies, and related areas, which have been driven, in part, by examinations of the colonial 'encounter' between white Europeans and the people they subjugated in the name of imperial expansion.

Of course, there is no successful 'unified field theory' of human interaction or social development. To my way of thinking, economic explanations of racism over-rely on materialist factors and fail to account for intercultural variations or unexpected progressions. Marxist analysis often seems to suffer from the very virility of its own

theory, which may seduce its adherents into believing that it can expand infinitely to encompass every human thing. Psychoanalytic explanations, on the other hand, tend to have a difficulty with origins, seeming to require essential or inherent human universals from which stem discomfort with ‘encounters,’ generating fear of the Other. Without getting into lengthy explication, I will say that I seriously doubt that psychoanalytical metaphors are scalable from the individual to the societal level, and that I tend to resist the pathologization of pain into trauma, sex into sexuality, and relation into aggression. Marxist and psychoanalytic schools both have limitations when applied to race. The alternative that I seek is a hybrid beast, born somewhere in the meeting of vulgar materialism, psychological metaphor, structuralism and its posts-, and a finely tuned attentiveness to literature, visual texts, and other artifacts of popular culture. I believe in the power of those intangible, indefinite qualities and currents that can be called, respectively, ‘culture’ and ‘cultural change.’ Critical whiteness studies vivifies careful scholarship with the conviction that race is absolutely central to the structure of American society. Drawing as it does on a fine-grained historicism which includes cultural artifacts from popular media, critical whiteness studies satisfies both the demand for rigor and the appetite for bold explanatory ideas. It also provides theories and methodologies that are deeply ethical, and responsive to the ongoing consequences of racism.

The Story of the German-American Bund

It may be useful to periodize the growth of the Nazi movement in the United States by briefly describing the differences and continuities between the GAB and its two predecessor organizations, Teutonia (later the Nazi Party USA) and the Friends of the New Germany (FNG). Each iteration of American Nazism had its individual tone, and each represents something of the transformation that Nazism underwent during its absorption into the American context. Teutonia lasted from 1924 to 1932, and was succeeded by Friends of the New Germany, which in turn became the German American Bund, extant from 1936 until its dissolution in 1941. Each stage in this organizational development marked further estrangement from the NSDAP and an increasing emphasis on American identity. I decided to focus on the GAB as the final, most visible, most hybrid, and most American of the three groups. However, it must be understood that the boundaries between the groups were highly permeable. These successive titles denote an entity that was really more like a single continuous organization than three discrete groups. The various incarnations shared members, resources, and some, but not all, elements of philosophy and strategy.

The first phase of American Nazism is exemplified by The National Socialist Teutonia Association. During this phase, the movement was characterized by direct (if tenuous) ties to Hitler's German activities and by allegiance to the NSDAP. The core activists were German nationals who had not sought American citizenship, and who saw themselves, to some degree, as economic or political refugees from the Weimar Republic

who were solely biding time in the United States and planning immanent return to Germany.

Teutonia was founded in Detroit, 1924, by a young German national named Fritz Gissibl, along with his brother and two other Germans. These young men at the kernel of Teutonia had been “destitute, self-described members of the ‘lost generation’”¹⁴ in Weimar Germany, and became Hitler supporters quite early in the history of the Nazi movement.¹⁵ The organization they founded was composed exclusively of recently-arrived German nationals. This was to become an important distinction between Teutonia and the GAB, which, by the end of its existence, had officially banned un-naturalized German nationals from full membership, and admitted only American citizens.¹⁶ Teutonia claimed official sanction by the NSDAP in Germany, although, as it did not receive meaningful financial or organizational support from Germany,¹⁷ the weight of this ‘official sanction’ should not be overestimated. It apparently consisted mainly of friendly letters from Goebbels. Although Gissibl and his followers enthusiastically collected money, and were able to provide financial donations to Hitler and the nascent NSDAP, their support did not translate into a special relationship with Hitler once he came to power. That Teutonia’s adulation of Hitler went mostly unreciprocated does not diminish the fact that the group was founded with

¹⁴ Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 93.

¹⁵ As was common in Third Reich Germany, many Nazi-leaning German nationals and German-American who had been in Germany during the 1920s claimed to have been present at Hitler’s side during the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. According to Sander Diamond, who has done the most complete investigation of both American and German records and correspondence related to the Bund, the only Bundist who could possibly have been involved with the Putsch was Josef Schuster.

¹⁶ The ban on German Nationals, though insisted upon by GAB leadership, never resulted in a fullscale purge, so even after it was enacted, it is likely that the GAB had 40% German members. I believe that the policy, even poorly enforced, is indicative of a genuine shift of intention between the two iterations of the group.

¹⁷ Timothy J. Holian *The German-Americans and World War II*, New German-American Studies, Vol. 6.

the express intention of being a branch of the NSDAP that happened to function in the United States. As such, it was not, as the Bund would be, a truly American Nazi group. Rather, it was a group of German nationals with no professed allegiance to their American host country.

“Initially, Teutonia’s leaders did not envision any future for national Socialism in the United State. Accordingly, they regarded America as a temporary home for new arrivals from Germany, a refuge from the Weimar Republic. These men were firmly committed to National Socialism in Germany and believed in Hitler’s inevitable victory. They hoped to return to Germany upon Hitler’s advent to power and share the fruits of victory.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, their activities were centered on the production of National Socialist propaganda and the enticement of recently-arrived German immigrants into the Nazi fold. They published and distributed a large number of pamphlets as well as a newspaper.

Most recent interlocutors agree that Teutonia’s recruitment efforts benefitted greatly from the economic and social atmosphere of late-1920s Detroit, where German-Americans had been among the ‘last hired, first fired’ during the period of rapid mechanization of the automotive industry.¹⁹ As factories underwent the transformation from manual to mechanical labor, many auto workers were forced out of their jobs and into economically inhospitable urban conditions. For German-Americans, the overcrowded and unhealthy living conditions available in the rapidly growing and industrializing cities were made even more intolerable by widespread anti-German hostility. Unemployment coupled with a hostile cultural environment and produced potential for radical political groupings. Teutonia found its strength in appealing to the racist beliefs of a minority of German immigrants who came to see a vast Jewish conspiracy as the overarching

(New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998) p. 19.

¹⁸ Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941*, p. 96.

¹⁹ See Diamond, pp. 93 – 95; and Canedy pp. 36-39; for discussion of Detroit as a fertile “seedbed,” in

explanatory myth that could give meaning to their hardships, and allow them to take on the special status of oppressed but righteous victims. In the cosmology painted by Teutonia's literature, Germans living in the United States were constantly subject to antagonistic forces, and the only hope for defeating these forces lay in German racial unity – expressed as devotion to Hitler and his party. Publications were intended to circulate news about Weimar politics and to promote Hitler as the savior of Germans globally, while telegraphing an eagerness to join the fight for a new Germany when the moment ripened.

Aside from propaganda output, Teutonia's work during its first five years of existence consisted mainly of creating an organizational structure and solidifying its self-image as the primary American wing of the NSDAP. Its early efforts at building a Nazi solidarity among Germans living in the US were largely fruitless, and they failed to gain anything like a widespread following. They could not boast even 500 members²⁰ until around 1929, when the stock market crash and symptoms of the Great Depression began to be felt in larger segments of the German-American population.

It was then that the tiny association began to gain cultural traction enough to extend its scope and influence. By the early 1930s, amidst the ravages of full-scale economic depression, the Teutonia had expanded into Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles,²¹ with a small but increasingly active constituency. It is interesting to note that the expansion of the group had already necessitated a relaxation of membership requirements: by 1932, at the point of its dissolution, it was no longer composed

Canedy's phrase, for Nazism.

²⁰ NB: As every historian of the GAB and its predecessor groups warns, reliable membership figures are difficult to ascertain, dependent as they are on the testimony and ephemera of group leaders with multiple (and often conflicting) interests. At various moments, it was politically expedient for these leaders to exaggerate or minimize the size of Nazi-oriented groups in the United States.

exclusively of German nationals, but also of German-born American citizens and their descendant generations, thus signaling the coming shift in American Nazism as it entered its second and third phases. Teutonia rose as one of many, many new or newly radicalized and reactionary organizations that proliferated in the uncertainty and suffering of the Depression. While the majority of Americans withstood the Great Depression with a striking degree of political passivity, merely intensifying and solidifying their individual commitments to a '100% American' patriotic identity, an influential minority turned to ideologies and strategies for the transformation of society. Communism, trade unionism, anarchism, extreme nationalism, and applied racism were all vivified and enacted within the American context. Radicalization on the broader American political scene was paralleled in the microcosm of German-America.

This shifting German-American zeitgeist benefitted not only Teutonia, but a number of other small Nazi-oriented and -affiliated projects. These included a haphazard network of NSDAP party members living in the United States. The network's participants were dispersed through multiple cities, but probably never numbered more than 200 strong, and certainly never matched Teutonia for organization or activity.²² However, in 1931, the local New York unit managed to outmaneuver Teutonia and get itself designated the 'official' arm of the NSDAP in the United States, under the designation NSDAP Ortsgruppe New York.²³

Teutonia had not previously been subject to opposition from rival Nazi groups,²⁴

²¹ Diamond, p. 95.

²² Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

²³ Members would come to refer to the unit as Gauleitung-USA or Gau-USA.

²⁴ Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 98.

and was sorely disappointed when its (accurate) claim to being the largest and best-organized group of NSDAP in the United States was offhandedly dismissed by NSDAP officials.²⁵ The blow came from a functionary at the new German Foreign Section office. This unexpected discourtesy can now be viewed as symptomatic of the disorder, duplication, and lack of inter-organizational cooperation that characterized the NSDAP in power. Its immediate effect was to throw Teutonia into turmoil. Careerist NSDAP members, believing they could still capture the reward of loyal party service, fled the group in favor of membership in Gau-USA. Gissibl apparently toyed with a plan for forcible takeover of the competing organization, but discarded the idea.²⁶ He ordered Teutonia dissolved in October of 1932, perhaps in tacit agreement with his fellows' tactic of obedience as a route to NSDAP prestige, and transferred Teutonia's remaining membership into the ascendant Ostgruppe formation.

The Orstgruppe Nazis' preemptive obedience did not, however, win them lasting favor from the NSDAP. After Hitler's appointment as chancellor in early 1933, one of the newly powerful party's early actions was to formally order the dissolution of all Nazi parties outside of Germany. Hitler never was truly supportive of Fascist governments or Nazi-like movements in other countries, and in those early days, he did not wish to risk damaging his reputation abroad as he engineered his movement's ascent.²⁷ Moreover, the fractious American Nazi movement, by that time comprising a mosaic of conflicting subgroups jockeying tirelessly for NSDAP approval, had proven difficult to control or

²⁵ Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, California: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), 39; Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 99; Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 75.

²⁶ Diamond, 99.

even monitor. In April of 1933, Deputy Party Fuehrer Rudolph Hess ordered the breakup of the Gau-USA, and of all other groups that claimed to be part of the German NSDAP, thus ending the official sanction for those claiming to represent Nazi party interests in the United States.

It was only two months after the official disbanding of all would-be NSDAP cells in the country that former members of Teutonia regrouped and created a new organization into which to channel their efforts. Heinz Spanknoebel, a former Detroit local leader in Teutonia, managed to arrange an audience with Hess,²⁸ during which he was granted written permission to establish a new organization in the United States. Upon his return from Germany, he set himself up as the 'fuehrer' of The Friends of New Germany (*Bund der Freunde des neuen Deutschland*.) His leadership was accepted, likely as a direct result of Hess's benediction, and in Yorkville, New York, July of 1933, American Nazism entered a second phase.

The second phase marks an intermediate stage on the way to a more complete Americanization exhibited by later incarnations of U.S. Nazism. It also marks a shift in diplomatic relations between Hitler's new government and the United States, and the beginning of sustained U.S. government intervention meant to disrupt the activities of the domestically-based Nazis. This intervention was made highly visible in the public arena, and included a series of dramatic, widely reported hearings. The publicity generated by government opposition to Nazism was the concomitant of newly public campaigns launched by the Nazi movement itself. Where once it had been relatively low-profile,

²⁷ Holian, p. 18.

²⁸ Bund Communique #5, January 5th, 1937, Detroit. Records Group 131, Box 5.1, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, MD.

appealing primarily to a narrow subset of newly arrived German immigrants, American Nazism in its second phase went public, becoming bilingual and increasingly national in scope.

Friends of New Germany was, from the start, “extremely militaristic and vehemently anti-Semitic.”²⁹ It was organizationally modeled on the NSDAP, a fact that has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of close connections between the FONG and Hitler’s government, but similarities, in this case, should not be read as the result of cooperation or even reliable communication between the two entities. Spanknoebel spent his tenure as fuehrer ceaselessly touring the country to deliver impassioned and incendiary public speeches. Although anti-NSDAP feeling was not common among the American populace in 1933,³⁰ Spanknoebel quickly attracted a flood of negative attention. Pre-existing antipathy towards Nazis was not strong enough to explain the degree of controversy generated by these events, but Spanknoebel’s personality and militaristic rhetoric may have been aggressive enough to inspire stronger animus than anti-Jewish statements yet could. Brawls frequently erupted during Spanknoebel’s appearances, as objecting spectators clashed with his uniformed ‘bodyguard’ unit. Before the organization’s first year was out, Congressman Samuel Dickstein had requested Spanknoebel’s deportation. Spanknoebel chose to avoid this indignity by deporting himself, and hurriedly fled the country. His exit did little to quell the rising opposition to American Nazism: a grand jury began taking steps toward a full investigation of the Friends of New Germany, and congressman Dickstein began organizing a congressional

²⁹ Susan Canedy *America’s Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma*. (Menlo Park, California: Markgraf Publications, 1990), p. 51.

³⁰ Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell

inquiry into the group's activities. This pattern, of vocal and strident publicity campaigns answered by widespread public outcry and governmental scrutiny, would be repeated by the Friends' successor organization, the German-American Bund.

The GAB represents the peak of American Nazi influence on domestic politics, and represents, as well, the third phase of the movement, during which it can be said to exhibit its most distinctly American characteristics. In this connection, I wish to emphasize three distinctions between the German and American Nazi movements. One, economic demographics, two, the particularities of anti-Jewish rhetoric, and three, revolutionary or extremist strategies. First, the demographics of the two movements are distinct from one another, which supports the idea that the groups reflected the distinct tendencies and motivations of non-equivalent classes. While the early Hitler-centered movement and the NSDAP in its formative years had a disproportionately high number of members from the upper classes, white-collar professionals, and university students, the GAB was likely composed mainly of people living in the lowest-rent neighborhoods of their various cities, and working at low-prestige, low-pay jobs.³¹ They were, apparently, firmly lower-middle class, but, in the main, not manual laborers. This preponderance of lower-income members may have contributed to the economic valences of GAB anti-Jewish rhetoric, which focused less on some allegedly scientific analysis of racial capacity than on the idea that Jewish people were winning the competition for scarce jobs and scarce resources by virtue

University Press, 1974), 106.

³¹ Donald Strong, *Organized Anti-Semitism in America: The Rise of Group Prejudice during the Decade 1930-40* (Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), pp. 33 – 35. Strong gleaned his information from multiple sources and with multiple methods: surveying reported professional affiliations in newspaper articles; checking geographic distribution of Bund members against property tax records, etc. Unfortunately, the internal records that could corroborate Strong's near-contemporary account of the GAB have mostly been destroyed, so although there is little proof to be had, I have

of an invisible conspiracy of Jewish bankers, bosses, media tycoons, and property-owners.

Despite their basic accord with the principle aims of the eugenicists, the Bundists displayed very little affinity for bio-scientific terminology or for the progressive agendas claimed by eugenic advocates. Their rhetoric was most frequently defensive rather than ambitious, and conservative rather than progressive or revolutionary. During the HUAC investigations, much was made of GAB militarism. Investigators were particularly disturbed by the summer camps, where young boys drilled with wooden rifles beneath snapping swastika flags. But even this activity was not outside the mainstream of American life, at least not materially: the Boy Scouts of America did many of the same things, under a different flag. It is perhaps telling that internal GAB documents favorably compare their own organization with the Boy Scouts,³² rather than, say, the U.S. military. A skeptical observer might conclude that GAB militarism was expressed most completely by the wearing of uniforms and the distribution of merit badges. While we might classify Bundists as extremist whites, or extremist racists, their contemporaries were much more concerned about their foreign-ness, specifically their German-ness, and about the fact that they espoused anti-democratic sentiments than about their racial ideology. In nearly every respect, the German American Bund was less fascist, less revolutionary, less extremist, and less effective than the NSDAP. As a small but revealing example, members of the GAB's uniformed service, the OS (roughly equivalent to the SA/SS) were exhorted by the Bund fuehrer to train hard, and work hard, in anticipation "someday, when all of you may be

chosen to accept Strong as a fairly reliable reporter.

³² United States Congress, *House Committee Hearings, 77th Congress*. (Senate Library, 1941), Card 1/18, p. 1452.

fuehrers of your own groups.”³³ It is difficult to imagine a character like Hitler endorsing the idea of a thousand little fuherers, rather than leadership by a destined ruler who functioned as a sort of avatar for the will of the race-nation. I contend that individual GAB members may have been possessed by revolutionary or palingenetic ideals, but that the group as a body was not organized, dedicated, or motivated enough to constitute a genuinely capable revolutionary movement. In a time when the Ku Klux Klan was successfully running candidates for office in multiple jurisdictions, the GAB was a group that merely endorsed major-party candidates and sometimes managed to ally themselves with marginal congresspeople or municipal councilors. None of its activities led to actual political power – but they did succeed in making themselves highly visible, and becoming a lightning rod for dissatisfaction and anger.

Throughout its brief four-year existence, the Bund’s members carried out a campaign of highly visible public meetings, rallies, and cultural events. They produced reams of pamphlets, newspapers and handbills, operated a string of militaristic youth camps, staged boycotts, lobbied politicians, and recruited nationwide, all to advocate a vision of a Nazified white America. Mention of these activities should not comprise an overstatement of the GAB’s scope or power. The Bund’s active membership probably never numbered above 10,000,³⁴ and it would be nonsensical to assert that they ever seriously threatened American democracy. The group’s significance lies not within the

³³ United States Congress, *House Committee Hearings, 77th Congress*. (Senate Library, 1941), Card 1/18, p. 1447.

³⁴ Again, this membership figure cannot claim indubitable accuracy. Records, where kept, have been destroyed and modified, and the claims of various actors are highly questionable and inconsistent. This particular figure is disputed by online text produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which claim Bund membership reached as high as 25,000. All available sources that agree with this number seem to cite the Holocaust Memorial Museum as their source. I found no other

group itself or its failed Nazification project, but in the ripples of reaction it caused on the surface of American popular culture, and in the deeper currents it exemplified.

The Bund was initially constituted partly as an effort to “Americanize” the membership of the Friends of New Germany and make it more palatable to the American public. Accordingly, group members were told that they had to at least file preliminary papers seeking U.S. citizenship in order to enjoy full membership in the new organization.³⁵ There was a sibling group established, the Prospective Citizens League, to house those German nationals still interested in participation with the Bund. The Bund’s early efforts were focused on a boycott of Jewish shops and services. This was claimed to be a defensive action, into which good German-American citizens had been forced by the aggression of Jewish leaders calling for a boycott of German businesses. The vicious anti-Semitism, justified as anti-Communism, which characterized the Friends of New Germany remained in full effect under the new moniker. To it, the Bund added anti-black racism. Their messages were roundly condemned in the mainstream press. But, at the same time, their membership was growing monthly, and the crowds that turned up for Bund speaking engagements swelled and became more and more fervent. The suspicions of the authorities and the actions taken against the Bund encouraged a near-constant spotlight of media attention on the group, and, for a time, this attention publicized their aims and brought them followers. At the peak of its strength and soundness, the German-American Bund drew a crowd of near 20,000 supporters to their “monster mass rally” in Madison Square

sources that supported this claim.

³⁵ Later investigations revealed that a large number of non-naturalized Germans retained membership in the GAB even following this directive, but the proportion was definitely smaller than that of Teutonia or even Friends of the New Germany.

Gardens, New York City – a fact that should not be minimized, as it often has been, by the assertion that the number of counter-protesters present outnumbered the pro-Nazis.

The German-American Bund was a different animal than its predecessors. It did not openly claim to be the United States branch of the Nazi party, and in fact members frequently denied accusations that the group took orders from Germany. The Bund Constitution, though it was seemingly constantly revised and reworded, consistently portrayed the group as a patriotic American fraternal organization. An inaugural publication declared that the purpose of the Bund was “to honor and defend the Constitution, the flag, and institutions of the United States of America,” first and foremost. Bund leadership did not hesitate to append further goals: “to oppose all racial intermixture between Aryans and Asiatics, Africans, and other non-Aryans,” and “to break up the dictatorship of the Jewish-international minority.”³⁶ The organization was patriotic and pro-American; its members believed in creating a United States that was modeled after the racial hierarchy proposed by Hitler and his compatriots. The Bundists were National Socialist in their allegiance to Hitler and their adulation of so-called German blood purity, but their interpretation of National Socialism was far more appropriate to the American than the German context. And they were “Germanic” in their devotion to a union of all (Aryan) German-speaking peoples, while simultaneously remaining staunchly desirous of staying in their adopted American homeland.

Perhaps the Bund’s strongest resemblance to the NSDAP emanates from Bundist

³⁶ All three quotes are from a Bund-published pamphlet promoting the February 29, 1939 “Pro-American Rally,” and can be found under the heading “Aims and Purposes of the Bund,” in that publication. *Pro-American Rally*. New York: German-American Bund, 1939, p. 5.

organizational ideas, which were rooted in Nazi theory and practice. From its members, the Bund required the utmost loyalty. It included a uniformed paramilitary unit known as the OD: *Ordnungs-Dienst*, also called the Uniformed Service. Their training, methods, and uniforms were modeled after the SS. Following the basic contours of Hitler's *fuehrerprinzip*, the organization depended heavily on its self-styled fuehrer. All local leaders were ultimately answerable to his wishes, at least in theory. The most visible and effectual of the Bund's fuehrers was Fritz Kuhn. After Spanknoebel's departure, Fritz Gissibl had taken over leadership of the remaining Friends of New Germany. Fritz Kuhn was appointed national leader of the Friends in 1935, and held leadership after the group underwent its reconfiguration and became the German-American Bund. Kuhn was an ex-military man, who had served on four different fronts as a soldier in the German army. Professionally, he was an industrial chemist, and spent time practicing his trade in Mexico before coming to the United States in 1928. It was alleged by a family friend that Kuhn first left Germany after ruining his professional reputation by engaging in petty thefts from his employer, and Kuhn never publicly refuted that claim. Kuhn was a barrel-chested, sturdy figure, with a strictly erect posture shaped by military training. His speaking voice always retained a distinct German accent. He favored dressing in pseudo-military uniforms, including jackboots, leather straps, and swastika badges. Those contemporaries who counted themselves among his allies thought of Kuhn as an imposing, intelligent, and forceful man.³⁷ It was under his direction that the German-American Bund was transformed into something of a leader-cult, expanding its activities and membership before deflating entirely.

³⁷ Op. Cit., p. 83.

The Bund's activities included public meetings, lectures, and speaking tours; publishing newspapers, pamphlets, and books; a Women's Auxiliary; rallies and marches; and maintaining a network of youth camps. The youth camps provided 'athletic training' for young people, in which the usual summer-camp activities like swimming and campfire singing were heavily larded with National Socialist education and Nazi mythology. Children were drilled in military fashion with wooden guns and swastika flags. The GAB held dances, beer gardens, dinners, picnics, and movie nights. The celebrated their own roster of holidays, marked by ceremonies and gatherings, and including George Washington's birthday, Adolf Hitler's birthday, Labor Day, and 'German Day.' For those German-Americans who were nostalgic for the sounds and flavors of the Old Country, the Bund provided comfort and familiarity. For those who were unhappy with the direction of American politics and longed for the firm hand of leadership in the style of Hitler, the Bund provided camaraderie and opportunities for political activism. The German-American Bund was a complete experience. A member could spend every night of the week at Bund events, in the company of fellow Bundists. She or he could read only Bund publications and converse socially with no one but other Bund members. The Bund could serve as a total way of life, social, cultural, educational, and political.

The number of members commanded by the German-American Bund is difficult to establish, thanks to missing and destroyed records and to estimates that greatly exaggerate the group's potential as a real threat to the United States. Fritz Kuhn bragged that there were 230,000 members. Congressman Martin Dies, co-founder of the House Un-American Activities Committee claimed the Bund had upwards of 100,000 members. A careful review of financial records, however, reveals that actual dues-paying membership

was likely never more than about 6,500. This figure is supported by FBI investigation reports. Whatever the membership number actually was, it is clear that the Bund took in up to \$900,000 a year through dues, sales of publications, and camp fees.³⁸

The organization was highly visible, perpetually controversial, and the target of a great deal of negative backlash. Timothy Holian asserts that “given the Bund’s high profile, it was simply a matter of time before their activities attracted nationwide harsh criticism, sporadic reprisals, and governmental attention.”³⁹ By the late 1930s, Bund meetings and rallies were being regularly broken up by violent counter-protesters. Anti-Nazi picketers shadowed Bund youth camps. Restaurant owners and public-hall proprietors refused to rent space for Bund events. One camp was set ablaze by arson. Civil suits dogged the property trusts that held Bund assets. All of these tribulations were taken by ardent Bundists as evidence that they were doing the right thing: they were effective enough to attract the violent attentions of their enemies. More ominously for the future of the organization, the FBI began an extensive investigation of the group’s organization, finances, and activities. The Bund was also subject to congressional investigation at by the Dies Committee, also familiarly known as the House Un-American Activities Committee. Many Bundists and allies turned against the organization to offer testimony before Congress. The German-American Bund was spiraling into downfall, crumbling rapidly even at the peak of their visibility and influence. Their February, 1939 mass New York rally, the largest event they ever organized, was attended by upwards of 20,000 Bundists and sympathizers – and more than 100,000 angry anti-Nazi counter-protestors. Rather

³⁸ Bund accounting ledgers, unclassified. Records Group 131, Boxes 4.2-5.3, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, MD.

than aiding in the formation of a broad American support base, as the Bundists had hoped, the Monster Mass Rally was instead the last major action taken by the dying organization before it was decommissioned in the face of internal corruption and external pressure.

In March of 1939, New York District Attorney Thomas Dewey launched an inquiry into the financial history of the German-American Bund. By May, Fritz Kuhn had been indicted for embezzlement. His passport was rescinded, and he was arrested. Although the Bund leadership committee voiced their confidence in him throughout his trial and even after his eventual conviction for grand larceny, Kuhn's reign was over. Members fled the organization. The Bund was decomposing. On December the 8th, 1941, the day following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Bund executive committee decided that, in light of the entry of the United States into war, the German-American Bund should be immediately disbanded. Leading Bundists were interned or deported during World War II. The Bund had been disavowed by its German Nazi allies, suffered the criminal indictments of its leadership, undergone financial mismanagement and embezzlement of funds, found itself riven by factionalism, and had been forced to downplay its explicitly Nazi orientation in order to boost shrinking membership. By 1941, the Bund could no longer sustain its public activities. Four days after Pearl Harbor, federal agents seized the Bund's records and arrested its leaders. Some prominent Bundists were sent to detention camps; others were deported. Several committed suicide. Given the small number of German-Americans interned during World War I, it can be assumed that the rank-and-file Bundists were absorbed silently into white American life, and did not necessarily suffer anything like their leaders' fates. The formal, tangible expression of the American Nazi movement had

³⁹ Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II*, p. 31.

peaked and subsided. It has not yet recovered.

Because analysis of the GAB has, by and large, focused on the role of the organization as an ostensible arm of the NSDAP in the United States, I will not seek to duplicate existing research by emphasizing the similarities and interconnections between the German Nazi party and the American Nazist movement. Although there is some disagreement about the extent and quality of the relations between these bodies, the fact that there were connections is indisputed. I will therefore assume those connections as a starting point. Rather than uncovering new information, I will seek to apply interpretive methods to the story of the Bund, and frame it as an American phenomenon, indicative and generative of American cultural trends. I view the GAB as symptomatic of a specifically American racism.

Many authors who deal with race omit historicizing information that could prevent anachronistic assumptions. I do not wish to approach race as an ahistorical abstraction, but as a set of historically specific conditions and beliefs that contribute to institutionalized social and material realities. By approaching race as a historical problem, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of either naturalizing or denying the power of racist thinking. Though the forms and boundaries of whiteness have undergone multiple transformations over the lifespan of the United States, the influence of racialism remains perniciously present. I hope that illuminating some of these transformations will assist in chipping away at the monolithic weight of a 'white race' that appears solid, natural, and clearly demarcated.

While many of today's Americans would include the descendants of any and all light-skinned Europeans in the category of 'white people,' that has not always been the prevailing view. Especially during periods of high immigration, when waves of light-

complexed European immigrants were arriving in the United States, skin color alone was not a sufficient condition for access to white privilege. The case of Irish assimilation, which has been well-documented, if sometimes over-dramatized, is a well-known example of a light-skinned out-group moving in to claim, over the course of several generations, the power of white privilege. The Irish were struggling to enter white America at a moment when whiteness itself was highly fractured and contested. Americans of the period recognized racial difference within and across what the vernacular now refers to as a singular white ‘race.’ Where we may see light skin, our forbears saw a complex of characteristics and combinations, subcategorized as Slavs, Iberians, Hebraics, Celts, Saracens, Teutons, et cetera, et cetera. Theorists debated the number of human races – some proposed as many as two hundred.⁴⁰ The story of how a polyglot, multicultural collection of pale-skinned people came to be assembled and labeled as a single white “race”, and more specifically, how Germans became white Americans, is a task that cannot be equaled by a simple or linear narrative approach. It is not just the story of a people, but of the way in which human groups are constituted and defended. It is also the story about the apportionment of privilege and civil rights.

⁴⁰ Coon, Carleton S. and Stanley M. Garn, “On the Number of Races of Mankind,” in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 57, No. 5 (October 1955), p. 996.

The Development of American Whiteness

Matthew Frye Jacobson's periodization of whiteness⁴¹ offers a useful schematic framework for illuminating moments of definitive identification that influenced the formation of American racialism, and thereby influenced the GAB. Jacobson sees the fabrication of race as, roughly, a long period of unification followed by a disruptive fragmentation during industrialization, after which the concept of the white race would re-consolidate. In the legal code of 1790, naturalized citizenship was offered to all "free white men."⁴² That restriction was not much discussed, as Jacobson notes: amidst heated Congressional debates regarding the fitness for citizenship of Catholics and 'monarchists,' just two among many examples, the exclusion of those who were not white goes unquestioned in the annals. Perhaps because of the predominant focus on slavery and a racial dichotomy admitting only black and white as pertinent categories, the language of the law crafted in 1790 effectively accepted all European-descended men as belonging to a single white race. Whiteness was, then, unquestionable enough as a legal category as to be nearly ignored. This version of whiteness was broadly-defined, and relatively untroubled, when compared with later eugenicist subdivisions and hierarchies that would question the whiteness, and therefore the fitness, of some Europeans. John Higham characterizes nineteenth-century American ethnic tolerance as dependent on distance: "White Americans showed particularly receptive attitudes toward people who were distant in time or in space

⁴¹ Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, 1st paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴² *Annals of Congress, Vol. 1, Abridgements of the Debates of Congress, 1789-1856* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1857), p. 184.

from themselves: people whose disembodied remoteness made them suitably abstract objects of an abstract faith in assimilation.”⁴³ This distance was speedily crossed by the onrush of new immigrants in huge numbers, entering the United States under the auspices of 1790’s monolithic definition of white, and troubling that definition through their presence. As these immigrants entered and changed the demographic body of the nation, defense of the existing white culture required new justifications and new hierarchies.

Whiteness came under strain with the rapid and dramatic process of industrialization in the United States. Shifting economic necessities and changes in the requirements of production and distribution of goods fueled a national appetite for cheap labor. For industrialization to move apace, United States business demanded vastly increased numbers of workers, but their presence troubled those Americans who saw them as qualitatively different than those who had preceded them. This caused conflicts between the requirements of capitalism and the requirements of republicanism – immigration debates employed a racialism that was distinct from that which evidenced by citizenship debates. So, while industrial expansion demanded cheap and plentiful labor, and therefore liberal immigration, full citizenship rights were withheld from certain newcomers on the basis of their alleged fundamental inability to self-govern, a deficit that was coded in racial difference.

Irish and German nationals comprised the majority of new arrivals to the United States during the 1840s and 1850s. The mid-nineteenth century saw a massive influx of Irish immigrants to the United States, as the Potato Famine ravaged Ireland and starvation conditions pushed hitherto unseen numbers of people across the ocean.

⁴³ John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New

Immigration to the United States from all countries combined amounted to only 8,385 people in 1820. In the year 1847, there were 234,968 immigrants, nearly half of them Irish.⁴⁴ By 1860, there were over 4 million foreign-born people residing in the United States, and over 3 million of those were either Irish or German.⁴⁵ Irish and German immigrants, as well as later waves, including Russian- and Italian-born populations, all served similar functions within the racist national discourse: they were white enough to enter the country, white enough to work, but their fitness for civil participation and their role in the American context were clamorously questioned and attacked. Whiteness began to fracture and stratify: in light of the complex demographic, economic, and cultural interactions on American soil, monolithic whiteness no longer sufficed. The term Anglo-Saxon was employed⁴⁶ to denote as a distinctly superior segment of the superior white race, one which trumped Iberians, Slavs, Hebrews, and other somewhat-white people. These questionably white Europeans were referred to collectively as ‘hunkies,’ a category which included, at various moments and in various contexts, a dizzying assortment of non-English, non-French Europeans,⁴⁷ said to be strong laborers but inferior humans. In 1870, even as black men were ostensibly granted the full rights of citizenship, those rights were fundamentally dependent on another racial exclusions. Debates around the Fifteenth Amendment were settled with the agreement that Chinese-Americans should be

Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), 89.

⁴⁴ Elliot Robert Barkan, ed., *A Nation of Peoples: A sourcebook on America's Multicultural Heritage*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 280.

⁴⁵ Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, 1st paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: harvard University Press, 1999), 43.

⁴⁶ Perhaps first popularized in the work of Henry Cabot Lodge.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the term “hunky,” used at various moments to denote all manner of dubiously-white Europeans, from Greeks and Italians to Swedes, Hungarians, and others, see the section on “Guineas, Greasers and Hunkies, in David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the White Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 37-45.

specifically excluded from enfranchisement, and in conversations about the status of various European people, groups selected for derision were frequently labeled as ‘the Chinese of Europe.’ Chinese-descended people were readily accepted as a suitable illustration of the possibility that people could be light-complected and still obviously disqualified from white privilege . While it was fairly unanimous among eugenicists and policy makers that Asian immigrants were to be considered inferior and undeserving of civil rights, the affirmation that Asians were non-white called into question the inclusion of European immigrants whose skin color appeared similar in tone.

Europeans could be granted uniform whiteness in a white-and-black binary, and granted privilege as not-black only as long as the illusion of homogeneity was maintainable. Racist policy discourse came to rest on the assumption that not all potential whites were equal, and some were distinctly suspect. Skin color became a not-entirely reliable marker of racial fitness, and the stark racial category of white as not-black was complicated by adjectives like ‘swarthy,’ ‘dusky,’ and ‘inferior.’

On one hand, whiteness became elastic enough to include a variety of variations in ethnic, national, and physical characteristics; on the other hand, it was only possible to maintain as a category in contrast with blackness – and Chinese-ness. New immigrants were mantled by contradiction. They could be somehow, simultaneously, not white enough to be acceptable as proper Americans, but still whiter than the black African-Americans who served as the marked class providing negative definition.

Moving into the twentieth century, the application of racialism to public policy leaned more and more heavily on eugenic thinking and eugenics institutions.

Judging by the Congressional record, and by professional scholarly journals of the time,⁴⁸ debates around whiteness that sought logical legitimacy for the term were concerned with whether or not race could be discerned through a comparison of skin colors. The term ‘white’ referred to a whole constellation of characteristics, many of which would now be termed aspects of ethnicity or nationality. Language, religious belief, political participation, and a host of other predilections were assumed to be components of race, and advocates of racially-defined barriers to immigration or citizenship sought to predict a future for “American civilization” based on fortunate (white) or unfortunate (non-white) racial composition of the population. The difficulty lay in deciding how to define who was white, given that the characteristics considered desirable for futurity (and the sheer demographic numbers necessary to compose a majority) were not neatly distributed at one end of the skin-tone spectrum, and given the even more troubling fact that the genie of multiracial demographics had already been decanted in the United States. Eugenacists bemoaned the fact that intermingling and its inevitable result, racial degeneration, were already rampant in the nation, and regretted that their progressive ideas had not been available to inform immigration policy from the very start.

1924 saw the birth of the Teutonia Association, and also the passage of landmark immigration legislation that had been informed at every level by the concerns and strategies of eugenacists. These new immigration restrictions were designed specifically to

⁴⁸ Roy L. Garis, *Immigration Restriction: A Study of the Opposition to and Regulation of Immigration into the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1927); Goldenweiser, "Are the Races Potentially Equal?," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (American Philosophical Society) 63, no. 2 (1924): 215-221; James E. Gregg, "The Comparison of Races," *The Scientific Monthly* (American Association for the Advancement of Science) 20, no. 3 (March 1925); H.N. Hall, "Are the Various Races of Man Potentially Equal?," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (American Philosophical Society) 63, no. 2 (1924): 208-214. Bertha M. Luckey, "Racial Differences in Mental

answer eugenicists' concerns over the "breeding stock" of the United States. Racialist concerns had begun to shift into a distinctly eugenicist phase, in which the racial composition of the nation was seen as a primary predictive factor in its future potential. The national 'body' was a racialized body.

Ability," *The Scientific Monthly* (American Association for Advancement of Science) 20, no. 3 (March 1925): 245-248.

The German-American Experience of Whiteness

German immigrants' admission into whiteness came during the previous era of contested and divided hierarchies. The pointed racism of the GAB can be viewed as a triumphal consolidation of German-as-white, as an echo and an extension of the racial boundary skirmishes of the late nineteenth century. Though German-American participation in Nazi movements has popularly been viewed as a symptom of failed assimilation, and as a turning away from American ideals of democracy and integration, and as an exception to a German-American political quietude that predominated after World War I, I argue the reverse. The GAB represents aspects of successful cultural assimilation; it was reformist rather than revolutionary; and it was a controversial but not extremist expression of German-American political involvement. It was also a manifestation of the ascendant American eugenic movement which assigned a proactive role to eugenic science – racial engineering under the moniker social engineering – in policy formation. The Bundists were not exceptional in their racism. They were not exceptionally extreme in their political strategies or their rhetoric. Their professed loyalty to the German Fuehrer and their to the preservation of German cultural activities were not signs of an exceptionally unsuccessful integration as immigrants; they were in fact typical of the co-occurring strategies observable in almost every immigrant population of the time: assimilation coupled with intensified 'immigrant nationalism' and exaltation of native land. They weren't even extreme as border guards of whiteness: the Ku Klux Klan of the period was a dominant political force in many jurisdictions, and participated in overt

terrorism and violence. To locate the story of the GAB within the story of American racialism, and demonstrate the unities and structural interdependence of the two, this chapter will provide an account of some aspects of the German-American experience of assimilation into whiteness.

Historians of German-American life seem generally to agree that World War I tolled the beginning of the end of large-scale German-American political involvement that was based on a specifically ‘hyphenated’ identity. Many immigrant groups began entering the United States without any consolidated any nationalist identity from their countries of origin;⁴⁹ early German-Americans are an example of this phenomenon. Pre-nationalist immigrants to the United States often grouped themselves into cultural formations, sharing lifeways and modes of being that were more powerfully influential on their identities than had been their experiences of nationhood prior to immigration. ‘Immigrant nationalisms’ were thus often formed in contrast and complement to the American context, rather than imported as an extant set of beliefs and qualities from countries of birth. For German-Americans, group identity was rooted more in language and social activities (like beer-drinking) than in nationalism.⁵⁰ From early in their history, then, German immigrants were organizing themselves on the basis of ethnicity rather than national loyalty. However, most early German-Americans came from poverty and lack, and found that assimilation provided access to economic opportunity they had not enjoyed in their place of origin. Affection for German identity was expressed rather more privately and culturally than publicly or politically. The growing population of German-born immigrants and their direct

⁴⁹ Of course, it can be argued that they were also entering a country that had not yet secured its own national character, identity, or nationalism.

⁵⁰ Frederick Luebke, *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Champaign,

descendants was widely involved in national-scale cultural associations and German-heritage preservations societies. Many children attended schools taught in German, the German language press flourished, and beerhalls for drinking and singing proliferated during the mid-nineteenth century booms in German immigration. At times, these cultural associations functioned as a demographic bloc that took positions on issues deemed to be of particular importance to German-Americans, but they were not especially concerned with political power.

The Germans who came to the United States after 1848, many of whom were exiles from the upheavals in their homeland, provided some intellectual and material basis for a refining shift in German-American public participation. With some exceptions, their largely liberal political ideas did not significantly ameliorate their vocal support for German culture as innately and indelibly superior. These demographically different immigrants were not content, as had been many of their predecessors who had been poor before migration, to strive for rapid assimilation into an American mainstream. Though many of their contemporaries bemoaned German-American complacency and their lack of a mobilized, unified political presence,⁵¹ the widely-noted quietude of German-America was interrupted, when necessary, to defend against perceived threats to ethnicity. German-Americans considered their cultural practices to be fundamental to the maintenance of an ethnic identity – as Kathleen Conzen explains, a Germanocentric argument was made, “not so much for the right of all groups to coexist, but for the special right of Germans to support an ethnic existence in America because of the special gifts they would ultimately

Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 52.

⁵¹ See Leubke, *Germans in the New World*, chapter 3, Canedy, *America's Nazis*, pp. 36 – 40.

bring to the melting-pot.”⁵² German-American ethnic pride was based, at least in part, on an idea of racial superiority and exceptionalism, a foundation similar to that of white American/Anglo-Saxon identity. German-Americans were seen as a sort of model minority, an immigrant group whose values, language, and racially-encoded capacities were in alignment with those of white Anglo-Saxon American priorities, thereby easing their transition into the American mainstream. This acceptance appeared natural and right to German-Americans who saw themselves as not only equal, but culturally superior, to Anglo-Saxon America. The problem, for many thinkers,⁵³ lay in how to take advantage of access to assimilative strategies while simultaneously nourishing a distinctly German identity, one that would, by virtue of German cultural superiority, benefit American development. The unification of the German Empire in 1871 had a further galvanizing effect on German-speaking Americans, who seemed to be “much more inspired with national feeling than those within the Reich.”⁵⁴ Thus, unlike many other European immigrants whose skin color or national origin marked them as somehow immutably non-white or un-American, German-Americans who arrived in the were engaged not just in the project of either gaining admission to whiteness or maintaining solidarity through ethnic identity – through active and widespread emphasis on a racially transmitted superiority, they were largely able to accomplish both at once, at least internally. This would change, dramatically and rapidly, with World War I.

⁵² Kathleen Neils Conzen, “German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity,” in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-hundred-year History*, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), p. 132.

⁵³ See, for example, Julius Fröbel, *Aus Amerika* (Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1857).

⁵⁴ Hans L. Trefousse, “The German-American Immigrants and the Newly Founded Reich,” in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-hundred-year History*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 161.

While the first world war's influence was immense, complex, and far-reaching, some of the effects on German-American public participation were relatively straightforward. In charting these effects, it is necessary to emphasize the particularities of the propaganda campaign launched by the United States government in order to seduce the American public out of isolationism and into war. This campaign represents one of the first large-scale domestic uses of the American advertising industry for the purpose of selling a policy to the populace. The overarching campaign strategy lay in demonizing Germany. This was accomplished not only through the familiar poster images of crazed apes in spiked *Kaiserliche* helmets, but through newsreels, radio broadcasts, and mobilization of individuals. George Creel, the newspaper man hired to manage the campaign, was especially proud of his Four Minute Men, 75,000 men trained and encouraged to give brief arguments in favor of various wartime efforts, such as liberty bonds, generally by equating failure to participate as a failure of loyalty. Subjects were assigned to the speakers, so that their work would reflect the latest emphasis desired by Washington. One recurring theme was that of the German spy, a pernicious, lurking sort, who was moving undetected through American society, then reporting back to Berlin on his discoveries.⁵⁵ In images such as this, we can see how German-American potential of assimilation and unmarked whiteness could cut both ways. Where, just a short time before, German-Americans were roundly congratulated for their smooth assimilation, and enjoyed a doubled identity in which German and American were both emphasized, during WWI

⁵⁵ For more on the actual (blundering and counter-productive) use of German-Americans as wartime spies by the NSDAP, see Cornelia Wilhelm, "Ethnic Germans as an Instrument of German Intelligence Services in the USA, 1933-1945" in Heike Bungert, Jan G. Heitman and Michael Wala, , *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Heike Bungert, Jan G. Heitman and Michael Wala ([London]: Routledge, 2003), pp. 35-55.

this unmarked-ness and duality were interpreted as dangerous. An atmosphere of fear and hostility toward all things German came to pervade public discourse.⁵⁶ While propaganda and preparation for war did not create American nativism, they certainly accelerated and consolidated its development, and helped to focus hostile attentions on German-Americans in particular.⁵⁷ As anti-German sentiment blossomed, German-American identity lost its cachet, and German-Americans hastily retreated from visibility. Some people changed their names; others ceased speaking or teaching the German language. By all accounts, a majority of German-Americans submerged themselves in assimilation. This required that most German-Americans take sudden advantage of their whiteness, which offered the option of near-seamless integration into the white American mainstream. The period saw the decimation of the German-language press, and a near-complete silencing of German-American ethnic pride.

The exceptions are, of course, noteworthy, and the Bundists were among them. Bundists were representative of the minority for whom ethnic/national hybrid identity was firmly and publicly re-trenched by attacks, and intensified by public protests.

⁵⁶ Anti-German-American feelings, though widespread, were never anything near as extreme as anti-black feeling was among whites. A crude comparison can be drawn between the total number of lynchings suffered by German Americans during the whole of World War I (one) and the number of black people lynched during the years 1917 and 1918 (ninety-six.) An account of the single confirmed incident follows. On April 4, 1918, the Associated Press reported that a 15-year-old Illinois boy of German descent was lynched by a mob after being forced to kiss a flag. His alleged crime was disloyalty. He had made pro-socialist and pro-union speeches to local miners. Op-ed pieces lauded the act, calling it an “example to disloyalists.” – Chicago Tribune, 5 April 1918, p. 1. Reproduced in Tolzmann, Don T., ed. *German-Americans in the Word Wars*, vol. 1. (Munich: KG Sauer, 1995), p. 254-255. 16 people, including 4 policemen, were indicted for the killing. (Chicago Tribune, 26 April 1918, p. 7, reproduced in Tolzmann, p. 287. They were acquitted after the jury had deliberated only 45 minutes. (New York Times, 2 June 1918, p. 7 column 1.)

⁵⁷ For an interesting account of this process, albeit one that takes little notice of the role of white privilege in the story of German-Americans, see Jörg Nagler, “Victims of the Home Front: Enemy Aliens in the United States During the First World War,” in Panikos, ed. Payani, *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars*

Over time, the internal documents of the GAB display a hardening of oppositional identity, of self image transforming to become increasingly radical, and increasingly alienated from mainstream ideas. Perhaps due, in part, to the predominance of Weimar-era immigrants in the leadership of the Bund, the association possessed an urgency and rhetorical militancy not shared by many German national associations. Weimar immigrants were often economic or political refugees from their homeland, which they saw as embattled and assaulted from within – the disruption of German nationalist ambitions may have helped re-focus some immigrants, including Bundists, on a racist identity to supplement their scarred and weakened nationalisms. In some ways, the GAB's outspoken racism was evidence of their successful integration into American culture: they were reflecting the dominant racist tropes of their American homeland, rather than their German origination. The inter-war period remained a site for boundary skirmishes of whiteness, and while the necessity for surface-level unanimity during wartime may have concealed racially-motivated battles for a time, the tensions and boundary skirmishes of whiteness boiled over between the wars. In this connection, 1924 is a landmark year for yet another reason: the infamous Klanbake Convention, during which Ku Klux Klan members and allies dominated the proceedings of the Democratic National Convention.

While this event crystallized some negative public opinions of the KKK and the democratic party, it was only possible in the first place because of the KKK's deep and persistent power in multiple jurisdictions. They controlled whole state legislatures and many, many municipal governments. If American rejection of the GAB was truly a referendum on the organization's racism, then one would expect that the Ku Klux Klan,

(Providence, Rhode Island: Berg Publishers Limited, 1993).

with its immensely more violent, protracted, and successful racist revolt, would be treated similarly. Such was not the case. The Klan proceeded relatively unmolested, while the GAB was subject to investigations, editorials, counter-protests, and a host of other aggressive rejections. However, just as the GAB differed from the NSDAP in their emphasis on Jewishness as a religious, rather than racial, identity, so too did those who protested the GAB focus on their actions as “religious bigotry” rather than racism. The House Un-American Activities Committee, as it investigated the Bund, became concerned about a number of aspects of the Bundist approach – racism was not among their listed “Points of Concern.” “Religious bigotry”⁵⁸ was concern number five, but was not underscored or highlighted as a major issue. Just as the protests against eugenically-oriented immigration law had concentrated on who was being selected for definition as white, rather than attacking the fundamental assumption of white superiority,⁵⁹ so anti-GAB protests were substantially unconcerned with racism.

They were, instead, directed against a group that was seen as invasive, foreign, and un-American. The Bundists were troublesome as enemy aliens, grouped in the public mind with the communists and anarchists they despised. House bills specifically labeled these ideologies as kindred forms of un-American belief and proposed punishment of ideas and their advocates. Not by criticism of their racism, but by sustained attacks on their loyalty and fitness as Americans, the GAB was effectively de-naturalized, both legally and culturally. Had the United States not entered into war against Germany, the Bund may never have been seriously considered a threat to democracy. And had the public response

⁵⁸ United States Congress, *House Committee Hearings, 77th Congress*. (Senate Library, 1941), Card 1/18, p. 1443.

⁵⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of*

to the Bund been limited to action taken by Congressional committees, the Bundist cause may have grown in strength and numbers.

News reports on the expulsion of GAB leadership from the United States relied heavily on the same sort of disease imagery that was employed by the Hitler in his characterizations of Jewish people: the once-dangerous Bundists were portrayed, in defeat, as pathetic, parasites without hosts. American newspapers highlighted the irony of Fritz Kuhn's deportation to Germany, where he was reportedly interned at Dachau.⁶⁰ The public faces of the Bund were punished heavily, and many of their lives ended with suicide. Rank-and-file GAB members, however, were accepted, once again, for assimilation, and absorbed easily into American culture.

⁶⁰ *Race*, 1st paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: harvard University Press, 1999), p. 86.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the GAB proves significant in that they may have been targeted despite, not because of, their vocal advocacy of white supremacy. Their contemporary opponents, with some exceptions, were not focused on GAB racism as the most salient feature of their agenda. But, while the GAB likely fell to internal discord and external paranoia and nativism, rather than to some noble human-rights ideal, the cultural memories of their activities did, in some ways, contribute to later discussions of how to manage dissent in the United States. The GAB provided one impetus for establishment of the HUAC, which later became infamous during the anti-Communist witch hunts of the 1950s. It also precipitated some of the earliest hate speech legislation, being subject, along with Henry Ford, the Ku Klux Klan, and the NAACP, to some of the first hate speech laws in American history. The GAB was perhaps the first group whose imbroglios in the courts brought the debates about hate speech up to a national scale, where they had previously been primarily local, and left to individual localities by the Supreme Court. The ACLU's decision to defend the GAB's civil rights of assembly and expression was justified in the

landmark polemic “Shall We Defend the Free Speech of Nazis In America?”⁶¹ which became a foundational document for free-speech defense, and later contributed a great deal to the decision in the 1970 Skokie Nazi trial.⁶² In this sense, despite the GAB’s limited success and ignominious fizzling defeat, it has had lasting influence as a signpost marking the proposed limits of democratic freedom. It exemplifies the sort of movement that some Americans, at some times, would except from basic civil rights. This is perhaps newly pertinent at this time in particular, when American law makers are again erecting limits on expression, assembly, movement, and privacy.

Beyond its lasting effects on ongoing civil rights debates, the GAB remains a touchstone for extant neo-Nazi and racist groups in the United States. It was the Nazi organization that gained the greatest support, visibility, and credence of any in the country. Examining the conditions under which the GAB formed, and the conditions under which it dissolved, can inform contemporary responses to white supremacy, and can help us commit to the difficult distinction between “bad speech” and bad action. The GAB had awful ideas, but were relatively nonviolent when measured against other, more mainstream nativist groups. I think it is thus relevant to treat the history of the GAB as a way in to an examination both of racism and of domestic speech policy. It is particularly significant to note the decided failure of direct speech suppression to tarnish the Bund’s appeal. It is now clear that when the American Nazis were under the greatest pressure from the authorities, they were also the beneficiaries of concomitant increases in publicity. Membership rose when government attacks peaked. Appropriately to the teleological

⁶¹ ACLU, “Shall We Defend Free Speech for Nazis in America?” (New York: ACLU, 1934). The pamphlet in the original is available in many archives.

⁶² Samuel Walker, *Hate Speech: The History of an American Controversy*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University

mythology of the ‘white elect,’ the GAB felt most potent when under attack. In the end, it was not government interference but internal discord compounded by widespread popular counter-protest that destroyed the Bund. In this sense, the case of the GAB can be seen as an affirmation of the ACLU’s 1934 assertion that combating “bad” speech is best accomplished through more speech, rather than through imposed restrictions on expression. This is empirically suggested by chronological correlations between well-publicized legal battles with increases in membership and donations. It is detectable as well as by examining the increasingly hostile and alienated rhetoric of Bund communiqués. As the GAB suffers the slings and arrows of prosecution, investigatory committees, and federal bans, its internal rhetoric shifts. While, publicly, the GAB was insisting on its patriotism and all-American orientation, in private, their rhetoric was beginning to shift to greater radicalism and a more embattled sense of self. Their story is a demonstration of what techniques have been used in dealing with ideologically extreme groups in the American context, but it is also an argument for free speech, even in embattled times.

Beyond the idea that speech should be combated with speech, though, how should an ostensibly democratic society respond to internal threats? Given guaranteed rights of assembly, speech, and gun ownership, how can classical liberal values be upheld in combat against anti-liberal trends? What is to be done when an illiberal dogma flowers within American territory, especially given that such flowerings appear to be perennial? Proponents of militant democracy argue that authorities should legally abrogate rights at times when the democracy itself is at stake. Militant democracy gained currency, just as did the ACLU’s counterarguments, in the wake of the perceived internal threat of

of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 45.

American Nazis, including the GAB. Obvious reasons for a resurgence of militant democratic philosophy in the present day include overweening fears of terrorist attacks within the United States, as well as the desire to justify Israeli assassinations in the Palestinian territories. It is my hope that an examination of the German-American Bund will trouble the assumptions of those who would point perpetually away from the silences and complicities within their own societies, and who would restrict the liberty of all rather than devising arguments and actions that could defeat their enemies in honorable combat.

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