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**Austria-Hungary and the American Belligerence in World War One<sup>1</sup>**

Pro&Contra 2

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to systematize the available material on the role played by Austria-Hungary in America's entry into the Great War. Particular focus is placed on the part Hungary played, as well as the situation of the Hungarian immigrants living in the United States during this time period (1914–1918), and to what extent their lives were affected during these years. The research utilizes a wide range of secondary sources, as well as contemporary articles from American and Hungarian newspapers, and, to some degree, primary sources also. The federal government and major leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt were concerned with the insidious acts of the German and Ottoman Empires, but they were much less anti-Austrian or anti-Hungarian which is intriguing given the fact that the war was in effect instigated by Austria-Hungary. This paper examines this question in detail by analyzing the events leading up to April, 1917, investigating the involvement of Hungarians in American aggression, and discussing the social backlash such actions provoked.

**Keywords:** World War One, belligerence, United States, Austria-Hungary, immigration, Hungarian-Americans, espionage

## I. Introduction

On April 6, 1917, the United States of America officially entered World War One. In little less than the three years between 1914 and 1917, the Union had moved from an absolute rejection of violence to an enthusiastic support of the war effort. In his well-documented, thorough analysis of American society during the war, Michael S. Neiberg pointed out that contrary to common belief, Americans did not follow blindly a President with Messiah syndrome, and neither did they fall victim to the evil schemes of a mysterious “international financial elite”. For American society, the path to war was paved with news of outrageous acts committed by the Central Powers, more specifically the German and Ottoman Empires, which included aggression against Belgium, the massacres of Armenians in Turkey, unrestricted submarine warfare, a series of sabotages on American soil,<sup>2</sup> the sinking of *Lusitania* and the attempts to provoke a war between Mexico and the U.S. Such actions made it clear to most Americans that they could not afford to let the

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<sup>2</sup> See Tracie Provost, “Spy Games: German Sabotage and Espionage in the United States, 1914–1916.” *FCH Annals: The Journal of the Florida Conference of Historians* 22 (June 2015): 123–136.

Central Powers win the war.<sup>3</sup> Although Woodrow Wilson won his second term in November, 1916 with the slogan “He kept us out of the war”, it was only a few months later, at the beginning of 1917, that many Americans waited for the overt act justifying their entry into the war on the side of the Entente. Neiberg argues that American society was watching events very closely, and their support of hostility instead of isolationism was a much more informed opinion on their part than the academic literature previously suggested.

According to Neiberg, this change of view was based on three fundamental points. First, America recognized that securing Europe’s future meant securing their own as well: “Europe may have been *over there*, but it was also close to home.” Second, they collectively believed that by not having any part in instigating the conflict, they were acting in self-defense and in the interests of mankind against German imperialism. Third, they realized that their different ethnic identities meant less to them than their common American identity.<sup>4</sup>

The title of this paper reflects an interesting idea. Germany had played a crucial role in the three years leading up to American entering hostilities, and, although the US officially never declared war on it, the Ottoman Empire also played a role in convincing American society to support entering the war. But little is known about the role of the other great aggressor country among the Central Powers: Austria-Hungary. This paper aims to systematize the information available on the involvement of Austria-Hungary, more importantly Hungarians, in the American entry into the Great War. The situation of Hungarian immigrants living in the United States during this period is of particular concern, and in particular how their lives were affected during the war. This research is making use of a wide range of secondary sources, and contemporary newspaper pieces, both American and Hungarian, and, to some degree, primary sources as well. An examination of the secondary literature makes it clear that the insidious acts of the German and Ottoman Empires influenced the United States’ decision to enter the war against the Central Powers in 1917; however, Austria-Hungary and Hungarian Americans did considerably less to provoke them than their allies, yet their involvement ought not to be overlooked.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 222.

<sup>4</sup> Neiberg, *The Path to War*, 235.

## II. Historical Background: The United States and the First World War

It is common knowledge that the First World War began following the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Empire when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The reigning monarch, Franz Joseph I, was wary about declaring war on Serbia for fear of an attack by the Russian Empire, protecting their fellow Slavic country in the name of pan Slavism, but more importantly for defending its own political interests in the Balkans region. But with the encouragement of the German Emperor Wilhelm II, and after the Serbian rejection of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum, Franz Joseph signed the declaration of war. The plan for Austria-Hungary was to quickly defeat Serbia, optimally before Russia could mobilize, but in case their military operations took longer than expected, Germany would hold the Russian forces at bay.<sup>5</sup> Of course, events did not go to plan and four years of bloodshed ensued the like of which had never been witnessed before.

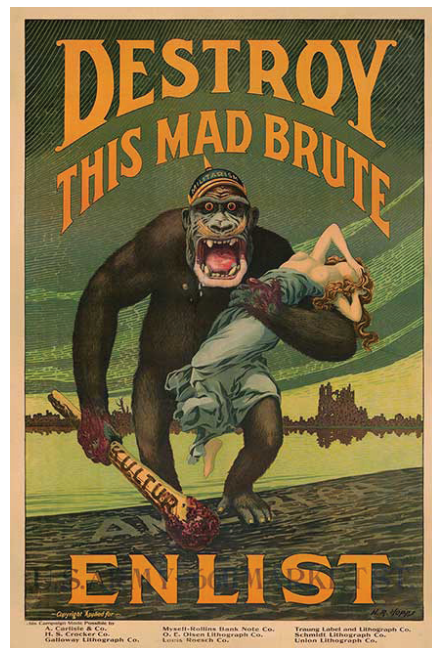
The World War marked the first great international conflict between the United States and countries that had large immigrant populations in the Union. Although the war was instigated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, their aggression against Serbia is given less attention in “Western” historiography than the German attack on Belgium.<sup>6</sup> The same was true in the case of the British, and French, and was also true for American newspapers of the time. Belgium was referred to as “Brave Little Belgium”, or “Poor Little Belgium”, and people in these countries, especially in the USA were outraged by the “brute force” Germany employed when they overran Belgium without a proper declaration of war.<sup>7</sup> These acts of violence, alongside several others during the course of the war, went a long way in convincing American society to abandon their pacifism.

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<sup>5</sup> József Galántai, *Szárarajevótól a háborúig: 1914. július* [From Sarajevo to the War. July 1914] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1975),

<sup>6</sup> By “Western” historiography, I mean here the academic literature from mostly the Anglo-Saxon nations and France.

<sup>7</sup> See Christophe Declercq, “From Antwerp to Britain and Back Again” in *Languages and the First World War: Representation and Memory*, eds. Christophe Declercq and Julian Walker (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016), 94.



**Figure 1: Destroy this mad brute - one of the best known American WWI propaganda posters<sup>8</sup>**

Figure 1 is one of the most recognizable examples of how the German Empire was presented to the American public. In Harry R. Hopps' painting Germany is depicted as a huge ape in a German military helmet, gripping a bloody club in one hand, and holding a helpless woman, Lady Liberty, in the other. The poster is essentially a visual representation of Woodrow Wilson's speech to Congress on April 2, 1917, in which he stated that the United States was preparing to fight Germany because it had proved to be a menace to world peace and indeed, civilization itself.<sup>9</sup>

The German role in provoking American hostilities is recognized and well-documented. Following this short introduction, the next section attempts to discover how big of a role Hungarians played in this particular story. But before doing so, it seems necessary to briefly outline how such a great number of Hungarians came to be in the USA.

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<sup>8</sup> The original source of the image is the website of the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/static/world-war-i-american-experiences/images/objects/over-here/wwi0025-standard.jpg>

<sup>9</sup> Akira Iriye, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations. Volume III. The Globalizing of America, 1913–1945*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.), 41.

### III. Historical Background: Hungarians in the USA

Hungarian immigration to the United States was at an all-time high in the years preceding the Great War. There are several statistics attesting to the extent of immigration. An uninterrupted record of immigration to the US began in 1819; the Act of 1819 required the captains of all vessels arriving into the US from abroad to produce a list or manifest of all passengers to the local authorities. Immigration statistics were compiled by the Department of State between 1820 and 1870, by the Treasury Department, Bureau of Statistics, between 1867–1895; and since 1892, by a separate Office or Bureau of Immigration, as a part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.<sup>10</sup> One of the problems with the statistical data is that they usually show significant differences based on the place of origin and the location where the data was recorded: US immigration statistics, records taken at the place of boarding (e. g. Bremen or Hamburg in Germany, etc.), and the emigration statistics of the countries of origin are dissimilar in many cases.<sup>11</sup> Another problem is that immigration statistics are primarily based on headcounts, namely the aforementioned ship manifests or passenger lists. But a great number of immigrants took the journey to the USA to find employment, save money and then return to their respective home countries to invest their new-found wealth in businesses, land or property. Since many undertook this process several times, it was not uncommon for individuals to appear in the statistics every time they travelled to America. So as a result, some people were counted multiple times which distorts the figures. Immigration statistics do not take generally this phenomenon into consideration, so consequently, there are no accurate accounts on the exact number of immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

Hungarians, along with nationals from a dozen other Central- and Eastern European countries, arrived into the USA in great numbers in the period known as the Third Immigration Wave, between about 1881 and 1914. This period brought more than 23 million new immigrants from mostly European countries, to the US. In the first decade of the period, most immigrants arrived from Northern and Western Europe, but after 1890, the majority came from southern and eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, there had been other, although considerably smaller waves of Hungarian immigrants, but none of those can be

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<sup>10</sup> US. Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC, 1975), 97.

<sup>11</sup> Julianna Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880–1940* [Hungarian Immigrants in the United States] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.) 443–446.

<sup>12</sup> Julianna Puskás, *Ties That Bind, Ties That Divide. 100 Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Carl L. Bankston III., ed. *Encyclopedia of American Immigration* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2010), 558.

compared to the 1890–1914 period. The main reasons for this were the immigration acts of 1921 and 1924, which essentially put an end to mass immigration to the US.<sup>14</sup>

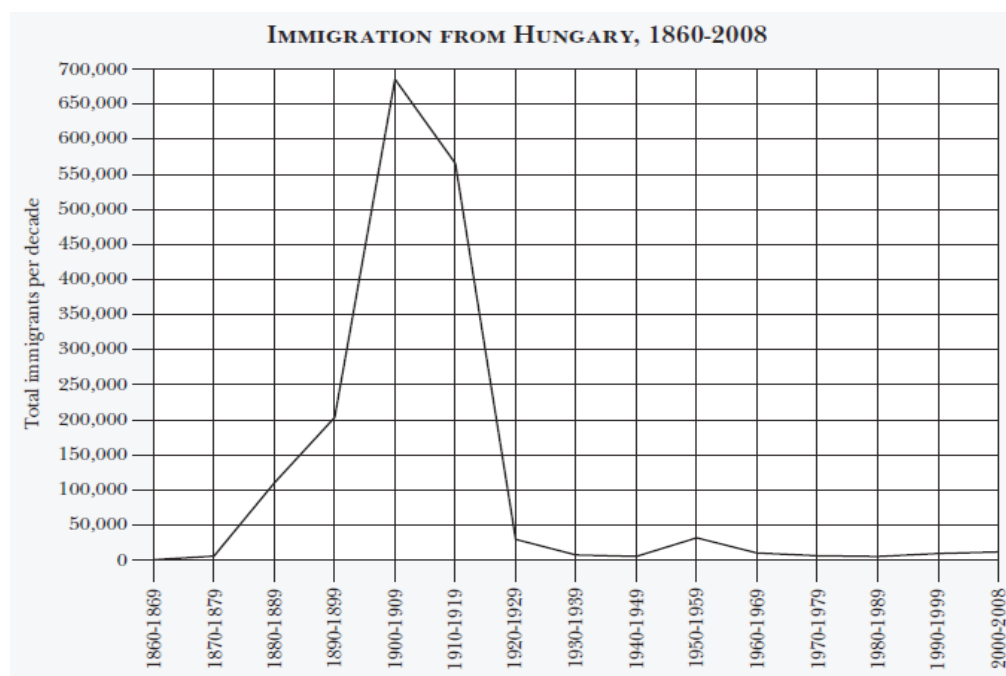


Figure 2: Line chart of Hungarian Immigration to the USA throughout history<sup>15</sup>

Figure 2 illustrates the extent of Hungarian immigration to the USA. Although, it shows just one variation of the several available statistics, the chart is still suitable for demonstrating that the peak of Hungarian immigration was in the decade prior to the First World War. So, when war broke out, more Hungarians were living and working in the United States than ever before. Of course, for the sake of preciseness, a distinction must be made between Hungarians (Magyars) and non-Hungarians (e. g. Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, Croatsians, Serbs, etc.) from the territory of Austria-Hungary.

Gross migration from the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the First World War can be put at three million people, the majority of which arrived after 1899. Of all Austro-Hungarian immigrants, an estimated one and a half million arrived from the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Yet this figure does not show how many Hungarians (by

<sup>14</sup> Bankston, *Encyclopedia*, 533–537.

<sup>15</sup> The data in the chart is based on the *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 2008, published by the Department of Homeland Security. Bankston, *Encyclopedia*, 507.

<sup>16</sup> Puskás, *Ties That Bind*, 21.



which secondary sources usually mean people who spoke Hungarian as a mother tongue) travelled to the USA in this period with accuracy. According to Hungarian census statistics, only 48.1 per cent of the population living in the Kingdom of Hungary considered themselves Hungarians in 1910.<sup>17</sup> Unlike other eastern European nations, more than 99 per cent of immigrants claiming Magyar as a mother tongue were from the same country. But conversely, only 46 per cent of immigrants from Hungary were actually Magyars.<sup>18</sup>

When it comes to determining how many Magyars were living in the United States during World War One, it is difficult to arrive at an accurate number. The US federal censuses of 1910 and 1920 are certainly helpful, but there are several important factors to be taken into consideration. Firstly, one should examine the flow of immigration to the USA on a yearly basis between 1910 and 1914. The outbreak of the Great War halted immigration – the number of immigrants arriving during the war was negligible so the years after 1914 can be eliminated from the calculation. The yearly numbers of Hungarian immigrants should be added to the results of the 1910 census but the calculation would still not be accurate. This leads us to the second methodological issue. As mentioned before, a sizeable number of migrants sailed to the United States with the intention of working there temporarily. As Steven Béla Várdy, a noted Hungarian American historian puts it:

They were driven from their homeland by economic privation, and drawn to the United States by the economic opportunities of a burgeoning industrial society. Most of them were young males who came as temporary guest workers with the intention of returning to their homeland and becoming well-to-do farmers.<sup>19</sup>

A not inconsequential number of these individuals repeated the journey several times over the course of a few years. Consequently, to determine the number of Hungarians in the US during the war, it would be necessary to eliminate the occasions of re-migration, which would in essence mean registering every single immigrant worker by name in a database, a task that would prove momentous – even for a research team. According to Julianna Puskás, the numbers involved can be put somewhere around at 1.8 million people.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> László Katus, *Hungary in the Dual Monarchy 1867–1914*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.), 167.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Daniels, *Coming to America. A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 232.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Béla Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban* [Hungarians in the New World] (Budapest: 2000). 744.

<sup>20</sup> Puskás, *Tíz*, 21.

#### IV. “The Conflict of Loyalties”

Julianna Puskás calls the 1914–1918 period “The Conflict of Loyalties”,<sup>21</sup> which could not be more accurate in respect of the Hungarian immigrants living in the USA that time. This split loyalty was not unusual and is similar to what other immigrant nationals faced: they had to decide whether their original ethnicity, or their new, American identity was more important to them.<sup>22</sup> But this was not necessarily a major talking point in the first years of the war, while the US maintained its neutral position in respect to the war. In this period (1914, and a main segment of 1915), a lot of Hungarians felt a sense of responsibility for those remaining in the old country, some others even expressed their patriotism by notifying the Hungarian Embassy of their intention to join the Hungarian army.

What made life very difficult for Hungarian Americans was the fact that they ended up in the crosshairs of both the Hungarian government and American society. The Hungarian government announced that anybody of Hungarian citizenship who worked in American weapons factories or any other military plants were considered enemies of the state of Hungary, and were to be subjected to 10 to 20 years in prison, or even to capital punishment. For instance in South Bethlehem, PA, one Hungarian immigrant described the situation as follows:

For weeks now the Austrians working here have been troubled by reports scattered broadcast that if they did not stop making shells for the allies, they would be put in prison and, in some cases, be executed as traitors if ever they dared return to their country!<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, after the announcement appeared in Hungarian newspapers in the USA, the number of Hungarians applying for American citizenship grew considerably.<sup>24</sup> Hungarian immigrants also felt the need to help with the old country’s war effort and so in several ways. Their associations in the USA organized charity events and bazaars to raise money for medical supplies, which were sent to Hungarian soldiers via the Red Cross. They purchased Hungarian war bonds. They even prayed in their churches for the victory of the homeland, the soldiers’ lives, and those remaining in the hinterland.<sup>25</sup> These acts of patriotism towards the Old World by Hungarian Americans most certainly raised some eyebrows among their native-born acquaintances.

<sup>21</sup> Puskás, *Ties*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Neiberg, *The Path to War*, 235.

<sup>23</sup> Dean Halliday, “Ammunition Makers Are Glad Dumba Must Leave,” *The Day Book*, (IL) September 14, 1915. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Miklós Szántó, *Magyarok Amerikában [Hungarians in America]* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 63.

<sup>25</sup> Puskás, *Ties*, 179.



**Figure 3: Ambassador Dumba<sup>26</sup>**

One of the major scandals concerning Hungarians during the course of the war was the infamous Dumba Affair. Konstantin Theodore Dumba (1856–1947) was the last Austro-Hungarian diplomat accredited to serve as Ambassador to the United States. He was in office from March 4, 1913 to November 4, 1915. Dumba, in a letter he had sent to his government, admitted to being part of a scheme that attempted to use strikes and sabotage by immigrant workers to keep American companies from fulfilling their contracts with Allied states.<sup>27</sup> In the documents found by the British Royal Navy, ambassador Dumba had proposed a plan to “disorganize the manufacture of munitions of war” in the United States. As a part of this scheme, Dumba also suggested funding a number of foreign-language newspapers published in America to influence Hungarian laborers. The Wilson administration was naturally outraged by this scheme and deemed it a particularly dangerous attempt to take advantage of the heterogeneous population of the USA.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Dumba was soon recalled from service.

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<sup>26</sup> The source of the image: William Seale, *The Imperial Season: America's Capital in the Time of the First Ambassadors, 1893–1918* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2013), 199.

<sup>27</sup> Puskás, *Ties*, 180.

<sup>28</sup> Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes. The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.

Prior to this incident, Dumba had been fairly popular among both the Hungarian community in America and the political elite back in Hungary. Several months before his dismissal, the Szeged-based daily newspaper *Délmagyarország* [Southern Hungary] praised Dumba for his excellent work as Ambassador, and quoted him on the importance of the neutrality of the United States.<sup>29</sup> Another Hungarian newspaper, *Esztergom és Vidéke* [Esztergom and Its Surroundings] also held Dumba in high esteem, praising a foreword he authored for a Hungarian-American propaganda pamphlet written by Ernő Ludwig, Hungarian Consul for the State of Ohio.<sup>30</sup> On October 26, 1915, with reference to the German newspaper *Vossische Zeitung*, *Délmagyarország* wrote that King Franz Joseph awarded a noble title to Dumba.<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that this news article was published less than two weeks before he was disgraced and took his leave from office. Ironically, Dumba contradicted these flattering articles with his own behavior as Ambassador: he talked about the importance of American neutrality, and yet was the one who attempted to organize a dangerous sabotage that could possibly have been used as a *casus belli* against Austria-Hungary.

This infamous affair shed an ill light on Hungarian Americans, who, according to newspapers of the time, sought to dissociate themselves from Dumba. Other Austro-Hungarian peoples jumped at the opportunity to take advantage of the situation and use Dumba's case to express their loyalty to America. The Slovaks for example, did not hesitate to send letters to major newspapers, labelling Austria-Hungary an oppressive state and denouncing the activities of Ambassador Dumba.<sup>32</sup> But Hungarians also expressed relief when the ambassador was recalled, Hungarians and Austrians of South Bethlehem celebrated together in the streets.<sup>33</sup>

After Dumba was recalled, Franz Joseph declined to appoint a new Ambassador to the USA, which made Dumba the last Hungarian diplomat to occupy such a high level in America. Dumba went on to serve as an Austrian diplomat for decades after the war. In his memoirs, published in 1932, he attempted to defend his actions in 1915 by sharing his own side of the story.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "A monarchia amerikai nagykövete a háborúról" [American Ambassador of the Monarchy Weighs in on the War], *Délmagyarország*, February 23, 1915, 7.

<sup>30</sup> László Kőrösy, "Amerikai honfitársainkról [On Our Fellow Countymen in America]," *Esztergom és Vidéke*, August 22, 1915, 1.

<sup>31</sup> "Dumbát kitünteti a király" [Dumba to be Awarded by the King], *Délmagyarország*, October 26, 1915, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Slovaks' Denounce Dumba, *New York Tribune*, (NY) September 16, 1915, 6.; or Slovak Citizens Praise Dismissal of Doctor Dumba, *The Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, (CT) September 20, 1915, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Halliday, *Ammunition Makers*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Constantin Dumba, *Memoirs of a Diplomat* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1932).

Similarly to the Dumba-case, American Secret Service agents managed to seize several documents (mostly correspondence) from German and Austro-Hungarian officials, that proved schemes were afoot that aimed to sabotage American factories and shipyards. One example of this was the capture of Dr. Heinrich Albert, a German commercial attaché, who worked for the Hamburg-Amerika line office in lower Manhattan. According to embellished versions of the story, federal agents arrested Albert after an exciting chase through the New York subway. In his briefcase, the agents found plenty of incriminating documents, outlining several German and Austro-Hungarian plots to undermine American neutrality. These plots included, apart from the “usual” proposals to buy American newspapers and publish propaganda, bribe politicians and instigate strikes, plans to commit acts of industrial sabotage. The documents served as evidence that Berlin and Vienna were organizing bomb attacks against American factories in Bethlehem, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, New Jersey, and several other cities where there were large populations of Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians.<sup>35</sup> Obviously, the documents angered the Americans but this anger was aimed mostly at Germany, and the role played by Austria-Hungary was dwarfed by her great ally. Moreover, Germany continued to occupy center stage when, in another set of seized documents, German commercial attaché Franz von Papen called Americans “idiotic Yankees”, who should “shut their mouths and better still be full of admiration” for German power.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, journalists hounded Papen from Yellowstone National Park to San Francisco, on a journey which ultimately transpired to be a trip to a meeting where further plans of sabotage would have been discussed.

Based on the Hungarians’ economic and spiritual support of their homeland, and incidents like the Dumba and the Albert Affairs, suspicion of where their loyalties lay increased gradually. These acts were not in keeping with President Wilson’ efforts to encourage “hyphenated” Americans<sup>37</sup> to embrace their new, American identity and leave behind their old one.<sup>38</sup> These “hyphenated” Americans came by the millions from Southern and Eastern Europe in the three decades prior to the start of the Great War, and typically settled in enclaves where they spoke their own language, ate their national cuisine foods, read their ethnic newspapers, and found support in their community’s social organizations. Although, they did retain many of their native traditions, they also adopted key

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<sup>35</sup> Neiberg, *The Path to War*, 78–79.

<sup>36</sup> Neiberg, *The Path to War*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Immigrants with multiple identities such as Italian-Americans, or Hungarian-Americans.

<sup>38</sup> See Hans P. Vought, *The Bully Pulpit and the Melting Pot. American Presidents and the Immigrant, 1897–1933* (New York: Mercer, 2004), 94–120.

elements of American culture.<sup>39</sup> Some of the immigrant national groups were expressly opposed to American aggression, and were adamant in their support of neutrality. For example, the National German-American Alliance, the Irish Ancient Order of Hibernians, and other ethnic organizations along with editors of ethnic newspapers joined together to convince the U.S. government to maintain neutrality. Of course, German and Irish American motives were different: the former did not want the USA to fight against their homeland, and naturally, the latter did not want the USA to actively help Britain, their longtime oppressor.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, several other nationals wished to convince the U.S. government to enter the war as soon as possible, most of whom were originally from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The fear of the enemy within was incessant during the war years reaching its peak in 1917. Based chiefly on the very real provocation activity conducted by German saboteurs, Wilson was actively fearmongering against immigrants. In a speech given before Congress, he said the following.

There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America, who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life... Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, these fears of an enemy inside were present throughout American society. Consequently, when the USA entered the war on April 6, 1917, the federal government took stern measures to deal with the situation of immigrants from enemy countries. This resulted in such measures as the Espionage and Sedition Acts, the Enemy Alien Proclamation, or the Enemy Alien Act. These sought to introduce certain restrictions against Germans, and later against citizens of their allies. In May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed, which created the Selective Service System. According to this, all non-citizen males were required to register, but not all were required to serve, and those deemed “enemy aliens” were forbidden to serve.<sup>42</sup> By November, 1917, the USA declared war with Austria-Hungary, too, so all nationals of the Empire (Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Hungarians) became “technical enemy aliens”, too. Later, after persistent protests from

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Gentile Ford, *The Great War and America. Civil-Military Relations during World War I* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 54.

<sup>40</sup> Ford, *Civil-Military Relations*, 2008. 54.

<sup>41</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here. The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You. World War I and the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.), 31.

Czech and Slovak groups,<sup>43</sup> this approach was changed to the degree that more immigrants were conscripted than their proportional representation in the population.<sup>44</sup>

As for the majority of Hungarian immigrants living and working in America – at least, those of an apolitical persuasion – they tried to retain a level of neutrality. Of course, many from minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire engaged in attempts to persuade Americans how their independence movements were in line with the war aims of the United States. In a way, it was a means for them to show that their enemy alien status was only of a technical type. The Magyars on the other hand, did not share the same enthusiasm for opposing Austria-Hungary, or if they did, they did not express it. Most Hungarian immigrants remained silent regarding the war. This situation resulted in the very different treatment meted out Austro-Hungarians than that received by the Germans after the declaration of war with their country of origin. One example for this variance was Wilson's decision to refrain from applying to the subjects of the Dual Monarchy any of the enemy alien regulations levelled against German aliens.<sup>45</sup> This made it possible for Hungarian-born individuals to register for the draft and volunteer to fight in the American military in 1917 and 1918. The federal government was ready to use the military training to better facilitate Americanization. Initially, the Army created "development battalions" in which foreign nationals received instruction in the English language, American history, and government.<sup>46</sup> Later, after witnessing the effectiveness of the Army's Americanization methods, the government in 1918 simplified the naturalization process for men in military service. In this way, the war had a positive influence on American society, by galvanizing assimilation and facilitating the emergence of the new, modern American citizen.

This was something that made volunteering for military service highly desirable for many foreign-born individuals, including Hungarians. In fact, only a small proportion, approximately 22 per cent of Hungarians, requested exclusion from the draft upon registration, and most did so for health reasons, or to support their families. A very small number exempted themselves on ideological/moral grounds citing a "refusal to fight abroad",

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<sup>43</sup> See Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-born Soldiers in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001) 30–44.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Karsten, *Encyclopedia of War & American Society* (Pittsburgh: SAGE Publications, 2006), 946.

<sup>45</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land. Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1988), 217.

<sup>46</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 158.



“don’t want to serve”, “I am against war”, or “exempt fight against brother”.<sup>47</sup> But the vast majority of Hungarians were open to registering and possibly serving in the United States Armed Forces in the war. Ultimately, some 3000 Hungarians served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the First World War.<sup>48</sup>

## V. Closing Remarks

In conclusion it should be noted that although there were incidents involving Hungarians or Austria-Hungary, the available evidence shows that the American government and American society were focused on their grievances towards Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. Acts such as the attack on Belgium without a proper declaration of war, the mass murder of Armenians, or the provocation of Mexico to attack the USA caused much more outrage than the Austrian attack of Serbia for example, which was the catalyst war in the first place.

Incidents like the Dumba Affair, and several attempts at industrial sabotage, were apparently dwarfed by the number of offences committed by Germany and thus proved to be insufficient to provoke the anger of American society. The federal government and major leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt were concerned with the insidious acts of the German and Ottoman Empires, and this antagonizing narrative could be found in all forms of printed press: newspapers, magazines, propaganda posters, etc. However, specifically anti-Austrian and anti-Hungarian propaganda was insignificant compared to other Central Powers, which is intriguing considering that the war was in effect started by Austria-Hungary. Although Hungarian-born individuals could experience hostility from American society, it was isolated and did not compare to what their German-born counterparts had to endure, especially after April, 1917.<sup>49</sup>

The United States entered the war in 1917 acting as a savior, a strong protector of the weak against the archetypal bully. Americans regarded themselves innocent in that they did not have anything to do with the outbreak of the war, thus regarding themselves morally superior to all the other aggressor countries on both sides. The nefarious bullies were Germany and the Ottoman Empire, but the third Central Power, which despite

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<sup>47</sup> From the author’s original research based on a representative sample of some 1200 Hungarian registrants who filled out Draft Registration Cards in 1917–1918. The database is based on the following record group: US National Archives M-1509 World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards.

<sup>48</sup> István Kornél Vida, “Hungarian Americans” in *Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the U.S. Military. An Encyclopedia*. Vol I, ed. Alexander M. Bielakowski (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 311.

<sup>49</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 67–68.



launching the entire enterprise was not widely regarded as one. Consequently, Hungarian immigrants in America were not considered villainous unlike their German counterparts.

This essay has examined this apparent paradox by outlining the background to this historiographical problem. It is acknowledged that this has been merely scratching the surface of the issues regarding the enemy alien question. Researching the state of all the different minorities living in the United States in the years of the war could, and would deserve to, fill volumes. There have been interesting studies about minorities in Great Britain, Germany, France, and the Ottoman Empire published recently,<sup>50</sup> but unfortunately, Hungarian-Americans were omitted from this research. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is hoped that this paper will be the springboard for further research focused on the way Hungarians lived and experienced the Great War as enemy aliens in the USA.

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<sup>50</sup> Hannah Ewence and Tim Grady (eds), *Minorities and the First World War. From War to Peace* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

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