

Book Reviews

work in American cities. Some contemporary critics of the American scene, such as Robert Bellah, suggest that we need to foster a greater sense of commitment and community in our society. Both of the books reviewed here can be recommended as part of the record of past attempts to do so.

GRINNELL COLLEGE

JONATHAN G. ANDELSON

The Germans in Missouri, 1900-1918: Prohibition, Neutrality, and Assimilation, by David W. Detjen. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985. xi, 214 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$23.00 cloth.

Of all the immigrant peoples who poured into the United States during the nineteenth century, none was more numerous than the Germans. In 1900 Germans constituted the largest single ethnic minority in more than half of the states. Although historians still debate the extent to which foreign-born and native-born German-Americans embraced a sense of *Deutschtum*, or "Germanness," at the turn of the century, there are ample signs that many German-Americans still saw themselves as culturally separate from the mainstream of American life. In addition to beer gardens, which blossomed wherever Germans settled, widespread support for German-language publications and theatre companies, a multitude of ethnic social organizations, and observance of various special days pointed to the continued vitality of German-American culture. But by 1920, in a process stunning for its swiftness, most German-Americans had assimilated, and outward signs of their once flourishing culture had largely disappeared.

In this tightly written volume, which despite its title is more about an elitist German-American organization in one Missouri city than about the Germans in Missouri, David W. Detjen traces the rise and fall of the St. Louis branch of the *Deutsch-Amerikanischer National-Bund* (DANB), the National German-American Alliance. Founded in 1904, three years after the national organization had been created in Pennsylvania, the German-American Alliance in Missouri soon claimed seventy-five thousand members. But in reality, Detjen asserts, "the Alliance . . . was no more than a loose federation of organizations, with no historical tradition and no established central organization of any permanency" (31). Consequently, the author directs his attention primarily to the dominant St. Louis alliance and the dozen or so men who led it. From 1907 to 1914 the alliance's central mission was to combat the drive for prohibition in Missouri.

With the onset of World War I, new issues began to emerge. At first, many German-Americans saw no conflict between their cultural

affinity and their political responsibilities as citizens of the United States, but this changed as relations between the two nations deteriorated. As alliance spokesmen became increasingly shrill in their defense of Germany and their attacks on what they perceived to be the pro-Allied policies of the Wilson administration, most German-Americans began to distance themselves from the organization. Over the years, Detjen writes, the DANB "had attracted those German-Americans most passionately devoted to their Germanness, and in the Alliance, more than in the German-American community as a whole, there were those who were extreme in their devotion to the German cause" (110). In the months following the American declaration of war on Germany in April 1917, the earlier, intemperate statements of alliance leaders came back to haunt it. Increasingly it became the target for charges of disloyalty. Eventually Charles Weinsberg, a St. Louis physician and president of the state alliance, was charged with violating a section of the Espionage Act of 1917. Although Weinsberg was ultimately acquitted, the alliance, unable to survive the anti-German sentiment brought on by the war, quietly disbanded. Thus the voice that had once spoken so loudly in opposition to prohibition was silent in January 1919 when the Missouri General Assembly ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

David W. Detjen is a New York attorney and the third generation of lawyers in his family to represent Germans and German-Americans. Not surprisingly, the author is at his best when describing and analyzing the Weinsberg trial. But when writing about other issues, particularly the "prohibition, neutrality, and assimilation" of the book's subtitle, his focus is so narrow that he adds little to our understanding of the impact of these issues on the larger German-American community. Nonetheless, Detjen has written an objective and well-documented account of the traumatic changes experienced by one element of the German-American community early in this century. Unfortunately, the book was published without illustrations.

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