

Stars Spangled Swastikas: The Dangerous of American Nazi Organizations in the
1930s

Grace C. Brooks

Fairfax, Virginia

Bachelors History, College of William & Mary, 2023

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of The College of William and Mary in
Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

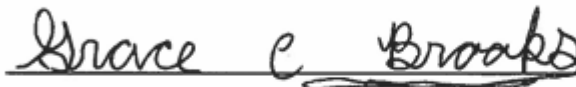
Harrison Ruffin Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia
August 2024

APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts



Grace Christiana Brooks

Approved by the Committee, May 2024

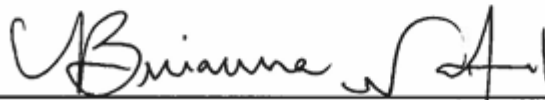


Committee Chair

Hiroshi Kitamura, Associate Professor, History
College of William & Mary



Andrew Fisher, Associate Professor, History
College of William & Mary



Brianna Nofil, Assistant Professor, History
College of William & Mary

ABSTRACT

Thousands of Americans joined domestic Nazi organizations during the 1930s. While a vast amount of the public did not engage with such ideologies, the United States' flirtation with fascism was far more widespread than presented in conventional histories. These domestic organizations preached the perilous doctrines of National Socialism, utilizing patriotic language and iconography to garner support for their radical beliefs. This thesis portfolio evaluates the rhetoric employed by these American Nazis. The first paper evaluates the rhetoric of the German American Bund, the largest of these domestic Nazi sympathizers, and the language they employed regarding immigration. The second paper examines how these organizations appropriated Indigenous cultures to support their far-right politics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. American Nazi's thoughts on Immigration: The exclusionary rhetoric of the German American Bund	5
Chapter 2. Playing Patriot: Interwar American Nazi Organization's Appropriations of Indigeneity	28

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The two papers comprising this portfolio are possible due to Dr. Briana Nofil and Dr. Andrew Fisher. I want to acknowledge their assistance, feedback, criticism, and recommendations. Through their knowledge of the topics discussed and their guidance, my research questions transformed into a developed work of scholarship. In addition, I also thank Dr. Fisher for lending me many books relating to my topic. I must also thank Dr. Hiroshi Kitamura for serving as my graduate advisor and supporting me throughout the process. Also, I am grateful to Dr. Charles McGovern for his consistent encouragement. I must also acknowledge Dr. Michael Butler, who taught me the essentials of researching and writing history throughout my undergraduate studies.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge and thank my family, especially my parents, for the sacrifices they made so I could acquire an education. I will never be able to express the true measure of my gratitude for all they have taught me and for their decades-long, resilient support.

Finally, I must acknowledge the friends who endured my long research rants, stayed with me during long study stretches at the library, and made the stressful moments bearable. I wish I had the space to list all of you by name. I specifically want to thank Jamie Lukow, Bryleigh Jackson, Gabrielle Pressley, Colleen Carrington, and Zoë Packel for their friendship; I could not imagine trudging through graduate studies without them. I also want to acknowledge and thank Nandini Yarlagadda for the many adventures and continual encouragement.

Introduction

Guiding the research of my master's thesis was a series of questions presented to me in my junior year of college. The professor presented the class with a segment from a documentary composed exclusively of found footage. From the back row of the lecture hall, I watched with stunned disbelief the black and white film of twenty-thousand Americans gathered at Madison Square Garden and proudly present the stiff-armed salute of the Third Reich. At no point in my educational journey had I seen images like these. I lacked a conceptual framework to understand how a giant portrait of George Washington could hang behind a podium as the man presenting from it praised Adolf Hitler. The fact that the American flag could reside comfortably beside the twisted symbol of the swastika struck me as a work of fiction. As I watched these images from the last century dance across the screen, questions reverberated throughout the caverns of my mind: *How can this footage be real? Who are these people, and how many of them were there? Why did this happen, and how did it affect American society during the interwar era?* This thesis is my attempt to answer at least some of those initial inquiries.

Like many Americans, I grew up with a carefully tailored and edited version of the Second World War. In most of my education, this conflict was a European catastrophe that, in 1941, the United States joined, crossing the Atlantic armed with the principles of democracy and the virtues of freedom. I was told that my country had defeated Nazism and that Fascism was a deadly ideology that only ever happened in Germany or *over there*. The fact that a notable number of my fellow Americans had flirted with the principles of National Socialism less than one hundred years before me was deemed an inconvenient fact and, as such, was excluded from the narrative. However, the silencing of this historical reality did not cause these incidents to

disappear from the archive; thus, I sat dumbstruck in my history class, watching images that contradicted the version of events that had defined my understanding of America's past.

The footage I confronted captured a rally orchestrated by the German-American Bund in February of 1939 dedicated to commemorating the anniversary of George Washington's birthday. Only eight months before Hitler invaded Poland, naturalized German-Americans attended the event to celebrate the Virginia-born president. They listened to the addresses of Father Coughlin and the "American Fuhrer " Fritz Kuhn. These men's speeches spewed anti-Semitic language and advocated that National Socialism was the only ideology that could save the United States from the threat of Communism. Though I did not know it then, this footage was not an isolated event.

Not only did Bund rallies occur throughout the United States, but this was not the only organization in interwar America seeking to convert the country to the murderous philosophies of Adolf Hitler. These organizations published newspapers and other literature seeking to persuade the American people of their cause. The Bund established summer camps throughout the United States and was dedicated to instilling in children not only the love of Nazism but also discrimination against Jewish communities. One investigative reporter, John Metcalf, testified under oath to Congress that he believed there to be around 25,000 members of the German American Bund. This figure does not consider the membership of other organizations sharing in the Bund's mission. These numbers represent a significant number of Americans who were tempted by far-right policies and I wanted to understand the effects caused by these organizations. Within this portfolio, I examine some of the impacts of these American Nazi groups.

In the first paper, I examine the rhetoric of the German-American Bund and the role that anti-semitism and xenophobia played within their propaganda. The paper seeks to draw a connection between the surrounding culture of discrimination, as observed by the Bund, and the United State's refusal to admit Jewish refugees, fleeing the approaching Holocaust, entry into the nation. While it is difficult to draw a direct correlation between the German American Bund and the United States rejecting sanctuary to those persecuted within Europe there are evident connections between the rhetoric of the organization and the harmful legislative practices that restricted Jewish communities.

Within my second paper, I explore how these far-right groups exploited a Native American advocacy group, the American Indian Federation, to appropriate their indigeneity in an attempt to appear more American. After Nazi Germany failed to align Native Americans with their beliefs, these organizations attempted to convert Indigenous communities to the cause of Nazism. However due to this, the mission of the American Indian Federation to secure greater Indigenous sovereignty became entangled with Fascist groups seeking to profit from their ethnic heritage.

Though I began researching American Nazi groups in an attempt to understand the dreadful footage first introduced to me in undergrad, this study quickly transformed from my initial inquiries. The words of this thesis were researched and written in a time when anti-semitism and radical policies are again on the rise in the United States. As I read the rhetoric of these Nazi groups, I listened to the United States and other nations again engage in harmful rhetoric against Jewish communities. In reviewing sources detailing the relationship between the American Indian Federation and domestic Fascist groups, I watched an election steeped in radical politics unfold. I hope this thesis is a reminder to learn from history and to avoid

repeating the heinous actions and dangerous ideologies that affected the United States during the age of the star spangled swastika.

The Immigration policies of American Nazis: The German-American Bund and the Rhetoric of Exclusion

Flying swastikas littered the landscape of the United States during the 1930s. The emblem of Hitler's murderous regime waved from sea to shining sea.¹ The Nazi icon proudly hung beside American flags at Madison Square Garden as an audience of twenty-thousand, wrapped up in patriotic zeal, wildly cheered.² Less than a month before the Nazi machine of war invaded Poland, pursuing a campaign of terror on the European continent and subjecting Jewish communities to unspeakable horrors, nineteen-year-old Helen Vooros delivered the stiff arm salute of the monstrous regime within the walls of the American Capitol Building.³ Summer camps across the United States attracted multitudes of German-American children. The camp leaders sought to indoctrinate these youths with a faith in National Socialism and a belief in the superiority of the Aryan race.⁴ Units modeled off of Hitler's Stormtroopers paraded through American cities. The prevalence of these activities launched Congressional investigations into organizations dedicated to establishing Nazism within the United States. Though often neglected in the conventional accounts of American history, the fact remains that during the 1930s, the United States dangerously considered the philosophies of Adolf Hitler. The largest of these organizations which sought to persuade the American people to adopt Nazism was the German-American Bund.

In the nearly eighty years since the fall of Hitler's Third Reich, a monumental amount of scholarship examines the philosophies of National Socialism, but relatively little scholarship questions the influence of the ideologies outside of Germany. The works that do evaluate Nazi

¹ Martin Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America*. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 306.

² Luther Hutson, "Bund Activities Widespread," *New York Times*, February 26, 1939, 70.

³ Frederick Barkley, "Bund Youth Unit Denounced by Girl for Immortality." *New York Times*, August 19, 1939, 1.

⁴ "Germans 'Heil' Swastika at Meeting of Nazi Bund Here." *Santa Rosa Republican*, November 22, 1937, 9.

movements within the United States neglect the topic of immigration and citizenship, which was a crucial aspect of the German-American Bund's identity and rhetoric. Vast majorities of the Bund were new immigrants from Germany or recently naturalized citizens of the United States.⁵ Despite the deep immigrant identity of the group, they sought the exclusion of groups that they believed would harm the American ideals they vowed to defend. Of the outsiders they considered as a corruptive force on national identity was the Jewish Community, which they believed manipulated the power structures of the United States and failed at assimilation within American society. The goal of this paper is to trace the immigrant element of the German-American Bund movement and to evaluate their rhetoric on the topic. The German-American Bund contributed to the decade's discourses of exclusion due to a fear that it would corrupt the nation's systems. Despite the short-lived nature of the group, their philosophies are not extinct within American conceptions of those who are insiders as opposed to outsiders. In an age defined by immigrant quota systems and the refusal of Jewish German refugees, examining the voice of this far-right association provides context and a contemporary perspective on these tragic policies.

To understand the aspect of immigration within this radical group, we will first trace its origins from a small community of recent American arrivals in the Midwest to a published national newspaper and their "Pro-American Rally" at Madison Square Garden. A main character of the Bund's story is Fritz Kuhn, the American *Fuhrer* and organizational leader who propelled the ragtag band of German immigrants into an influential group within American Society. Second, we will look at the group's rhetoric regarding immigration and exclusion. To evaluate their perspectives on this topic, we will examine their newspaper, the *Deutscher Weckruf und*

⁵ "Naturalization Study Ordered in Bund Probe: U.S Believes 'New Citizens' May Have Bolstered Membership." *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 21, 1940, 2.

Beobachter or the *Free American*, in addition to pamphlets from the group, the literature they promote, and Kuhn's address to the twenty-two thousand at Madison Square Garden—the organization's affiliation with anti-immigrant organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Before tracing the humble origins of the Bund, we will question the role of German immigration within the United States and its influence on the organization.

America has a long history of German immigration, which goes back to the nation's beginning, but the perception of this group changed during the First World War. When America finally entered the conflict in 1917, it caused an outpouring of anti-German sentiment within the United States. A renowned scholar of German-American relations, Don Heinrich Tolzmann: "The U.S declaration of war on Germany in April 1917 resulted in a tragic display of hysteria directed against everything and anything German. Although carried on by nativist extremists, the majority silently approved, or at least did not speak out against the nativist hysteria." ⁶ The relationship between German Americans and the broader American society was still ruptured when Fritz Kuhn took control of the Bund in the mid 1930s. A sense of discrimination and injustice fueled much of the rhetoric that propelled the American pro-Nazi group. In the defeat of the Second Reich during the Great War and the failure of the Treaty of Versailles, the new German government, the Weimar Republic, entered a time of economic crisis, such as hyperinflation and social chaos. Due to these conditions, many Germans sought to immigrate, hoping to achieve new opportunities, and the United States became the chosen nation of many of these European migrants. By the mid to late 1930s, the German government estimated around 100,000 to 200,000 German nationals resided in the U.S.⁷ Among the masses seeking to escape

⁶ Timothy Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996) 12.

⁷ Grant Grams, *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021), 28.

from the turmoil of Weimar were two brothers, Peter and Fritz Gissibl, who settled in Chicago. Fritz, the more politically driven of the pair in 1924, founded the Teutonia Association, which by 1936 would spawn the German-American Bund.⁸

Fritz Gissibl's fledgling Tuenoian association was built upon his deep pro-Nazi sentiments. Compared to other organizations of the period, which only desired to create community among American immigrants, Gissibl extolled the values of National Socialism. Despite the lack of members within his organization in 1925, Gissibl sent a couple of dollars from the group's scarce budget to Adolf Hitler as a birthday present.⁹ While the Teutonia Association was committed to Nazism abroad, the organization, though gaining little national following, collapsed due to tensions within the group. From the ashes of one of the first attempts of a German immigrant group that supported the ambitions of the Nazis came the Friends of New Germany, which built upon the beliefs of the previous association. Friends of New Germany would gain a new leader, Fritz Kuhn, and a new name, the German-American Bund Association, in 1936.

Before examining the structure and prominence of the German-American Bund, it is valuable to explore the ideologies of the Friends of New Germany. Kuhn's group reiterated the political alliances of the Friends while building upon their philosophies of the discrimination the German element allegedly faced in the United States and their ideas regarding the valuable contribution Hitler's government provided to the German people. A pamphlet published by the Friends in 1935 entitled *Lifting the Pale: Germany and Hitler in Their True Light*. On the inside front cover of the pamphlet, it asks, "Do you want reliable information or be treated as a moron

⁸ Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 15.

⁹ Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 23.

by the promoters of Anti-German Propagandas?" and provides a reading list for those seeking this enlightening material, with the first title being Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf*. The obvious leanings of the small, politically-driven work does not stop there but continues with a question-and-answer format. One of these inquiries asks how the American people should view Adolf Hitler, to which the Friends reply:

Certainly not in the light cast upon him by those whose' interest it is to make him appear odious and detestable, but as a patriot in his own country, who has performed miracles in snatching his people from the brink of ruin and despair, putting them back on their feet in a few short years. Few men are judged fairly by their sworn enemies or the victims of ignorance. In the eyes of his opponents, George Washington was a 'Hun' and Lincoln deserving of the assassin's bullet. (The designation of 'Hun' was literally applied to Washington long before it fell to the lot of the Germans to bear that stigma). If we would understand the man and his popularity, we should judge Hitler from the standpoint of the Germans, since we have no political reason for taking a distorted view of him and his mission.¹⁰

While much can be dissected from this work, one notable aspect is the connection the text fosters between Hitler and the heroic American figure of George Washington. The infamous rally at Madison Square Garden in 1939 was held on February 25 to honor the birthday of the founding father. As Kuhn proclaims in his address, "No one has a greater admiration than I for the fathers of the republic and the good structure they founded, and with that feeling, we come here tonight to honor the memory of immortal Washington."¹¹ The recurrent theme of appropriating the historical memory of George Washinton correlates to the organization's belief that the influential Virginian was also the world's first fascist.¹² It also relates to the Bund continually employing emblems of American culture to propel the legitimacy of their movement within the United States.

¹⁰ R. C. Dasher, *Lifting the Pale: Germany and Hitler in Their True Light*, (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, December 1935).

¹¹ Kuhn, Franz. "Madison Square Garden Address." National Archives, Recorded February 25, 1939.

¹² Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 197.

Besides this, the pamphlet also questions whether the Friends of New Germany was "a propaganda organization to promote Hitlerism in the United States?" The group reassured the reader that the Friends "pursue no political objectives apart from all other citizens pledged to support the American Constitution, American institutions, and traditions." Regarding an inquiry asking about the treatment of the Jewish population in Hitler's Reich, it dismisses any notions of anti-semitism. It compares the oppression of the nation's Jewish Community as being no different than the American response to minorities. It ends with a warning asserting, "The more the Jewish problem is agitated in the United States, the more resentful will be the treatment accorded them in Germany." It was upon this glamorous view of Hitler and the genocidal ambitions of the Fatherland's government that the Friends of New Germany and the German-American Bund would operate.

The Friends of New Germany evolved, at a conference in the winter of 1936 in Buffalo, New York, into the German-American Bund, with Fritz Kuhn voted as the unanimous leader of the newly named organization. The success of the Bund was deeply influenced by their immigrant leader's charisma and dynamic personality.¹³

Fritz Kuhn, the future leader of the German-American Bund, was born in Germany in 1896. He served his European nation during the First World War and was lauded for his distinguished service. The outcome of the war was a crushing blow to the patriotic young man seeking to rectify the defeat of his beloved nation and thus joined the growing organization of National Socialist in 1921.¹⁴ Two years later, Kuhn participated in the Beer Hall Putsch, the first attempt of Hitler and his organization to grasp political power in Germany. In 1924, hoping to

¹³ Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 30.

¹⁴ "History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

gain American citizenship, he moved to Mexico with his wife, Elsa, where their two children were born. A decade later, in December, Kuhn achieved his beloved American citizenship and moved to Detroit, where he worked as a chemist for Ford Motors. Due to the love of his native land and his natural restlessness, he joined the Friends of New Germany and became an active member of the organization's goals.

In one of the first publications of the German-American Bund, Kuhn introduces himself as the organization's leader and explains the reason for the name change. He states, "After long and mature reflection, we concluded that the name of Friends of the New Germany as that of an organization of American citizens of German blood implies a too restricted attitude, whereas the exercise of our objects demands a wider field and our movement a broader foundation...But today, every German by birth or descent should be a friend—an assumption which we take for granted—a friend of present-day Germany."¹⁵ From the perspective of the Bund, being German predetermined you to agree with the principles of Hiler's New Germany, and thus, the name which stated this fact seemed unnecessary. The fact that a vast majority of immigrants from Germany into the United States felt uneasy about the new regime in the country of their birth was not a consideration to the Bund.¹⁶ While, as demonstrated from the text, the vast amount of propaganda by the organization was directed towards those who recently came to the United States, the Bund was nevertheless interested in converting the average American into seeing National Socialism through their perspective.¹⁷

The number of people belonging to the German-American Bund was contested in the 1930s and is still debated by historians. According to a State Department report given to Franklin

¹⁵ Fritz, Kuhn. *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock* (New York: Deutscher Weckruf Und Beobachter, April 17, 1936).

¹⁶ Timothy Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 17.

¹⁷ Willhelm Kunze, "New Years Proclamation 1940," *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.

Roosevelt, membership of the Bund was 6,617, with 69.9 % being men and the other 30.1% female.¹⁸ According to John Metcalfe's testimony in Congress, a Chicago reporter who went undercover within the organization for half a year disagrees with the Department of Justice's Estimate of 8,500 and the Chicago Daily Times' estimate of 20,000 and places membership closer to 25,000.¹⁹ However, Metcalfe estimates those who sympathized with the German-American Bund association to be at half a million within the United States. Though membership into the Bund could be a complicated process, the official number of members is considered far less than the overall support the organization mustered. To become a member of the organization, you had to be an Aryan citizen of the United States, have two letters of recommendation, one from Germany and the other from an American, and pay membership fees.²⁰ While it was harder for those who lacked the connection to Germany to become members of the Bund, it was not an unheard-of occurrence. The restriction the society placed upon citizenship is worth considering. In addition to the German-American Bund, there existed the German Bund, which was composed of immigrants from Germany who had no intention of seeking to gain citizenship within the United States. Metcalfe explains that this group dislikes the patriotic ideals of their American counterpart and is under oath to Hitler and the Fatherland. Despite the restrictions on membership in the organization, the pro-Nazi group consisted of multiple branches and locations across the United States.

The German American Bund held posts in eighty locations throughout the United States. The group's largest and most prominent focal point was in New York City. It is from this location

¹⁸ Box 71, The President's Secretary's File. Collection. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President Archives and Special Collection, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.

¹⁹ "Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the United States." Included in: Hearing Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress. Testimony John C Metcalfe, Vol 1. (H. Res. 282; Date: August 1938). Text in: ProQuest® Congressional Hearings Digital Collection.

²⁰ "History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

that Fritz Kuhn carried out many of his operations. The Bund was organized into three main sections across the United States: the East, the Middle West, and the West. Within these three branches of the network were local chapters with individual leaders who reported back to Kuhn. The Bund also consisted of a youth organization, which aimed to teach the philosophies of the organization to younger generations.

Fritz Kuhn placed much emphasis on the role of youth in spreading the ideals of his star-spangled Nazis. He wrote upon becoming leader of the Bund, "But our special task is to look after our youths. Unless we proceed seriously and diligently to organize them, our movement will not endure beyond a generation."²¹ In this understanding Kuhn reflects the aims of the Hitler Youth in Nazi Germany. To join the organization, one had to pledge to "the German Youth to be faithful to the German way. to live and to act always in accordance with its rules. To follow the Leader's instructions with absolute obedience and to help the Society and all comrades in times of need and distress with all my powers. To this, I pledge my word as a boy of German stock."²² The use of the term stock, as will later be examined, is a continual theme throughout the propaganda of the Bund; their notion of stock harkens back to ideas of Aryan identity that Hitler violently advocated.

Helen Vooros, a former Youth Association member, testified before Congress about her experience within the group. She explained that part of her training involved indoctrination of the superiority of the Aryan race and the responsibility placed upon girls of German heritage to produce offspring. She stated that the Bund taught that, "Girls of German blood should not be ashamed of having illegitimate children because it is their duty to propagate the German race, but

²¹ Fritz, Kuhn. *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock* (New York: Deutscher Weckruf Und Beobachter, April 17, 1936).

²² "History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

alliance with Jews was vile.”²³ During the summer, the Bund had youth camps throughout the United States; Camps for the youth movement and other events of the Bund were planted throughout the United States. The states of Wisconsin, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New York all boasted campsites owned by the Bund, and they had constructed plans to build three other camps in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana.²⁴ Besides this, the Bund also instilled the values of these ideals throughout the year by importing books from Germany which praised Nazi values for German-American youth to study. Peter Gissibl, the brother of Franz who founded the Teutonia Association, stated his concern over the activities of the youth wing, due to preventing first-generation German Americans from assimilating properly into American society.²⁵ The Bund attempted to instill into the children of German immigrants their thoughts regarding the glories of national socialism and the dangers of outsiders harming American values.

While the German-American Bund placed much value on their ethnic identity and sought to form a sense of solidarity across the nation, Nazism formed the core of their beliefs. Many of these views regarding the state of the world came from the teachings of Adolf Hitler, and their ideologies regarding immigration were equally informed by the former painter’s fantasies of a racially powerful and purified Thousand Year Reich. Throughout the many rants that Hitler engages in throughout his fictionalized autobiographical work *Mein Kampf*, one relates directly to the theme of immigration and migration to the United States. The future German dictator was concerned about German immigrants procreating with those who diluted their Aryan bloodline. He nevertheless praises the “Teutonic element” of North America, “which has kept its racial

²³ Frederick Barkley, “Bund Youth Unit Denounced by Girl for Immortality.” *New York Times*, August 19, 1939, 1.

²⁴ “History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I.” *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

²⁵ “Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the United States.” Included in: Hearing Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress. Testimony Peter Gissibl, Vol 1. (H. Res. 282; Date: August 1938). Text in: ProQuest® Congressional Hearings Digital Collection.

stock pure and did not mix it with any other racial stock, has come to dominate the American Continent and will remain master of it as long as that element does not fall a victim to the habits of adulterating its blood. In short, the results of miscegenation are always the following: (a) the level of the superior race becomes lowered; (b) physical and mental degeneration sets in, thus leading slowly but steadily towards a progressive drying up of the vital sap. The act which brings about such a development is a sin against the will of the Eternal Creator. And as a sin, this act will be avenged." ²⁶ His detrimental view of the world regarding immigration and ideas of race precedes throughout his inflectional work. Hitler's philosophies regarding immigration continue into his open praising the restrictive system of the American immigration system of the period. As he writes later, "It is not, however, in our model German Republic but in the U.S.A that efforts are made to conform at least partly to the counsels of commonsense. By refusing immigrants to enter if they are in a bad state of health, and by excluding certain races from the right to become naturalized as citizens, they have begun to introduce principles similar to those on which we wish to ground the People's State." ²⁷ His understanding of what should be a prerequisite for citizenship influenced the philosophies of the German-American Bund, who, despite being immigrants themselves, believed that outsiders were a danger in derailing the principles of American principles.

On the chilly February evening when Fritz Kuhn took the stage at Madison Square Garden, he unleashed a torrent of language to persuade his audience of the perils their adoptive country faced, believing it faced being corrupted due to outside forces destroying their new homeland. He stood before a podium in front of a large tapestry of George Washington with American flags and swastika emblems flanking both sides of the stage. With his speech peppered

²⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* Translated by James Murphy. (1939) 233.

²⁷ Fritz Kuhn. "Madison Square Garden Address." National Archives, Recorded February 23, 1939.

with expressive hand gestures he states, “We, the German-American Bund organized the American citizens with American ideals and determined to protect ourselves, our homes, our wives, our children, against the slimy conspirators who would change this glorious republic into the inferno of a Bolskivick paradise. We, I say to you, will not fail you when called upon to give everything love and support in our power in the fight to break the grip of the parasite hand of Jewish communists in our schools, our universities, our very homes!” His dynamic speech here is interrupted by cheers and applause from his audience, confirming the passion of his points. He continued his vibrant address to the frenzied crowd as he powerfully proclaimed, “The largest minority element within the United States, the German Americans which they persecuted in every field of endeavor, why? Because the common enemy of all of us, who stand up to the American nation is realizing that if can get together in a united political front this minority will be able to move mountains and that is just-” again his speech is sliced by the audience loudly proclaiming their approval, he continues, “and that is just what our Jewish friends wish to prevent. They know that the German-American element is justified to claim political representation in our government and that the day will come, no matter who stands in our way!”²⁸

Within the rhetoric of Fritz Kuhn's address, he asserts the American-German sense of being an outsider while also announcing to his audience the perceived threat the Jewish community presented to the United States. Also speaking at this meeting is Father Coughlin, a Catholic radio personality of the period and an avowed and vocal antisemite.²⁹ While presenting his speech within one of the world's most famous arenas in downtown Manhattan, he discussed

²⁸ Fritz Kuhn, “Madison Square Garden Address.” National Archives, Recorded February 23, 1939.

²⁹ Peter Kurth, *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990) 286,

the United States' policy towards Jewish refugees from Germany.³⁰ The contemporary issue of immigration from the new Germany will be expanded on later, but for now, we will turn to the first of Kuhn's assertions that the Bund, even though the German-American element within the United States, was a minority. They felt it was their responsibility to defend the American Constitution and the philosophies of their adopted North American nation. To establish this, we will examine how the German-American Bund understands itself in connection to the rest of American society and how other extremist groups conceptualize the organization.

Within the constitution of the German-American Bund, they state their goals as upholding and defending the "Constitution and the laws of the United States, to respect and honor the flag and institution of the United States, to promote goodwill and friendship between the United States and Germany...". It continues that they state the ambition is also to spread a positive view of their origin country and "to remain worthy of the Germanic blood, the German motherland, and to cultivate the German language, customs and ideals... to remember that only in unity there is strength and if firmly united the German Americans shall be of real value and a desirable and respected class of law-abiding citizens of the United States."³¹

Even within the organization's constitution, it reiterates the tension between seeking to uphold American values and ideals of citizenship while simultaneously demonstrating a dedication to the identity of their country of origin. This relates to a belief within the beliefs of Nazism of the shared value and identity of the Aryan race that transcends borders. While there was a long-standing interest in the German government taking an interest in their people living abroad, this intensified under the Nazi Regime due to the desire to create a cohesive sense of the

³⁰ Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 96.

³¹ "History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

German self.³² The United States Department memo presented to President Roosevelt contains a quote relating to Hitler stating he was the leader of all the German people and that their collective alliance was to him.³³ The pro-Nazi group straddled the complicated line between holding the identity of their country of origin while at the same time seeking to accept the values and beliefs of their adopted nation. The State Department's choice to employ the quote within the presidential memo demonstrates the belief in a shared identity between the group. While the German-American Bund shared in the ideologies of Hitler, they resented the assertion that Germans lacked a sense of individuality, a point Fritz Kuhn explicitly draws upon in his speech at Madison Square Garden. To the Bund, the notion of embodying American values aligned with the beliefs of National Socialism.

Within the view of the Bund, National Socialism was the only hope for the United States and the only way to protect American values. As one American newspaper recorded, the Bund believed that National Socialism was the “only hope for the future of the world” and wanted the United States to be a part of the inspirational message it spread.³⁴ Fritz Kuhn wrote a similar message to his people. Within his affordable pamphlet *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock*, he proclaimed "The German American Volksbund is inspired by the National Socialist world concept. National Socialism has given the Germans in foreign countries a unified worldview; they cannot survive without a spiritual tie with the homeland."³⁵ The principles outlined by Hitler provided the Bund with a sense of protecting the values of the United States and connected them back to their

³² Grant Grams, *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021), 26.

³³ Box 71, The President's Secretary's File. Collection. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President Archives and Special Collection, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.

³⁴ "History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939, 6.

³⁵ Fritz, Kuhn. *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock* (New York: Deutscher Weckruf Und Beobachter, April 17, 1936).

European origins. While the Bund saw themselves as an essential element in shaping and protecting their newly found American values, to other right-wing groups, they were understood as a threat despite sharing many of the same notions about the need to cover elements that could be foreign to the society of the United States.

On the front page of the *Burning Cross* in 1940, the official newspaper of the Ku Klux Klan, it shouted in big, bold letters, "Klan Officials Removed from Office Following Alleged Bund-Klan Meet."³⁶ The controversy plastering the September edition of the harmful publication was caused by Klansman Arthur H. Bell, the Grand Dragon of New Jersey, who had arranged for a meeting between the extremist groups. At this communal gathering, members of the Bund addressed members of the Klan. These actions were met with much disapproval, and Bell was removed from his position by the imperial wizard of the white-clad knights. However, Bell asserted at the time that the two politically-driven alliances shared the same goals.³⁷ The KKK had grown in unprecedented popularity during the 1920s and is credited as being a guiding contributing factor in interwar era immigration policy, with the quota system reflecting many of the racial beliefs of the Klan.³⁸

One of the chief enemies the Klan identified in unleashing harm in America was the Jewish community, and much like the Bund, they believed in a global Jewish conspiracy that dictated the actions of governments. The rhetoric of both organizations sounds strikingly similar, with both capitalizing on a fear that American values are being taken to propel their policies of aggressive hatred. To both of these organizations, one of the most dangerous forces within

³⁶ "Klan Officials Removed from Office Following Alleged Bund-Klan Meet: Imperial Wizard Urges Dies Committee to Investigate Gathering at Camp Nordland, Andover, N.J." *The Fiery Cross*, September -October 1940, Vol 1, No. 19.

³⁷ Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 156.

³⁸ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 195.

American society was Jewish influence. Both advocated for pro-American sentiments through the language of exclusion of others who are not deemed worthy of the nation's high values. The KKK during the period had a relatively unstable relationship with fascism, but despite this, the American gang preached against Bund. They understood the intentions of the Bund only through their role as outsiders. The discourses that propelled the Bund deeper within the fiber of American cultures were similar to that of the KKK, which caused long-lasting effects not only on American memory but also on the legal standing of immigration within the country. Thus, even while the Bund understood themselves within the context of Aryan Americans, those who shared many of their shared options within the nation contested them to be outsiders. The Ku Klux Klan demonstrates the complicated line the Bund occupied of sharing the sentiments of nativists while at the same time being considered an outside entity by those extolling the same values. In the final section of this paper, we will examine the deep anti-semitism of the German-American Bund, a philosophy they shared with the Klan, and how they sought to propagate this message of discrimination throughout the United States at a time when Jewish communities of Germany were desperate for refuge in the United States, and the role immigration played on the ultimate downfall of this American-Nazi conglomerate.

Within the quota system of immigration, each nation received a prescribed number of allowed immigrants to the United States. The quantity of this number was arbitrarily constructed on what was believed to be the traditional ethnic legacy of Americans, which meant that nations from Western Europe received the highest percentage of allowed immigrants to the United States.³⁹ Those of Jewish heritage holding to leave Germany were classified within the number of the nations allotted number of those granted permission to enter the country.⁴⁰ The notion of

³⁹ Grant, Grams. *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021), 15.

⁴⁰ Eli, Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 285.

refugees or those seeking to escape persecution did not factor into this numerically driven approach. The fact that the Jewish community of the Rhine River nation was considered "German" is a topic Hitler rails against in *Mein Kampf* since he deemed this an abdominal misclassification.⁴¹ Even though Germany was designated to have one of the highest numbers allowed to come to the United States, only surpassed by England and the United Kingdom, the German-American Bund still asserted that they were systematically discriminated against.

Even though the Bund felt they shouldered injustice in the United States, the Jewish community throughout the 1930s was subjected to harsher treatment throughout the decade. This fact is reflected in an account presented in *Coughlin vs. Social Justice* prepared by the Jewish People's Congress. The first-person, anonymous narrative states that for most of his life, he understood himself as an American and felt he was given equal treatment to other gentiles within the nation, but how the 1930s and Great Depression caused a shift. He wrote, "Now, today, 1940, I look about me, what was once exceptional, unusual now I find frequent. I have sought work and found "No Jews wanted."⁴² In the wake of such blatant exclusion of the Jewish Community, only two years before the *Free American*, the newspaper of the German-American Bund proclaimed that the "End of Democracy Foreshadowed" and correlated this demise of American values to the global Jewish community seeking to establish Bolshevism within the United States. The propaganda voice of the Bund calls upon the American People to take action against this rising catastrophe of the American system dying and calls the society to weaponize in defense of its homeland, stating, "Unless, indeed, the American people wake up! Whatever besides, this Jewish empire on American soil will not last a thousand years. If not sooner, gentile Americans will shake off their sleep and arouse themselves if such a world change occurs; of that, there is

⁴¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* Translated by James Murphy. (1939) 316.

⁴² Coughlin vs. Social Justice. New York: *Jewish People's Congress*, (1940), 4.

no doubt.”⁴³ At a time when the notion of exclusion is mounting against those subjected to brutal discrimination in Nazi Germany, and where a law seeking to provide American shelter to at least German Jewish children does not even make it past the preliminary rounds of debates, the German-American Bund is detrimentally contributing to the American discourses surrounding these sufferings. However, the immigration exclusion they seek to promote within the United States against others would assist in the ultimate downfall of these flag-waving Nazis.

Despite all the American zeal that Fritz Kuhn presented to the American people, he emigrated back to Germany before the end of the war. Kuhn was charged in the United States for tax fraud and accused of embezzling funds from his beloved Bund. The *Free American* calmly informed the American people that while these faults were not without merit, the arrest and trial of the leader overall constituted a political attack against the organization. The 1939 December edition of the paper proclaimed, "That it was a case of persecution for political reasons is apparent from a number of circumstances which need not be repeated. History may yet record that the labors of the Bund for the United States were more deserving than any other achievement in the history of the German American element."⁴⁴

While history did not fulfill the author's prophecy of the Bund receiving praise, it did, however, continue to gain attention throughout the United States due to the Un-American hearings executed by Congressman Martin Dies Jr. and citizenship restrictions to members of the Bund. The Los Angeles Times articulated this point in 1938, explaining that the citizenship of Herman Schwinn, the Pacific Coast leader of the Bund, was under review due to immigration officials asserting that he forged information on his application by saying that“ he resided in Los

⁴³ “The Great Jewish Conspiracy.” *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, The Free American*, November 24, 1938.

⁴⁴ “Kuhn Politically Persecuted” *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* Vol. 5, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.

Angeles since October 1926, when in fact he did not come to Los Angeles until October 1927.”⁴⁵ Due to this discrepancy, Schwinn stated it was a simple mistake; he was denied citizenship in 1940. ⁴⁶ While other members of the extremist group were likewise denied citizenship due to their alliances, including the founder of the Teutonia society, Fritz Gissibl, these episodes demonstrate one of the many battles that members of the German-American Bund encountered with U.S. immigration officials. ⁴⁷ What also contributed to the choice of many members of the German-American Bund to return to Nazi ideals was their allegiance to National Socialism and the call Hitler made for his nation to accept the return of their Aryan brothers from abroad.⁴⁸ Thus, with the organization lacking the strong presence of a leader when Kuhn was charged, the isolation policy of the United States that Bund advocated for evaporated in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the return to Germany that many within the organization made, the organization collapsed. Though it became extinct, it left its fingerprints on the American mindset of the 1930s within the United States.

In a letter to the editor of the *Free American*, a thirteen- year- old girl from New England wrote to the newspaper in 1939 to express her pride in her German heritage and her love for all things Hitler. She states. "I have subscribed to the Free American so that I can read something besides the Jewish press. I have not many friends because of my admiration of Adolf Hitler. They have been taught that he is some insane maniac and not the great man he is. I look at him as the savior of the world from Communism, but what is more important, the man who served his Fatherland, the man who led a starving, oppressed nation out of the dark, the man who united all

⁴⁵ "Head of Coast Bund Under Fire: Immigration Officials Attack Legality of Schwinn's Citizenship." *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1938, 1.

⁴⁶ "Bund Leader Schwinn's Citizenship Canceled." *Los Angeles Times* June 23, 1939, 1.

⁴⁷ "Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the United States." Included in: Hearing Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress. Testimony Fritz Gissibl, Vol 1. (H. Res. 282; Date: August 1938). Text in: ProQuest® Congressional Hearings Digital Collection.

⁴⁸ Grant Grams. *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*, (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021), 26.

Germans in Europe, tore up the false Versailles Treaty, gained back the Saar, and is working today for the peace of Europe." ⁴⁹ These stories of Americans who supported the murderous regime of Adolf Hitler are not stories that survived in the canon of American popular memory of the decade, yet the story of the Bund highlights the Nazi element within the United States that, though silenced by history, was loud in its time.

The German-American Bund demonstrates the precarious condition that existed and persists in contemporary immigrant communities today, such that even their native heritage comprises a large part of their identity, and excess ideas about excluding others deemed as foreign. The position of the immigrant as both a member of their adopted nation and as an actor seeking the exclusion of others is a vital element within the narrative of the Bund, especially considering that extremist groups still remain an active part in American society. It is only possible to understand the German-American Bund through the element of mobility, though it has long been given a secondary status within the organization's literature. The Swastika flew across the United States, and Boy Scout-like Nazi summer camps that dotted the American plains provided critical and detrimental discourses within American society of the turbulent 1930s and provided another voice in the choir that sang of exclusion.

⁴⁹ "From an American Girl" *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* Vol. 5, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Barkley, Frederick. "Bund Youth Unit Denounced by Girl for Immortality." *New York Times*, August 19, 1939.

"Bund Leader Schwinn's Citizenship Canceled." *Los Angeles Times* June 23, 1939.

Dasher, R. C. *Lifting the Pale: Germany and Hitler in Their True Light*. New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, December 1935.

Dies, Martin. *The Trojan Horse in America*. New York: Didd, Mead & Company, 1940.

"From an American Girl" *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* Vol. 5, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.

"Germans 'Heil' Swastika at Meeting of Nazi Bund Here." *Santa Rosa Republican*, November 22, 1937.

"The Great Jewish Conspiracy." *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, The Free American*, November 24, 1938.

"Head of Coast Bund Under Fire: Immigration Officials Attack Legality of Schwinn's Citizenship." *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1938, 1.

"History of German-American Bund as Disclosed in Report By F.B.I." *The Gazette and Daily, York Pa*, April 13, 1939.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*, Translated by James Murphy, 1939.

"Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the United States." Included in: Hearing Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress. Testimony John C Metcalfe, Vol 1. (H. Res. 282; Date: August 1938). Text in: ProQuest® Congressional Hearings Digital Collection.

"Investigation of Un-American Propaganda activities in the United States." Included in: Hearing Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives Seventy-Fifth Congress. Testimony Peter Gissibl, Vol 1. (H. Res. 282; Date: August 1938). Text in: ProQuest® Congressional Hearings Digital Collection.

"Klan Officials Removed from Office Following Alleged Bund-Klan Meet: Imperial Wizard Urges Dies Committee to Investigate Gathering at Camp Nordland, Andover, N.J." *The Fiery Cross*, September -October 1940, Vol 1. No. 19.

- Kuhn, Fritz. *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock*. New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936.
- Khan, Fritz. "Madison Square Garden Address." National Archives, Recorded February 23, 1939.
- "Kuhn Politically Persecuted" *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* Vol. 5, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.
- Kunze, Willhelm. "New Years Proclamation 1940," *The Free American and Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, No. 27, New York December 28, 1939.
- Hutson, Luther. "Bund Activities Widespread,." *New York Times*, February 26, 1939.
- Thompson, Dorothy. "Revolt Against German-American Bund: Action in Southbury, Conn., Raises Questions of How Democracy Can Fight Training Schools of Alien Ideology. " *The Decatur Daily Review*, December 14, 1937.

Secondary Sources

- Bernstein, Arnie. *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013.
- Grams, Grant. *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021.
- Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.
- Hart, Bradley. *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018.
- Holian, Timothy. *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996.
- Kurth, Peter. *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1990.
- Lederhendler, Eli. *American Jewry: A New History*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Playing Patriot: Interwar American Nazi Organization's Appropriations of Indigeneity

Over eight months before the United States entered the Second World War, the *New York Times* reported on a gathering of over a thousand Native Americans celebrating tribal members' voluntary enlistments into the U.S. Army. An excited atmosphere overtook the Riverside Plaza Hotel during the "annual powwow," of March 1941. Chief Wapapenna from the midwestern Sac and Fox Tribe attributed the palpable enthusiasm to the distinct responsibility of Indigenous communities in the coming war effort. He stated, "We have a fight all our own. Hitler took our sign of peace and twisted it out of shape. The swastika was our sign of peace. He also took our 'How;' sign and made a 'Heil' sign. We don't like that." Instead of waiting for the draft, Indigenous men eagerly confronted the Axis powers due to Nazis appropriation of Native American culture. One of the white attendees questioned the dedication of the Indigenous fight against Hitler, asking, "(Do) you feel like chasing him like you used to chase us?" To this Chief Wapapenna replied, "No, like you used to chase us."⁵⁰ This frustration over the Nazi theft of Indigenous culture is not an isolated interaction. It is also expressed by Dr. S'hiuhushu, the Great Sachem of the Indian Association of America. He expressed outrage that Indigenous Tribes abandoned the ancient Native symbol of the swastika due to a "Foolish Minded Man in Germany" adopting the emblem.⁵¹ Such instances reflect the Third Reich's continuous appropriation and manipulation of Native American culture for Nazi propaganda. However, such exploitation was not only employed abroad but embraced by American Far-Right Nazi groups during the 1930s.

For decades before Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933, the nation had engaged in an intense fascination towards Native American culture, a fact that Nazi propaganda

⁵⁰ "Indian Tribes Hold Powwow in Hotel: 1,500 Gather Here, Many in Traditional Costumes, for Send-Off for Trainees," *New York Times*, March 16, 1941, 38.

⁵¹ "Sachem Won't Give up Swastika to Hitler; Reveals Indian sign is on Nazis anyway," *New York Times*, March 10, 1940, 43.

capitalized upon. In the nineteenth century, stories involving Native Americans captivated German audiences and soon influenced how the European nation understood its culture and contemporary political situation.⁵² Germans felt a deep affinity for the Indigenous tribes of North America, believing that their Germanic ancestors processed a similar culture and endured many of the same injustices. The oppression inflicted upon Native American populations was well known in Germany, with even the official Nazi newspaper, the *Beobachter*, addressing the United States subjugating these communities.⁵³ The profound connection the German public felt towards Native American communities only intensified in the interwar era, as they came to view their treatment as similar to the afflictions endured by Indigenous populations. Such cultural conceptions and sentiments became easily exploited for Nazi Propaganda.⁵⁴ In attempts to bolster their propaganda utilizing Indigenous populations, Nazi officials sought to garner favor with Native Americans. The German government extended to Native Americans the status of “Aryan,” the highest racial caste in the Third Reich, and sought to introduce Nazi propaganda onto reservations.⁵⁵ These efforts did nearly nothing to recruit Indigenous communities to side with Hitler. However, these bizarre episodes represent how badly the Fascist government sought to persuade Native Americans to their side, hoping that the image of Native communities as their allies would support Nazi propagandistic claims. Despite these failures, Nazi organizations in America watched Hitler's attempts to curry favor with Native Americans to appropriate their identity for the political far-right. These domestic groups thus attempted to do the same.

⁵² Penny Glenn, *Kindred by Choice Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1-16.

⁵³ "Nazis Assail Roosevelt Speech as 'Holy Crusade Against Reich' Chide 'Yankees' for Treatment of Indians and 'Annexation Designs on Canada'- Italians Charge 'Incomprehension'." *New York Times*, April 15, 1939, 1-2.

⁵⁴ Frank Usbeck, *Fellow Tribesmen : The Image of Native Americans, National Identity, and Nazi Ideology in Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 2-3.

⁵⁵ “Hitler Accepts Indian as Aryan.” *The Rhinelander Daily News*, June 7, 1940, 1.

Fascist organizations in the United States not only sought to persuade Indigenous communities to join their cause because Hitler had already identified their image as functional to far-right propaganda but because these domestic Nazis desperately sought to appear authentically American. The philosophies of Fascism had been born in Europe, and these domestic followers of these ideologies struggled to Americanize Nazism.⁵⁶ One method these organizations used to convert these foreign philosophies to the American style of politics was by these groups engaging in deeply patriotic language. Nazism in the United States could only survive by embracing patriotic iconography and seeking to persuade Americans that National Socialism could save the nation from outside threats. Newspapers of the period alerted readers to be wary of Patriotic organizations such as one warning "Nazi propaganda is followed... through the medium of 'American' organizations with high-sounding patriotic names, behind which the now discredited nazi group camouflages its Trojan horse tactics."⁵⁷ Nazi organizations in the United States sought to appear American. To achieve this, these organizations sought to engage in a long-standing tradition of "playing Indian" to increase their credibility as genuine Americans.

Just as Nazi propaganda in Germany drew upon long-standing views regarding Indigenous Communities to assist their ideologies, American Nazi groups sought to couple this approach with the well-established tradition of utilizing Native identity to appear American. In *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria argued that Indigenous communities represented to many in the United States an idealized connection to American identity. He states, "Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness." One example he cites of this fact is the colonists of the Boston Tea Party

⁵⁶ Micheal Joseph Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* (New York: Month Review Press, 2018), 12–16.

⁵⁷ Thomas Johnson, "Nazi Fascist Propaganda Spread by Million in U.S. Activities are Masked in Many 'American Societies'," *The Blackwell Daily Journal*, June 5, 1940, 5.

impersonating Native Americans during this distinctly American protest.⁵⁸ Historian Alan Trachtenberg expands upon this assertion of Indigenous characteristics relating to American identity, describing this phenomenon as a method for “playing American.”⁵⁹ However, Nazi groups in the United States sought to utilize Indigenous identity for more than appearing American; they sought to appropriate these communities for the nationalist rhetoric of National Socialism while also guiding this philosophy of Fascism. Thus, for these organizations, the appropriation of Indigenous Communities became “playing patriot,” a method to Americanize the foreignness of Fascism for district political ambitions. Even with these groups wanting to employ such a tactic, they quickly ran into the problem of how to accomplish this when most Native Americans disagreed with their political philosophies. To remedy this inconvenience to their planned propaganda, they engaged the American Indian Federation (AIF), an organization dedicated to Native American rights, and entangled the group with Nazi politics.

Founded in 1934, the American Indian Federation opposed contemporary legislation regarding Indigenous rights. Though the organization did lean toward conservative politics, the group did not advocate for Nazism. However, the AIF became bombarded by such accusations due to domestic fascist groups seeking to appropriate the organization's Indigenous identity. The aim of this paper is to evaluate how American Nazi groups such as the German-American Bund and the Silver Shirts, dragged the American Indian Federation into domestic fascism in an attempt to appropriate the Federation's Indigeneity to appear American and “play patriot.” While historiography regarding the AIF is relatively scarce, it often characterizes the Federation as an Indigenous Fascist group. Historian Laurence Hauptman dismisses the tendency of scholarship to

⁵⁸ Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

⁵⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 10.

highlight the Federation's right-wing politics and connection to other radical organizations and instead argues that to understand the AIF, historians must examine the group's own political attempts toward Indigenous activism.⁶⁰ Despite the merits of Hauptman's reinterpretation of the Federation, he does not attempt to answer why there was a connection between the AIF and Nazi organizations or why contemporary scholarship chooses to focus on the right-wing rhetoric of the group.

This evaluation seeks to answer why historiography generally attempts to define the Federation as a Nazi organization and argues that this occurs because it was helpful to fascist groups to appropriate the AIF's appeals for Native American Rights so that these radical groups could play patriots. To demonstrate this, we will examine three of the AIF's most famous members: Joseph Bruner, the Federation's founder and president; Elwood Towner, who gained popularity as Chief Red Cloud; and Alice Lee, the public face of the American Indian Federation. First we will follow Joseph Bruner through the political situation which caused him to create the AIF, and how as the leader of the Federation he denounced the activities of Fascist seeking to infiltrate his organization. However even as Bruner sought to separate from such affiliations, Elwood Towner a member of the AIF embraced the role American Nazi groups provided him to be the Indigenous representation of Hitler's ideologies through his persona of Chief Red Cloud. While Towner gained popularity due to his connection to domestic Fascist groups, Alice Lee Jemison wrestled to salvage her reputation from assertions of her connection to Nazi politics. Each of these figures represent a distinct aspect of the Federation and the Fascist attempts to appropriate Indigeneity during the 1930s.

⁶⁰ Laurence Hauptman, "The American Indian Federation and the Indian New Deal: A Reinterpretation," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (Nov 1983): 379-380.

Joseph Bruner

Joseph Bruner, the founding member of the American Indian Federation, was a full-blooded member of the Creek tribe of Oklahoma and a successful businessman who made his wealth from the oil industry. Like many others of his generation, Bruner grew up within the Indian Boarding school system. Mainly due to his education within these institutions, Bruner was a firm advocate of assimilation, believing that Indigenous integration into mainstream society would ultimately benefit Native communities.⁶¹ Bruner's inspiration to establish the American Indian Federation resulted from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) departing from the established policy of assimilation under the new leadership of John Collier who served as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In his position, Collier pursued massive legislation in how the United States treated Indigenous populations.⁶² These monumental shifts in Native American policy became known as the "Indian New Deal."

John Collier, a wealthy Georgia-born anthropologist and activist, became the commissioner of the BIA in 1933 after dedicating a decade of his life to opposing the Bureau.⁶³ Unlike Bruner, Collier believed that assimilation resulted in the erosion of American identity and culture. Assimilation was the belief that the United States must "civilize" Native Americans to incorporate these communities into mainstream Euro-American society. In 1887, through the Dawes Act, this approach became the legal policy of the United States towards the continent's original inhabitants.⁶⁴ Despite the claimed altruistic intent of these policies, it was based upon the desire to acquire Indigenous land and resulted in the boarding school systems that Bruner

⁶¹ Arne Bernstein, "New Moon and Red Cloud," in *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn And the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 96.

⁶² Alice Kehoe, "The Indian New Deal," in *A Passion for the True and the Just: Felix and Lucy Kramer Cohen and the Indian New Deal*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 9-25.

⁶³ Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 3-7.

⁶⁴ David Daily, *Battle for the BIA: G.E.E Lindquist and the Missionary Crusade against John Collier*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004), 11-12.

attended. Collier, however, disagreed with Assimilationist policies, believing it resulted in the loss of Indigenous culture. In 1928, Collier's convictions about the dangers of assimilationist policy received confirmation through the Meriam Report. This memorandum issued by the Department of the Interior demonstrated the failures of the United States Government of Indigenous Communities; this launched a desire to change the broken system. When Roosevelt won the presidency, promising a New Deal to the American people, Collier undertook to do the same for Indigenous populations through the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and a series of legislative changes known collectively as the Indian New Deal.⁶⁵ Bruner's objections to Collier's new legislative measure caused the American Indian Federation.

Joseph Bruener cited the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934 as one of his primary frustrations with Collier's progressive approach to Native American policy. The Wheeler-Howard Act called for reforms relating to the restoration of lands to tribal ownership, allowing limited self-government for Indigenous communities and encouraging Native culture through traditional arts and crafts.⁶⁶ To an avowed Assimilist like Bruner, such measures were unacceptable. Besides this Bruner and others worried about the measures calling for the return of private prosperity to tribal authority. While the aim of such a measure was to restore pre-colonial Indigenous philosophies of land ownership, to some, such a provision sounded similar to the collectivist ideas of Communism, policies that were currently occurring in the newly formed U.S.S.R. The legislative upheaval of the Indian New Deal and accusations that the BIA sought to impose Marxism on Indigenous populations resulted in Bruner establishing the Federation, not any Nazi

⁶⁵ Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle. *The Nations Within: The Past and the Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 56-59.

⁶⁶ Laurence Hauptman, "Alice Lee Jemison, Seneca Journalist as Activist," in *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800*, (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 72-73.

sentiments. It was this concern over Collier, not sympathy towards Fascism, that caused Bruner's new organization to draft a letter expressing their concerns to President Franklin Roosevelt.

In December 1934, the American Indian Federation sent a letter signed by Joseph Bruner to President Roosevelt and Congress. In this correspondence, the AIF conveyed their grievances regarding the Indian New Deal and John Collier's leadership. Citing their newly recognized citizenship of 1924, the Federation stated, “ we have been led to believe and have hoped that the Bureau of Indian Affairs would grant us our personal freedom, and that the American Indian at last would be 'Recognized as an American citizen; treated as such; educated as such.'” They expressed how the fragility of these hopes citing, “That under Commissioner Collier the Indians have been denied freedom of speech and free assembly; Indians opposing the policy of the Bureau have been subject to vindictive treatment; the personal rights of the Indians as guaranteed to American citizens under our Constitution have been completely ignored, and in fact, by Commissioner Collier denied to exist”.⁶⁷ To Bruner and those who shared his viewpoint, denying Indigenous communities the opportunity to assimilate would subject these populations to impenetrable segregation. Profoundly influencing Bruner's beliefs were the teachings of Carlos Montezuma, who, after enduring the boarding school system, became a regarded doctor and activist. Montezuma viewed the systems imposed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as oppressive but necessary to protect Native populations from further subjection and provided the only avenues for Indigenous communities to improve their futures and foster personal potential.⁶⁸ Thus, Bruner and others who clung to Montza's philosophies considered Collier's new measures an affront to Native communities' hopes of improving their status. Nothing within this letter

⁶⁷ American Indian Federation to the Office of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 21, 1934, HeinOnline.

⁶⁸ Peter Iverson, *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 176–177.

conveys an alliance with Nazi ideologies, only an advocacy for Indigenous rights. This correspondence only mentioned Adolf Hitler once, painting him as the cruel dictator he was.

Within the letter to Roosevelt relating to the status of Indigenous communities, the Federation highlights their restricted voting rights. They argue that this affront to democratic rights, "can only be likened to the 'free' elections under the Dictator Hitler." The American Indian Federation is declaring the Nazi leader as a force of authoritarian dictatorship before many newspapers within the United States and Europe are even willing to admit this fact. Despite the later claims hurled against the BIA, the Federation itself did not support Hitler, even if individual members did.

Bruner's discomfort with ideologies of Hitler is not isolated to this correspondence, which Roosevelt never replied to, instead delegating the answer to Harold Ickes, who dismissed their claims. In 1937, delegates from thirty tribes "in native grab spoke through interpreters" to denounce the BIA at the American Indian Federation Convention.⁶⁹ During this convention the Silver Legion sought opportunities to persuade members of the AIF with their fascist rhetoric. The Silver Shirts or Silver Legion was founded by a prophecy spouting, Nazi fanatic from North Carolinian, William Dudley Pelley, who formed the Christian American patriots in 1933, a day after Hitler's peaceful seizure of power, and used the Nazi Brown Shirts as the model for his Silver Shirts.⁷⁰ Like the AIF the Silver Shirts shared a similar disdain for Communism and believed it threatened American values. However, despite this shared stance Bruner refused to side with the organization. As an Oklahoma newspaper recounts the AIF convention, "The Indians, however, refused to accept an alliance with the 'Silver Legion; in a campaign against communism." In addition, Bruner went further than collaborating with the extremist. He refused

⁶⁹ "Indians Continue Fight on Collier," *Morning Examiner*, July 31, 1937, 1.

⁷⁰ Eckard Toy, "Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies and Personalities in the 1930s," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (October 1989): 141-143.

Roy Zachary, Dudley's deputy a place on the program and ordered, "the assembly hall cleared of copies of the Legion's national publication, which bore a front page headline: 'Silver Shirts Propose Justice for the American Indians.'" This not only demonstrates Bruner's reluctance to tarnish the mission of his organization by working with known American Nazis, but also the attempts that these far-right organizations made to recruit Native Americans to their cause. Even as the Federation continued to be courted by fascist societies within the United States, Bruner held to his convictions against willingly joining these Nazi organizations. As Bruner articulated in 1938 regarding his Federation "We resent and we most vehemently deny that there is any relation between the AIF and any group objectionable to a loyal, patriotic citizen." ⁷¹

However, even if Bruner resisted adopting the ideologies of the Fascist groups, the American public did not believe this. As the AIF warded off connections to Nazi organizations, it aligned itself with other American groups on the political right. Like other groups on the spectrum of the political right, the AIF adopted patriotic iconography. This fact is demonstrated within the proposed constitution of the Federation. Article 6.3.h states, "Each meeting of the Federation of each unit shall be opened with scripture reading or prayer, and with a salute to the flag of the United States and pledge of allegiance. Religious and patriotic songs may also be used as part of the ceremony of opening. the Holy Bible, open, and the United States flag, unfurled, shall be displayed at every meeting of this Federation, national, district or unit." ⁷² By evoking this patriotic image, it appeared to some Americans to be like the Nazi organizations which also engaged in such practices. Thus as Joseph Bruner conceptualized the plight of Indigenous Communities within the context of American patriotism and Christian devotion, it closely resembled Nazi organizations, even though the AIF did not support these beliefs. However even

⁷¹ Kenneth Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 30.

⁷² "Proposed Constitution and Code of the American Indian Federation," *The Daily Claremore*, October 13, 1939, 3.

as the vast majority of the AIF did not ascribe to such sentiments individual members did, such as Elwood Towner or to employ his stage name Chief Red Cloud.

ELWOOD A. TOWNER

Towner, before adopting his stage name, was an attorney from Oregon, who like Bruner was a child of the boarding school system and attended Chemawa Indian School.⁷³ He was raised on the Siletz Reservation and served in the First World War before graduating from law school. Towner's exact tribal relation is disputed with some historians listing his lineage as Creek and others claiming he was a descendant of Hoopa chiefs. Regardless of his exact ethnic identity, he was a confirmed member of the American Indian Federation though professed a deep fascination with the Silver Shirts. The domestic Nazi leader, utilized his claims with the connection to the metaphysical and spiritual to secure his power base and ascribed to a belief of the Great Pyramid's role in predicting the future of world events. Despite such outlandish claims used to establish his "American Aryan Militia" he made a losing bid for the presidency in 1936, failing to gain any real support outside of the state of Washington.

Nevertheless his connection to the supernatural was believed by his followers. As his deputy Roy Zachary expressed when asked about Pelly, "He hears voices that no one else hears. Pelly does nothing without divine orders. It only takes him a few minutes to get in touch with God. Pelly has been chosen by God for this special work."⁷⁴ In one of these conversations with the divine, Pelly came to the conclusion Bolsheviks had seized power in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and claimed this fostered his interest in the cause of Native Americans.²⁴ Through this he attempted to recruit Indigenous Communities, and in one such appeal referred to himself as

⁷³ An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Wheeler-Howard Act S. 2103, session 3, *An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act*, 75th Cong. 2103 (1939) (statement extracts from the Oregonian, the Northwest's Own Magazine, Portland, Oreg., January 29, 1939).

⁷⁴ Eckard Toy, "Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies and Personalities in the 1930s," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (October 1989): 141-144.

“Chief Pelley of the Tribe of Silver.”⁷⁵ Despite the caricature Pelley crafted of Indigenous Communities, he nevertheless garnered the attention of Elwood Towner who cited a connection between the supernatural interactions Pelley claimed and traditional spirituality among Native Populations.⁷⁶ In addition the rhetoric employed by the Nazi groups like the Silver Shirts was often presented through flowering prose of patriotic zeal and rampant anti-semitism which would not have seemed to different to the AIF literature Towner had previously interacted with. Pelley readily accepted Towner and due to the German government extending the identity of "Aryan" to American Indigenous Communities did not have to compromise his idealized racial integrity of his patriotic army. Thus Pelley became interlocked in the bizarre beliefs of a presidential candidate and with his organization and the German-American Bund exploiting his willingness to play “Indian” and garner support for their radical ideologies.

In the 1930s the largest group molded by the influence of Hitler was the German American Bund, which was skeptical of Pelley yet understood that many of the ambitions of the Silver Shirts were similar to their own.⁷⁷ The German born chemist and leader or as he was known the "Führer" Fritz Kuhn began infusing in his speeches the mistreatment faced by Native American Communities but prevented them from joining his organization due to his organization composed nearly exclusively of naturalized German immigrants.⁷⁸ However, despite his unwillingness to extend membership to the demographic he claimed to support, he was more than happy to appropriate their image to emphasize the Bund's political ambitions. Due to this

⁷⁵ Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's supporters in the United States* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 59.

⁷⁶ Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act S. 2103, session 3, *An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act*, 75th Cong. 2103 (1939) (Extracts from the Oregonian, the Northwest's Own Magazine, Portland, Oreg., January 29, 1939).

⁷⁷ Michael Joseph Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Genesis of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018) 50-64.

⁷⁸ Timothy Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 24-26

Towner who by now adopted the persona of Red Cloud engaged speaking tours across the United States for both the Silver Shirts and the German American Bund.⁷⁹

For both organizations Towner's indigeneity was valued for political rhetorical claims, it nevertheless spoke directly to the culture within the German-American Bund. As previously mentioned the Bund was formed and targeted towards recently naturalized German immigrants who evaluated their country of origin due to the political and economic turmoil of the Weimar government.⁸⁰ Thus most of the bundists shared and were raised in the German culture's infatuation with Native Americans. Their childhoods would have been bombarded with depictions of America's aboriginal population through childhood games, dime novels, popular films and even within the academia of the European country due to a belief in a shared culture between Indigenous Communities and Germanic identity.⁸¹ Thus Towner and other Native Americans represented not only their adopted land of the United States but also the shared cultural identity of Germany. In addition, considering the group was composed primarily of immigrants seeking to force a connection to their new land of America, what better symbol could the Bund hope for than the cultural icon of indigeneity. Towner understood that his appeal to these groups was not his achievements as a lawyer, a veteran of the Great War or even his heritage, but through playing the stereotypical "Indian" that Americans, and German-Americans expected and Towner endeavored to live up to these expectations.

One method Towner "played Indian" was through, speaking in broken English and highlighting the mysterious spiritualism problematically associated with Indigenous

⁷⁹An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act *S. 2103, session 3, An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act*, 75th Cong. 2103 (1939) (Statement John Collier).

⁸⁰ Grant Grams, *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021), 10-28.

⁸¹ Frank Usbeck, *Fellow Tribesmen : The Image of Native Americans, National Identity, and Nazi Ideology in Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 4-10.

Communities.⁸² Second, he dressed for his stage name wearing traditional regalia and displaying the traditional Native American symbol discussed earlier, the swastika. Within his speeches he attributed the brutal treatment endured by Indigenous Communities to the work of a powerful worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Towner proclaimed at one gathering, "To rid the country of the Jews and Communists and return to the whites, patriotic leaders, perhaps Indians, will arise."⁸² Besides this admiration for far-right principles he claimed to a German-American Bund group in Oregon, "Whether you know it or not, Adolf Hitler's government is established on an Indian model and according to Indian principles."⁸³ At this same rally, Towner also discussed how George Washington and the Constitution was based on Indian principles, relating to the Bund belief of the first American president also being the world's first Fascist.⁸⁴ Towner also spoke about the mistreatment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs under Collier and the Communism which informed the decisions of both, which reflected the beliefs as a member of the AIF. While Pelley hoped Towner would lure in more Native Americans to his cause, this does not seem to be the case, since many, including Bruner, were hesitant to join the ranks of known Nazi.⁸⁵ However that did not prevent these groups from indirectly gaining the image of the "Indian" through financial support and persuasion, and this was the plight of Alice Lee Jemison.

⁸² An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act S. 2103, session 3, *An Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indians from the Provisions of the Act*, 75th Cong. 2103 (1939) (Excerpt from From Peoples daily World, San Francisco, Calif.).

⁸³ Eckard Toy, "Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies and Personalities in the 1930s," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (October 1989): 142-145.

⁸⁴ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 197.

⁸⁵ Arne Bernstein, "New Moon and Red Cloud," in *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn And the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (Minneapolis: New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 96-100.

ALICE LEE JEMISON

Much of the controversy which plagued the AIF resulted from alleged allegations between Alice Lee Jemison and domestic Nazi organizations.⁸⁶ Despite these assertions, it is critical to understand that it is not the demands of Fascism that influenced her political career but an advocacy for Native American rights. She was not a disciple of Hitler or the Fascist philosophies of Europe, but, like Bruner, followed in the convictions of Carlos Montezuma, seeking to implement them in American society.⁸⁷ Jemison was born near the Cattaraugus Reservation in upstate New York. She was a descendant of Mary Jemison, a white woman who attracted fame due to her fully integrating into the Indigenous society.⁸⁸ Alice's mother traced her lineage to this prominent Seneca family, but her father was of Cherokee descent. Jemison was impacted by the Indian Boarding school system, like Bruner and Towner, with her parents meeting at Hampton Institute.⁸⁹ Jemison's life was deeply affected by Iroquois culture, conceptions of sovereignty, and gender constructions, which posited women as a central figure within the defense of the nation. Despite these cultural understandings, Jemison was nevertheless vulnerable in an interwar society and economy almost exclusively dominated by men.

Jemison married the year she graduated high school to Le Verne Leonard Jemison, whom she left due to his alcoholism. Because of this separation, Alice alone carried the burden of providing for their two children and her aging mother. Unlike Bruner and Towner, who engaged in lucrative careers as businessmen and lawyers, she continually occupied a precarious financial

⁸⁶ Jere Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 1.

⁸⁷ Peter Iverson, *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 176–179.

⁸⁸ Alice Lee Jamison, "Present Crime Poor Example of Real Indian: Cruel, Bloodthirsty Savage of History is Now Gentle and Kindly," *The Buffalo Times*, March 23, 1930, 10.

⁸⁹ Laurence Hauptman, "Alice Lee Jemison, Seneca Journalist as Activist," in *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800*, (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 69.

state. Jemison worked a series of odd jobs to support her family. By 1930, she engaged in writing to support her family and spread awareness of the injustices carried out against Native American communities. In 1930, she became the “author of the series of articles representing the Indian viewpoint on the trial of Lila Jimerson,” a Native woman accused of murder.⁹⁰ Jemison used her journalist position during this criminal investigation to advocate for Indigenous rights.

Jemison, within one such article, evaluated the representation of Native Americans within the United States, stating, "I wonder just what impression of the Indian will be in the white man's mind. Does he still consider the Indian the cruel and bloody savage which history paints him?"⁹¹ After posing this question to the reader, she states that this form of violence attributed to these communities only resulted because "the Indian was fighting for his home, his family, his very life-fighting against extinction!" Jemison refutes such a claim, arguing that these violent stereotypes did not represent Native American communities, writing, "But how I wish I could take you into some of those shabby homes upon the reservation. Here, at evening, his day's work over, you'd find this cruel Indian, seated beside his fireside, the youngest baby, or maybe two, clambering over him. Minding the baby, while mother makes the biscuits." Within this piece, Jemison traces how problematic constructions of Native American violence resulted not only in the sensationalism attributed to the Lila Jimerson case but the approach the justice system exemplified in the trial. As displayed within this writing sample, dedication to Native American rights fueled Jemison's activism, not a belief in the doctrines of fascism, which was gaining European popularity at the time. Articles such as these garnered attention to Jemison's abilities and were instrumental in her appointment as secretary of the American Indian Federation.

⁹⁰ "Indian Author Winning Hard Battle in Life: Alice Lee Jemison Overcomes Long Odds to Bring Honors and Respect to her Race," *The Buffalo Times*, March 23, 1930, 10.

⁹¹ Alice Lee Jemison, "Present Crime Poor Example of Real Indian: Cruel, Bloodthirsty Savage of History is Now Gentle and Kindly," *The Buffalo Times*, March 23, 1930, 10.

In a memorandum submitted before Congress in 1938, Jemison stated, "No member or officer of the federation receives a salary for work performed for the organization, or is reimbursed for expenses incurred in that work, with the exception of myself. Since 1935 the actual expenses for the work carried on in our Washington office and part of the expenses for a subsistence living for myself and two children have been paid by the federation."⁹² As represented in this statement, Jemison occupied a different position than other executives of the AIF; even as she remained committed to causes of Indigenous sovereignty, economic restraints were a persistent concern in her life, and this was an insecurity Nazi organizations exploited. Most connections between Jemison and, hence, the Federation and domestic Fascist organizations were economic. One such connection was Naval Intelligence sources Collier received, which detailed how German-American Bund agents provided Jemison economic assistance in buying an automobile during a period of dire personal finances.⁹³ Though Jemison refuted these claims, it nevertheless represents the understanding of the economic constraints afflicting Jemison, considering that even the Nazi took note of this. A similar incident occurred between James True and Jemison. James True was the leader of the militant, anti-Semitic, fascist group the James True Associates. Through his considerable economic backing, True agreed to pay Jemison for weekly industrial reports she wrote for his organization.⁹⁴ Jemison most likely saw this commission as a means to advocate for indigenous rights while increasing her financial security.

⁹² *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings on Un-American Activities House of Representatives H.R. 282, session 3, Before the special comm. on Un-Activities Activities, 75th Cong. 203 (1938)* (statement of Alice Lee Jemison, American Indian Federation).

⁹³ Jere Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 18.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 17.

Jemison's writing circulated within a number of these Far-Right organizations, though she never spoke about National Socialism or Hitler as solving the crisis confronting Native American communities. She saw communism as a threat to Indigenous standing within Euro-American society. As one California newspaper reported below an image of Jemison crying, "Mrs. Alice Lee Jemison, Seneca Indian, is shown here as she sobbed whole, objecting to the notion of Felix Frankfurter to the Supreme Court." The outburst of emotion resulted from her belief that Frankfurter was a member of an organization that was "forcing communism on the Indians."⁹⁵ Jamison's concern regarding ideologies forced on Native Americans originated from decades of traumatic coercion and harassment into Euro-American beliefs. Jemison often engaged in right-wing rhetoric to defend Indigenous communities from this perceived threat of Marxism. Her commitment to defending these communities and her financial status allowed her exploitation by these fascist organizations in their attempt to "play Indian."

These Fascist groups were willing to provide her with economic incentives to represent their organizations through her writings and attending the rallies of these ultra-right organizations. These factors and her dedication to protecting her community from Communism resulted in her appearing on stage with the Silver Shirts and German-American Bund members.⁹⁶ Her actions resulted not from a dedication to Hitler or his policies but from her vulnerable position as the female provider of her family, her concern about the Communist threat, and the desire of domestic fascist groups to appropriate her Indigeneity to gain mainstream popularity. While the fact that she knowingly engaged with organizations affiliated with Nazism and

⁹⁵ "Sobs Out of Objects," *Oakland Tribune*, January 12, 1939, 3.

⁹⁶Kenneth Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 55-56.

pronounced antisemitism should not be neglected or excused, it is crucial to understand these ideologies were not what informed her political activism.

Due to her commitment to activism and her role within the American Indian Federation, Jemison was often the most publicized figure in the activist group. Many newspapers report her statements before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Such as, a Pennsylvania paper proclaimed, "Alice Lee Jemison, a Seneca Indian, told House investigators that Seneca Indian told House investigators that Secretary Ickes, Indian Commissioner John Collier and several officials of the Indian bureau were members of the Civil Liberties Union or had expressed a belief in its principles."⁹⁷ She appeared in these congressional hearings on Indian affairs more than any other Native American during her time in the Federation from 1934 to 1939.⁹⁸ However, her frequent voluntary statements before the community caused attacks against her reputation. In one such expose, a newspaper detailed the ambitions of American Nazi groups to recruit Native Americans and Collier's defense against such activities. The article details how "Mr. Collier had had more than one joust with critics of the Government's Indian policies. Before he made his latest statement, the Dies Committee had heard an Indian woman, Alice Lee Jemison, testify that Government officials have fostered 'communistic practices' on Indian reservations."⁹⁹ Due to her outspokenness and Collier portraying himself as the defender against Nazism on the reservation, Jemison is cast as the opposition and, in the article, depicted as a Fascist sympathizer. However, this characterization does not reflect reality. These Fascist groups colonized her outcries against the unjust treatment of Indigenous communities and historically

⁹⁷ "Violation of U.S. Rights was Claimed," *Henderson Daily Dispatch*, November 22, 1938 , 1-3.

⁹⁸ Laurence Hauptman, "Alice Lee Jemison, Seneca Journalist as Activist," in *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800*, (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 73.

⁹⁹ "Lo, the Poor Indian!," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, November 26, 1938 , 6.

informed skepticism of the American government. Her fierceness, disenfranchisement, and concerns provided these organizations with a famous Seneca woman to supply them with the ability to "play Indian" and thus "play patriot".

Thus despite the aims of the American Indian Federation to advocate for Native sovereignty, domestic Nazi groups in the United States viewed the organization as an effective means not only to present their ideologies as distinctly American but as a projection of patriotism. Just like Hitler's seizure of the Swastika, far-right associations within America diminished the AIF's demands for justice instead providing support to the Federation and those involved to spread the doctrines of National Socialism throughout the United States.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

"Indian Author Winning Hard Battle in Life: Alice Lee Jemison Overcomes Long Odds to Bring Honors and Respect to her Race," *The Buffalo Times*, March 23, 1930.

"Indians Continue Fight on Collier," *Morning Examiner*, July 31, 1937.

"Indian Tribes Hold Powwow in Hotel: 1,500 Gather here, Many in Traditional Costume, for Send-Off for Trainees. *New York Times*, March 16, 1941.

Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings on Un-American Activities House of Representatives H.R. 282, session 3, Before the special comm. on Un-Activities Activities, 75th Cong. 203 (1938).

Jemison, Alice Lee. "Present Crime Poor Example of Real Indian: Cruel, Bloodthirsty Savage of History is Now Gentle and Kindly." *The Buffalo Times*, March 23, 1930.

Kuhn, Fritz . "American Bund Rally Address." Speech, Nazi rally at Madison Square Garden, New York, NY, February 20, 1939.

"Lo, the Poor Indian!," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, November 26, 1938.

"Proposed Constitution and Code of the American Indian Federation." *The Daily Claremore*, October 13, 1939.

"Sachem Won't Give up Swastika to Hitler, Reveals Indian Sign is on Nazi Anyway." *New York Times*, March 10, 1940.

"Sobs Out of Objects," *Oakland Tribune*, January 12, 1939.

Thomas, Johnson. 1940. "The Blackwell Daily Journal. "Nazi Fascist Propaganda Spread by Million in U.S. Activities are Masked in Many 'American Societies.'" *The Blackwell Daily Journal*, June 5, 1940.

"Violation of U.S. Rights was Claimed," *Henderson Daily Dispatch*, November 22, 1938.

Secondary Sources:

- Bernstein, Arne, 2013. *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn And the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Daily, David. 2004. *Battle for the BIA: G.E.E Lindquist and the Missionary Crusade against John Collier*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Deloria, Philip. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Deloria , Vine, and Clifford Lytle .*The Nations Within: The Past and the Future of American Indian Sovereignty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Eckard, Toy. 1989. "Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies and Personalities in the 1930s." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (Oct.): 139–146.
- Franco, Jere. 1999. *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*. Denton TX: University of North Texas Press.
- Franco, Jere. "Patriotism on Trail: Native Americans in World War II." PhD diss., (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1990.
- Glenn, Carolina. *Kindred by Choice Germans and American Indians since 1800*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 20.
- Grams, Grant. *Coming Home to the Third Reich: Return Migration of German Nationals from the United States and Canada, 1933-1941*. Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2021
- Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.
- Hauptman, Laurence. 2008. "Alice Lee Jemison, Seneca Journalist as Activist." In *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800*, 65–79. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Hauptman, Laurence. 1983. "The American Indian Federation and the Indian New Deal: A Reinterpretation." *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 2 (Nov.): 165–176. Jstor.
- Hart, Bradley. 2018. *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's supporters in the United States*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Holian, Timothy. *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996.

- Iverson, Peter. 1982. *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Kehoe, Alice. 2014. *A Passion for the True and the Just: Felix and Lucy Kramer Cohen and the Indian New Deal*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Kelly, Lawrence . *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983.
- Murray, Robert. *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955
- Roberto, Micheal Joseph. *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* New York: Month Review Press, 2018.
- Rosier, Paul. *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Shogan, Robert. *Prelude to Catastrophe: FDR's Jews and the Menace of Nazism*. Chicago : Ivan R. Dee, 2010.
- Townsend, Kenneth. 2002. *World War II and the American Indian*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. 2004. *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Usbeck, Frank. 2015. *Fellow Tribesmen : The Image of Native Americans, National Identity, and Nazi Ideology in Germany*. New York: Berghahn Books.