

“German Must Go”: German-American Diversity and the *Cincinnati Post*’s Anti-German
Campaign

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Today, Cincinnatians take pride in the city’s German heritage. Cincinnati boasts the largest Oktoberfest in the country, and a 2018 *Cincinnati Enquirer* article rather bluntly noted, “This place is German. Really German.”¹ At its peak in 1890, fifty-seven percent of Cincinnati’s population consisted of German immigrants and their children.² However, when anti-German sentiments swept the country during World War I, Cincinnati’s strong German presence did not exempt it from war fever. Street and business names dropped any hint of German origin. The Cincinnati Public Library pulled its German books out of circulation. Schools stopped teaching German. Federal agents arrested the Austrian-born conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra as an enemy alien. On some occasions, German-Americans even experienced violence at the hands of other Cincinnatians.³ And the city’s press, including major newspapers such as the *Cincinnati Post*, reported on it all. The *Post* campaigned vigorously against Cincinnati’s long-standing German education system. Though World War I undoubtedly sparked the *Cincinnati Post*’s campaign against German education in Cincinnati public schools, the *Post*’s coverage about the study of German in schools reveals underlying nativist motives. In this paper,

¹ Dan Horn, “How German is the Cincinnati Region? We’re on the Leaderboard, but not No. 1,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 20, 2018, accessed September 16, 2020.

² Don Heinrich Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1983, published in *Cincinnati’s German Heritage*, (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1994), 47.

³ *Ibid.*, 128-136. For a broader description of anti-German actions in the United States during World War I, see Carl Wittke, *Ohio Historical Collections*. Vol. 5, *German-Americans and the World War*, chapter VI “*Furor Americanus*.”

I am drawing primarily on *Cincinnati Post* editions from 1917, as well as the work of scholars of the German-American experience in the United States, to analyze the *Post*'s campaign and what it reveals about the diversity of German-American identity in Cincinnati.

Any work on the experience of German-Americans in the United States must recognize the diversity among German immigrants and their descendants. As Russell A. Kazal argues in *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*, an “extraordinarily high level of internal diversity” incorporating “class, religion, gender, politics, [and] homeland region” divides characterized German immigrants, and each of these subgroups had a unique experience that limited the prominence of a shared German-American identity.⁴ Though Kazal writes about German-American identity in Philadelphia, his argument applies equally to German-American identity in Cincinnati. Earlier scholars, such as Don Heinrich Tolzmann and Frederick C. Luebke, argued the anti-German sentiments of World War I predated the war; the “war was the occasion that converted latent tensions into manifest hostility.”⁵ The *Cincinnati Post*'s coverage of the German education debate aligns with this argument. However, these scholars inadequately recognized the diversity within the German-American community. This paper aims to add nuance to Tolzmann and Luebke's analyses by complicating them with Kazal's understanding of German-American diversity through an examination of the *Cincinnati Post*'s campaign against German education in Cincinnati. German-Americans experienced, and clung to, the German language to varying degrees: the 1910 census listed a total of 152,478 Cincinnatians as German-born or the children of German immigrants, but only 125,446 Cincinnatians “who

⁴ Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 274. Don Heinrich Tolzmann and Frederick C. Luebke emphasize this diversity to a lesser degree.

⁵ Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I*, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), xiii.

claimed German as their mother tongue.”⁶ This disparity indicates that a number of second-generation Cincinnati Germans primarily spoke English. As this paper will later demonstrate, German-Americans in Cincinnati participated on both sides of the debate about German language education in public schools.

A “Really German” City

By World War I, German immigrants’ presence in Cincinnati had been firmly established and institutionalized. German immigration to the city peaked in 1882.⁷ The 1910 census indicated 41.9% of the city’s population either was born in Germany or of “German stock.”⁸ By 1917, the German-speaking population of Cincinnati constituted approximately 34.9% of the city’s total population.⁹ This strong numerical German presence in the city enabled the creation of a thriving network of German institutions. German immigrants and their descendants created religious and secular societies, attained prominence in the city’s banking industry, and founded musical conservatories and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. The city’s two major German-language newspapers, the *Volksblatt* and the *Freie Presse*, reached “a combined circulation of 110,000” in 1910, amounting to 30.2% of Cincinnati’s total population.¹⁰ German influence on Cincinnati was so notable that the Works Project Administration’s 1940 *Ohio Guide* claimed, “Cincinnati did not even try to assimilate its German immigrants; instead they

⁶ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 47. Tolzmann draws the opposite conclusion from the 1910 census records. However, he compared the language number to the number of Cincinnatians of German stock alone rather than the total number of German immigrants plus their children.

⁷ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47. Tolzmann indicates in the notes on page 204 that “German stock” with regards to the census data refers to the children of German immigrants.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German Cincinnati*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 58, 80, 87, 95.

assimilated Cincinnati.”¹¹ The myriad nature of German institutions in the city demonstrates the community’s diversity, as no single issue dominated their involvement in Cincinnati society.

Nowhere was the institutionalization of German culture quite so prominent as in the city’s public schools. The first bilingual German-English public school in Cincinnati began in 1840 in the North German Lutheran Church. By World War I, Cincinnati’s German education system served as a model for other cities. The Cincinnati Plan, designed by Dr. H. H. Fick, consisted of five to nine hours of German instruction each week, emphasizing songs and poems.¹² All forty-seven white elementary and intermediate schools, along with one African-American school, participated in this plan to some degree. At its peak, the program involved 17,000 students and 250 teachers.¹³ German language served as a valuable symbol of German identity for many, giving Cincinnati Germans a clear stake in the preservation of this education system. Many religious German-Americans, like John Henni, believed “[l]anguage save[d] faith,” while other German-Americans linked German language education with the preservation of German literature and secular culture.¹⁴ On two previous occasions, Cincinnati was embroiled in nativist debate over its German education system, first as a part of the Know-Nothing movement in the 1850s and second due to concerns of interference with English education in the 1880s.¹⁵ Between the 1880s and World War I, however, few Cincinnatians protested German study. That all changed when the United States entered World War I in spring 1917, at which time the *Cincinnati Post* jumped right into the fray.

¹¹ Works Projects Administration, Writers Program, Ohio, *The Ohio Guide*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 79, quoted in Don Heinrich Tolzmann “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 44.

¹² Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 85.

¹³ Tolzmann, *The Cincinnati Germans After the Great War*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), published in *Cincinnati’s German Heritage*, (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1994), 85-86.

¹⁴ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 69; Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I*, 41-42.

¹⁵ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 86.

The Campaign Begins: April-May 1917

The *Cincinnati Post* had the widest readership of any Cincinnati daily newspaper in the early twentieth century and constituted a key part of the Ohio press landscape.¹⁶ It was the second-largest newspaper of the Scripps media chain, known as the Concern. As with any Scripps paper, the *Post* drew its stories from a combination of local journalists and the national Scripps wire services. Scripps reached an agreement with President Woodrow Wilson in 1914 to promote his presidency, including his pro-British policies.¹⁷ However, Scripps papers maintained some degree of neutrality until after the Zimmerman Telegram in March 1917, at which point Scripps adopted a strongly anti-German stance that carried over into domestic news. Though local editors generally had to align their viewpoints with the Concern's, Scripps encouraged journalists to include their own opinions in stories they wrote. Roy Howard, a former employee of the *Post* who served as president of the Scripps service United Press from 1917 to 1920, explained at a newspaper conference, "We're only human beings, and most of us have pretty strong individualities. We couldn't keep our individualities out of the news, no matter how hard we tried."¹⁸ Such a philosophy resulted in an opinion-heavy press landscape.

As the 1916-1917 school year ended, the *Post* began its campaign against German education in Cincinnati public schools, indirectly promoting nativist sentiments through the words of community members. Alexander Thomson, "sales manager of the Champion Coated Paper Co.," emerged early as a leader of Cincinnati's anti-German movement.¹⁹ His letter to the school board, which the *Post* published on April 30, opened the *Post's* discussion of the education issue. Thomson's letter facially relied primarily on economic arguments. He called the

¹⁶ H. O. Haarmayer, "In Cincinnati," *Printer's Ink*, July 23, 1903, 34.

¹⁷ Zacher, 35.

¹⁸ Will Irwin, "The United Press," *Harper's Weekly*, April 25, 1914, quoted in Zacher, 22. Zacher notes that Irwin likely was paraphrasing Howard's speech at the conference in this quote, despite the quotation marks. Howard later became chairman of the Concern (221).

¹⁹ "German Study Is Protested," *Cincinnati Post*, April 30, 1917.

required study of German in some districts “manifestly ridiculous” on the grounds that Cincinnati lacked the “probably in excess of \$150,000 per year” necessary to pay German teachers. The end of the letter, however, revealed the nativist sentiment underlying Thomson’s opposition to German – the real issue was not the expense, but rather that the money was “used for the teaching of a foreign language in [the] public schools.”²⁰ His second letter, as summarized by *Post* editors, argued that teaching German was “un-American” and “exalt[ed] German ideals, German culture and German institutions and learning above American ideals.” Thomson’s letters demonstrate a backlash to the prominence German-Americans in Cincinnati enjoyed relative to other immigrant groups. He took particular offense at “the teaching of German to the exclusion of other foreign languages.”²¹ The *Post* then invited Thomson to write a full article²², in which Thomson relied on a (probably spurious) story of a German teacher telling a student “the value of beer as a beverage was equal to that of milk.” Here, too, Thomson revealed his nativist sentiments by relying on stereotypes about Germans and beer to argue that they imposed “the ‘German idea’” on schoolchildren.²³

The *Cincinnati Post* also highlighted Rev. John F. Herget, who gave an address on May 20 entitled “Americanism, Diluted and Undiluted” against German language education in public elementary schools.²⁴ Herget argued German education created “milk and water patriotism.” Unlike Thomson, though, Herget’s nativism did not criticize Cincinnati’s partiality to Germans, as he made it abundantly clear “there is no reason for teaching any foreign language in the grade schools.”²⁵ The *Post*’s extensive quotation of Herget’s speech without comment indicates

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “German Study Again Flayed By Thomson,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 24, 1917.

²² Thomson’s article also included discussion of a survey of Cincinnati teachers he conducted, with highly questionable methodology. The survey results would suggest that most Cincinnati teachers opposed teaching German in schools, but the survey itself contained so much bias it would be impossible to rely on as evidence.

²³ “Thomson Says German Study Blocks Pupils,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 25, 1917.

²⁴ “Herget Flays School German,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 19, 1917.

²⁵ “Pastor’s Plea To Bar German Is Applauded,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 21, 1917.

agreement with his sentiments – there would be no reason for a Scripps journalist, encouraged to include their own perspective, not to comment if they disagreed. Additionally, the *Post* emphasized “Dr. Herget is of German descent,” thereby attempting to show that even Cincinnati Germans opposed German language education.²⁶ However, rather than affirming a generalized view of German-American opinions about German language education, Reverend Herget’s speech demonstrates the diverse viewpoints held by Cincinnati Germans.

“Cease Emulating the Ostrich”: May-August 1917

Despite the efforts of the *Cincinnati Post*, the Cincinnati Board of Education decided on May 26, 1917 not to investigate the study of German in public schools. Since the city elected its first German-American school board member in 1842, Cincinnati Germans “demonstrated concern for continued representation.”²⁷ The 1917 Board of Education comprised six members, four of whom were likely of German descent. Through 1917, Superintendent of Schools Randall J. Condon “crossed horns” with anyone who sought to remove German from the public schools.²⁸ He felt “German must and will stand or fall upon its own merits as an educational subject” rather than face elimination because of nativist attacks.²⁹ The school board as a whole remained divided. Three members felt “times were not normal enough for a deliberate discussion of the question,” and three, including one board member of German descent, wanted to investigate Thomson’s claims.³⁰ As a result, no investigation took place before the 1917 school year.

The Cincinnati school board’s decision prompted the *Post* to take a clear editorial stance against German language education and attack the board. The *Post* directly juxtaposed an article

²⁶ “Herget Flays School German.”

²⁷ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 85.

²⁸ Scott A. Merriman, “Persecution of the German Language in Cincinnati and the Ake Law in Ohio, 1917-1919,” *Journal of the Association for History and Computing*, 1, no. 2 (November 1998), accessed September 16, Michigan Publishing.

²⁹ Cincinnati School Board of Education Minutes, book 31, page 373, September 15, 1917, quoted in Merriman, “Persecution of the German Language in Cincinnati and the Ake Law in Ohio, 1917-1919.”

³⁰ “German Is To Be Kept In Schools,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 26, 1917.

about the school board's decision with a column about other cities that recently eliminated German from their schools, implying Cincinnati should do the same.³¹ "The ostrich is a stupid bird," an anonymous writer mused in a front-page article following the decision. "Our Board of Education should cease emulating the ostrich." The *Post* directly admonished the board members who opposed the measure, demanding they "consent to a full statement of facts concerning this important public business." That these three board members – Dr. Louis Schwab, Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr, and Albert E. Mittendorf – were of German descent certainly did not help their case as far as the *Post* and its readers were concerned. While the newspaper attempted to mask its resentment against German by saying it did "not say now that German should or should not be taught in the elementary grades," it clearly accused German study of "exalting the ideals of a foreign enemy and inculcating principles contrary to American democracy."³²

This nativist attack by no means represented the views of all Cincinnatians. On the same day that the *Cincinnati Post* published its polemic against Schwab, Eisenlohr, and Mittendorf, the Board of Education received seven petitions espousing various opinions about German language education. These petitions called for "action ranging from postponement of the issue...to continuing German...to banning it...to discussing the idea of studying German."³³ Such heterogeneous attitudes throw the *Post*'s firm stance on German education, unsurprising given Scripps journalists' tendency towards persuasion, into sharper relief.

"Out With It!": September 1917

In the weeks preceding the 1917-1918 school year, the *Post* adopted new tactics to attack German language in the public schools, primarily focusing on textbook content in an effort to

³¹ Ibid.

³² "In Fairness to Pupils School Board Members Should Ask Investigation of German Study," *Cincinnati Post*, May 28, 1917.

³³ Merriman, "Persecution of the German Language in Cincinnati and the Ake Law in Ohio, 1917-1919."

convince Cincinnati parents to remove their children from German classes. “How Long Are We To Stand For This?” an anonymous columnist demanded above a cartoon of sad children studying German as a caricatured Kaiser Wilhelm leered through a window. The writer portrayed Cincinnati as “blindly” focused on the “sturdy German pioneers” of its history rather than paying attention to other cities’ decision to stop offering German classes. Cincinnati’s children had been exposed to “mental poison” from the “subtle passages upholding autocratic Prussian ideals” in German textbooks.³⁴ The editorial contained few facts and instead relied solely on combative language to call parents to action. The *Post*’s articles of these few weeks, particularly the week directly preceding the start of school on September 10, display themes common to this article.

The *Cincinnati Post* devoted its front page on September 5, 6, 7, and 8 to the German education issue. The articles linked learning German language to absorbing undesirable German ideals and blamed textbooks for “high school students...assimilating kultur on the way.”³⁵ The analysis involved taking quotes out of context and finding sinister motives behind them. In one example from *Im Vaterland*, a high school German textbook, the *Post* stressed that Ethel, a character in the book, “point[ed] out that America has scarcely any army.” The article implied this textbook was therefore un-American and seeking to belittle the United States in a time of war. However, Paul Valentine Bacon authored the textbook in 1910, prior to World War I. Ethel’s statement, in context, proves not so sinister after all.³⁶ This failure to recognize context characterized most of the *Post*’s textbook criticisms. A September 10 feature article decried the use of the poem “Hail to You, Germania” in Cincinnati German textbooks. While this poem might have been acceptable in 1911, when the book was published, the journalist argued, in 1917

³⁴ “Time Is Here For Parents To Decide Whether Their Children Are To Continue Study Of Kaiser’s Language In Grade Schools,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 1, 1917.

³⁵ “Cincinnati Pupils In Pursuit Of Kultur Will Read These Things,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 5, 1917.

³⁶ “Yes, Kaiser’s Picture Is In School Books,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 5, 1917.

it promoted a glory “tarnished with the blood of murdered women and children and stained by the hands of men who, for the sake of their ambitious schemes, tear treaties into scraps of paper.”³⁷ The *Post* frequently examined pre-war texts with this wartime mindset.

Despite the shaky ground on which the *Post* based its accusations, these articles motivated Superintendent Condon and the school board to restrict German education for the first time. In “a bad month for the kaiser’s language,” Condon “ordered an investigation of all German textbooks used in the schools.”³⁸ The German Textbook Censoring Committee formed as a result of this decision eliminated six texts from the curriculum by mid-September, though two had to be reinstated for lack of acceptable material, and pasted over “objectionable” sections of several others.³⁹

On the first day of school - September 10, 1917 - the *Cincinnati Post*’s front page focused triumphantly on the German education issue. Fourteen children, smirking at the viewer, stood squarely in a line in the front page photo as a broken-English caption intended to mimic German boasted to “Herr Hohenzollern” the fifty percent decrease in German study at the Cummins School in Walnut Hills.⁴⁰ The *Post* did have cause for celebration, as trends across the city generally mirrored this numerical decline. The number of students enrolled in German plummeted from 13,856 in 1916 to 7,546 in fall 1917, a decrease of nearly 46%.⁴¹

The *Cincinnati Post* quickly claimed credit for both developments. A front-page article from September 13, 1917 declared the campaign against the teaching of German had “been a

³⁷ “‘Hail To You, Germania,’ Is School Poem,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 10, 1917.

³⁸ “German Textbook Probe Ordered: ‘Kultur’ Lessons Attacked,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 6, 1917.

³⁹ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 128; Merriman, “Persecution of the German Language in Cincinnati and the Ake Law, 1917-1919.”

⁴⁰ “Pupils Desert German As Schools Open; Poisoned ‘Kultur’ Books Are Still In Use,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 10, 1917.

⁴¹ Tolzmann, “The Survival of an Ethnic Community: The Cincinnati Germans, 1918 through 1932,” 128. District rules required classes to consist of at least twenty students (Merriman); this requirement left several schools without a German class. It is possible that some of the students who dropped German would have continued in German instruction given the opportunity.

great success,” even though they had yet to achieve their “main objectives” of ending German in elementary schools altogether and shifting textbook content away from “Potsdam poison.” Even though the *Post* outwardly cited the war as inspiring their campaign, the article rested on general nativist sentiments rather than particular anti-German feeling, arguing against “giving political and educational nourishment to alien elements, whether they be German, Chinese, Russian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, English, or French.” Anti-German activism was simply the cause of the moment, since the Cincinnati German-Americans “ha[d] alone asked for special privileges.” It specifically referenced that “the national danger” of foreign language education would continue “after the war,” despite what any of the “pro-Germanites” might think.⁴² This postwar continuation of the education issue signals the broader nativism and retaliation against German influence that motivated the *Post*’s campaign.

“Post Readers Discuss”

The *Cincinnati Post*’s publication of readers’ letters commenting on the study of German in public schools further reveals the paper’s underlying motives. Beginning in May 1917 with Thomson’s article, the editors “invited readers to contribute views” on “the question of continuing German study in elementary grades of the public schools.”⁴³ The *Post* published letters to the editor about German study in sets. These sets were framed as “discussions,” but the *Post* editors included just “One Who Is For German” in each collection. Notably, in the September 10 issue, the editors hid this pro-German argument even further by headlining the collection “Post Readers Spurn German” despite one of the four letters in the collection supporting German.⁴⁴ The letter-writers espoused a variety of arguments against teaching German based in nativism and wartime patriotism. To these correspondents, the German

⁴² “Kaiserites, Losing Grip In Schools, Hope To Regain It,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 13, 1917.

⁴³ “Thomson Says German Study Blocks Pupils.”

⁴⁴ “Post Readers Spurn German,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 10, 1917.

language was “Kaiser poison” because the United States and Germany were at war, but its teaching in the first place was the result of prewar “alien enemies and their influence.” They emphasized that learning German was unnecessary because “foreign people...should try to learn to speak our language correctly;” since “very few do,” Americans should not have to “kneel down and make [their] children study German.”⁴⁵ Nativism also colored the correspondents’ ire at the school board, as letters highlighted a need for “electing Americans to the School Board of Cincinnati,” with the implication that German-American board members should be removed.⁴⁶ Even economic arguments rested on nativist sentiments; one correspondent argued it was not “fair to milk the taxpayers” for the teaching of foreign languages because foreign language education should never receive taxpayer funding.⁴⁷ Many letters were signed, “A Reader,” but at least three of those arguing against German for its un-Americanness had German surnames. Thus, these letters to the editor also demonstrate how some Cincinnati Germans, probably several generations removed from immigration, distanced themselves from their German identity.

A letter from May 26 aimed to illuminate what the correspondent saw as problematic favoritism towards Germans in Cincinnati. If German education existed because of a significant German population, A. F. Valerio argued, “it [was] only fair that Italian be taught also, because many Italians live here,” and “in the interest of consistency, the Turkish language should also be taught.” He continued, noting “[t]he Rumanians also should not be neglected in that respect...to say nothing of the large number of Bulgarians who live in Cincinnati.” Plainly, Valerio proposed these arguments not as any legitimate call to expand foreign language instruction, but to refute arguments that German should be taught, as he also stated “there should be nothing but the

⁴⁵ “More Post Readers Discuss Study of German In Schools,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 11, 1917.

⁴⁶ “Post Readers Say German Must Go,” *Cincinnati Post*, September 8, 1917.

⁴⁷ “Post Readers Spurn German.”

English language taught in the lower grades.”⁴⁸ This tactic of calling for other language classes in an effort to demonstrate the absurdity of German education repeated itself in other letters as well. Most controversially, some letters argued for Chinese to be taught in schools for this reason.⁴⁹

While community members wrote these letters, the *Cincinnati Post* retained editorial discretion over publication choices. Petitions received by the school board reveal public opinion on German education was not nearly as aligned behind banning the language as the *Post* portrayed. On September 10, the same day the *Post* published its triumphant article on German class numbers, 8550 Cincinnatians petitioned the Board in favor of German, condemning “unwarranted and untimely attacks...upon the instruction in the German language in the public schools.”⁵⁰ The *Post*’s relative silence on the campaign to preserve German spoke volumes.

Though World-War-I-related patriotism provided a catalyst for the *Cincinnati Post*’s campaign against German education in public schools, the *Post*’s coverage about German study reveals lingering resentment of German-Americans on nativist grounds and for their prominence in the city. When the school board eventually banned German in elementary schools in February 1918, the *Cincinnati Post* immediately attributed the decision to its own efforts. “The board’s action, at the request of Dr. Randall J. Condon, superintendent of schools, was the outgrowth of a campaign started by The Post,” it boasted on February 9, the day of the preliminary vote.⁵¹ The Board of Education voted again on February 11 to uphold the decision to ban German in elementary schools starting at the end of the 1917-1918 school year; only one member dissented.⁵² Despite the *Post*’s claims, the newspaper’s own articles suggest this decision related

⁴⁸ “Fight On German Study Is Lost In School Board,” *Cincinnati Post*, May 26, 1917.

⁴⁹ For example, Eli Frankenstein’s letter to the Village Gossip, *Cincinnati Post*, May 29, 1917.

⁵⁰ Board Minutes, book 31, page 355, September 10, 1917, quoted in Merriman, “Persecution of the German Language in Cincinnati and the Ake Law in Ohio, 1917-1919.”

⁵¹ “Schools Drop German: Language of Kaiser Will Be Ousted in June at Term End,” *Cincinnati Post*, February 9, 1918.

⁵² “Board Clinches Vote Ousting German Study,” *Cincinnati Post*, February 12, 1918.

more to practicalities of class numbers than anything else. Condon cited “a decreasing desire for the study” and the likelihood of “a large falling off in the number electing the subject next September.” As such, “classes with little more than the minimum number of pupils” or even combining grades “into a single class” would be probable.⁵³ While the *Post* undoubtedly influenced public opinion and by extension class numbers to some degree, it did not achieve the patriotic banning of the language for which it agitated.⁵⁴

Whatever the motivation behind the German education ban, this decision, along with other anti-German actions as a result of both world wars, effectively stifled German-American prominence in Cincinnati for the better part of the twentieth century. The institutions and influence remained, but they were stripped of public German connotations or cautious about engaging in advocacy for the German-American community. Nativism also prompted many Cincinnati Germans to accelerate their assimilation into conformist American culture. This subsumption facilitated a consensus view of German-Americans in Cincinnati focused on those who preserved German culture until the world wars; the revival of German-American culture that continues to this day draws on that consensus view. The time is ripe for more scholarly analysis of German-American diversity in Cincinnati, in line with Kazal, to illuminate the nuances and pluralism that characterized this community. Examining these nuances would facilitate a more complete understanding of German-American identity and bring scholarship on German-Americans up to date with what is already being done in the field for other ethnic groups.

⁵³ “Schools Drop German.”

⁵⁴ It should be noted that the prohibition of German education did not last long. Ohio Governor James M. Cox successfully obtained the passage of the Ake Law in 1919, banning German language education below the eighth grade. However, in 1923, the Supreme Court case *Robert Meyer v. The State of Nebraska* declared that all state laws prohibiting German education were unconstitutional and violated the Fourteenth Amendment rights of teachers and parents. Carl Wittke, *Ohio Historical Collections*. Vol. 5, *German-Americans and the World War*, 181.

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