

# H-Diplo ARTICLE REVIEW 1032

28 April 2021

**Jennifer Luff. "The Anxiety of Influence: Foreign Intervention, U.S. Politics, and World War I."**

*Diplomatic History* 44:5 (September 2020): 756-785.

<https://hdiplo.org/to/AR1032>

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The British government deliberately manipulated American public opinion and sought to influence American political policies in Britain's favor during the First World War. Waging a secret campaign of propaganda, fear-mongering, and misinformation, British agents portrayed the Germans as waging a culture war against Anglo-American hearts and minds. And yet throughout the war, British officials refused to even disclose the existence of a propaganda effort. The true impact of British influence did not become clear to the American public until after the war was over. In part this was due to concerted efforts to conceal the sources of information and the reach of British interests in the United States. In this article Jennifer Luff clearly proves pervasive nature of British influence during the war, which helped to build an Anglo-American alliance and draw the U.S. into the war on the Allied side.

While the British pursued a doctrine of secrecy, the German government took the opposite approach. Once the British had severed the transatlantic telegraph cables linking continental Europe with the United States, news regarding the conduct of the war typically passed through British channels before reaching the United States. Reports could be relayed through neutral countries, but this delayed communications, meaning that the British perspective dictated the headlines. In an effort to counter this dilemma, the German government opened its own press office, the German Information Service, in New York City in September 1914. This office operated openly, distributing daily information memoranda to newspapers reflecting the 'German perspective,' complete with the stamp of the Imperial German government. The Germans also engaged in espionage, sabotage, labor-organization efforts, and public relations campaigns in an attempt to keep the U.S. neutral. The two campaigns could not have been more different in method and approach. Luff's larger point is that historians in general, and U.S. historians in particular, have often overlooked the various ways in which foreign governments have sought to influence U.S. politics and policies. The British and German campaigns are notable in this regard; the former was disclosed after the war for its successes, while the latter was denounced during the war for its audacity and illegality.

As Luff writes,

The battle for U.S. hearts and minds that began in 1914 involved a strange conjuncture of campaigns by the British and German governments. Each campaign entailed public initiatives such as speaking tours, pamphleteering, and editorials, as well as secret operations—sabotage by German agents, and covert surveillance by British intelligence. British agents sought to whip up anti-German animus by publicizing German propaganda and sabotage as it occurred, while concealing Britain's role in uncovering it (757).

These campaigns had clear effects on U.S. policies, proving the influence of foreign governments within the United States during the war. The single most important piece of legislation was the Espionage Act of 1917, which dramatically increased the capacity of the federal government to monitor dissenters and spy on U.S. citizens who sought to protest against U.S.

involvement in the war.<sup>1</sup> Britain's Official Secrets Act and the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) served as models for the Espionage Act and its later amendments known as the Sabotage Act and the Sedition Act, "and the wording of the U.S. law closely follows the British one" (777). While the contemporary sources recorded in vivid detail the widespread effects of the British and German campaigns, public memory was fleeting. Scarcely a decade after the war's end, the role of foreign interference in American public affairs had been forgotten, overlaid by domestic concerns.

Luff's careful study draws on a wide range of sources and fully engages with an extensive historiography. Contemporary accounts, such as William Maloney's satire *The Re-Conquest of America*, as well as newspaper articles help to convey the heady emotions of the war years.<sup>2</sup> These are balanced by a number of historical studies written during the 1920s and 1930s which established the basic framework of the propaganda campaigns orchestrated by Britain and Germany.<sup>3</sup> Archival records and congressional testimonies further document the actions undertaken by foreign agents. Luff notes that a number of the standard analyses of the United States during the post-World War II years hardly mention the cases of German intrigue, but that more recent scholarship has begun to correct this misperception.<sup>4</sup>

While Luff aptly shows the extent of foreign manipulation in American affairs during the First World War, some specific dimensions go unmentioned. Perhaps the most obvious is the absence of the economic aspect in her account. Once President Wilson authorized the extension of credit for the sale of munitions and war materiel, the floodgates opened for the vast exportation of all sorts of products and goods to the Allies. Very little could be sold to the Central Powers, given British control of the Atlantic. The numbers paint a clear picture; "between December 1914 and 1916, Allied trade rose from \$825 million to \$3.3 billion. During the same period, exports to Germany and Austria-Hungary fell from \$169 million to \$1 million. American ties to Britain were forged by the munitions industry and American diplomacy, which clearly favored the British, despite President Wilson's public position."<sup>5</sup> British propaganda efforts helped to expose the ineptitudes of the German campaign, but could never have drawn the U.S. into the war on their own.

Another aspect that is more subtle, but also should have figured in Luff's analysis is the importance of culture and language to a campaign that is intended to influence public opinion. The British had a distinct advantage with a common language and a savvy comprehension of the nuances of manipulating public opinion. The Germans badly miscalculated American attitudes and views toward sources of 'authoritative information.' Books penned by academics and government-authorized memoranda could hardly compete with the shocking headlines in the daily news. Furthermore, the language barrier created

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<sup>1</sup> For a more thorough analysis of the impact of the Espionage and Sedition Acts, see Michael Kazin, *War against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> William Joseph Marie Alois Maloney, *The Re-Conquest of America: Full Text of the Most Astounding Document Ever Discovered in the History of International Intrigue* (New York, 1919).

<sup>3</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War: An Introduction to the Problem of War Guilt* (New York, 1927); Frederick Bausman, *Facing Europe* (New York, 1926); Walter Millis, *Road to War: America 1914-1917* (New York, 1935); H.C. Peterson, *Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Norman, 1939); James Duane Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917* (Cambridge, 1935).

<sup>4</sup> Luff singles out David Kennedy's *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Wilson scholar Arthur Link's *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) in particular as lacking detail on the German campaign. Recent correctives include Chad R. Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016), Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Zachary Smith, *Age of Fear: Othering and American Identity during World War I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I*, 27.

additional hurdles for the German propagandists working in New York, who were forced to rewrite much of the material sent from Germany to be palatable for an American audience. The German Foreign Office assumed that a direct accounting of the 'German perspective' from career officials would be seen as above reproach, failing to recognize that most Americans preferred to draw their own conclusions. British agents, on the other hand, downplayed their role, leaving informative details in plain sight for newspaper editors, the Bureau of Investigation (precursor to the FBI), and diplomatic officials.<sup>6</sup>

The backlash against Britain came in the 1920s and 1930s. Luff notes that “Whereas discovering evidence of German propaganda and covert operations as they occurred had produced a spy fever and a legislative crackdown, discovering evidence of British propaganda after the fact produced a profound cynicism and a fierce Anglophobia” (781-782). Yet, after World War II, most scholars had lost sight of the significance of foreign influence in the United States. Luff casts Arthur Link’s view of British and German propaganda in 1960 as “ultimately negligible” (784), drawing on his *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*. The result was an obfuscation of the role that foreign governments played in American politics during the twentieth century. One wonders what role future scholars might attribute to foreign influence in the U.S. for the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

**Chad Fulwider** is an Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History and Political Science at Centenary College of Louisiana. He is the author of *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016) and “Shared Ideals: Transatlantic Liberalism, Atrocity Propaganda and US Entry into WWI” (with Emily Robertson) in *Proximity and Distance: Space, Time and the First World War*, edited by Emily Robertson and Romain Fathi (Melbourne University Press, 2020). His current project examines the work of French artist Jean Despujols and his role as an artist and soldier on the Western Front during the First World War.

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<sup>6</sup> Steward Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (London, 1996); Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I*.