

# Off Campus: German Propaganda Professors in America, 1914–1917

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“In this war of ideas,” German professor of philosophy Eugen Kühnemann wrote in 1915, “America, as the greatest of the neutral western nations, is the real battleground.”<sup>1</sup> On this “battleground” numerous professors took a stand, Kühnemann being most visible among them. Academics mobilized and were mobilized in Britain as well as in France, Germany, the Habsburg Empire, Russia and, after 1917, also in the United States. However, the particular situation in America during the neutrality years, this essay will argue, allowed for the emergence of a specific type of politically engaged academic that—certainly as mediated by the press—was particular to the German side: the propaganda professor.

## CRUMBLING TIES

Ever since the turn of the twentieth century the German government had stepped up its efforts to generate appreciation among the American educated class. Its attempts at cultural diplomacy on campus included

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an elaborate gift of plaster casts from the Kaiser directly to Harvard University as the basis for a Germanic museum in 1902/3. It had also brought about the establishment of professorial exchange programs and guest professorships at Harvard University in 1905, at Columbia University in 1906 and at the universities of Chicago and Wisconsin soon after that, to name just the most prominent ones. American universities had welcomed these offerings as another kind of asset in the ever-fiercer domestic competition for students, funds and public favour that was gaining momentum among US institutions of higher education.

Germany was trying to artificially foster and maintain a favourable transatlantic network that had formed naturally during the nineteenth century when many American scholars sought out German universities for advanced studies they could not yet obtain at home.<sup>2</sup> Due to their indelible belief in their own superiority in the academic sphere, German scholars and diplomatic representatives were blind and deaf to the American criticism and self-assertion that began long before the war. Jörg Nagler has shown that an outspoken American criticism of Germany's claim to cultural superiority can be detected in the public discourse long before the rhetoric of war equated *Kultur* with militarism, autocracy and atrocities.<sup>3</sup> In 1904, when Germany staged a bombastic display of its scholarly prowess at the St. Louis World's Fair, an American commentator almost saw it as the swansong of former glory: "[T]his showing was a magnificent attempt on the part of Germany to demonstrate that [...] her universities are still the foremost in the world," he begins, yet he continues: "In view of the marvellous advance of American universities [...], this exhibit assumed a new and interesting aspect, even if it may not be assumed to become historic."<sup>4</sup> The dean of philosophy at Berlin University, economist Adolf Wagner, intended a joke in 1908 when he quipped that, in the future of the republic of letters, it may no longer be "*Germania docet*" but, heaven forbid, "*America docet*." Only his hurried addendum—"let us do everything we can to prevent this"—may suggest a secret awareness of change never to be admitted openly.<sup>5</sup>

The coming of the First World War should have made it abundantly clear that the motives on each side of the Atlantic had been different. While the Germans thought they could now harvest the political seeds they had sown, American universities were at pains to salvage their image and to distance themselves from their German ties, as that was what the new political climate and public opinion demanded. Moreover, as US

institutions had professionalized and transformed, they were keen to take their place in the academic world. But this discrepancy still seemed to have escaped many German scholars, as well as their political superiors in the Ministry of Culture, who tried to actuate old ties for propaganda purposes. In August, Friedrich Schmidt-Ott of the German Ministry of Culture encouraged the former exchange professors to write to their friends and colleagues across the Atlantic to explain the German situation in the conflict and to gain their sympathy.<sup>6</sup> How many German academics followed this request privately is hard to determine. Ranging from the occasional sentence in otherwise mostly scholarly or personal correspondence, to page-long explications preoccupied with current affairs, naturally the war crept into the exchange of letters within the international learned community. Some professors, however, made their efforts poignantly public.

This chapter will examine German professors who took up the cross for the German cause in the United States during the neutrality period between 1914 and 1917. The focus will be on those scholars who started out from Germany. Either they tried to influence American public opinion from afar by publishing in American newspapers, or they embarked on a transatlantic journey with the express purpose to travel the country and deliver speeches in favour of the German cause. This set-up of the analysis hence leaves out the considerable number of German-born professors employed at American universities. Some of them had already taken on American citizenship – like, for example, Franz Boas and Kuno Francke, both in 1891—or they did so during the war. Others may have made a point of remaining German, like Hugo Münsterberg. However, even if convinced of the righteousness of the German position and—like Münsterberg—not shy about saying so, these German professors faced a very different challenge. Their existence after all, depended on their academic and social standing in the United States.<sup>7</sup> They could not and would not dedicate their lives exclusively to propaganda work as, for example, Eugen Kühnemann did from his arrival in New York in September 1914 onwards.

Nevertheless, even for those who suspended their teaching and research for the duration of the war, or relegated it to minor importance, the reference to the authority they deduced from their membership in the academic community was key to their performance as propaganda professors. “Perhaps nothing did more to impress the public mind,” Lord Ponsonby famously wrote, “than the assistance given

in propaganda by intellectuals and literary notables.”<sup>8</sup> An academic kinship not only implied a vague notion of impartiality and expertise, but also afforded a social position of considerable respect in the public discourse—at least in the German experience. An American newspaper article explained at the beginning of the war: “Nowhere else in the world is scholarship so venerated [as in Germany]; nowhere else is there such ready submission to the influence of teachers.”<sup>9</sup>

### FALLEN IDOLS

Evoking their social position, German scholars mobilized quickly after the conflict erupted in the summer of 1914.<sup>10</sup> Even before the famous “Appeal to the Civilized World” was issued in October 1914, the two Jena professors Rudolf Eucken and Ernst Haeckel began publishing public addresses in American newspapers. “These thinkers have readers and admirers all over the world,” the *Chicago Tribune* reminded its readers, “their views are of particular interest.”<sup>11</sup> Eucken had just returned home to Germany after spending a semester at Harvard University as an exchange professor. Haeckel, too, was well known and well connected in US academic circles, especially among eugenicists. Both of them would soon after also sign the Appeal. Their effort in America started off with a “Declaration” in the *New York Times* on 10 September 1914.<sup>12</sup> The text was also picked up later by George Sylvester Viereck’s *Fatherland*, one of the few ardently pro-German serial publications in English.<sup>13</sup> Here the two German philosophers took a very explicit stand against Britain. The article framed accusations of “brutal national egotism” and “hypocritical Pharisaism” with a lament for the forced breakdown of fruitful scientific cooperation for which Britain was clearly to blame: “[Thus is] destroyed the collaboration of the two nations which was so full of promise for the intellectual uplift of humanity. But the other party has willed it so.”<sup>14</sup>

Two days later the *New York Times* published yet another letter from the same two Jena authors addressed “To the Universities of America.”<sup>15</sup> While the Declaration, save for its appeal to the scholarly community, was more generic in its dismissal of Britain, this new text was explicitly written for an American academic audience. Haeckel and Eucken pointed out that they both felt “especially justified” in addressing their American colleagues, “as so many scientific and personal relations connect us both with the universities of America.” The entire opening paragraph is dedicated to establishing and reiterating “the lasting intercourse of scholarly

research” among German and American scholars. The two authors reminded readers of the “[n]umerous American scholars who received their scientific training at our universities,” as well as of the exchange programmes. They did not fail to add a personal note: “the idea of our American friends’ thoughts and sympathies being with us gives us a strong feeling of comfort in this gigantic struggle.” And after having elaborated over four more paragraphs on the crimes of their enemies, they concluded: “[US] universities know what German culture means to the world, so we trust they will stand with Germany.”<sup>16</sup>

It was still early days and many Americans were not yet prepared to accept the “fall of the German mandarins.”<sup>17</sup> Reactions in letters to the editor showed surprise, disbelief and attempts at exculpating excuses for the two German scholars whose work they appreciated and whose authority seemed well established. “I cannot help wishing that one day we may get the inside history of the last pronouncement from those beloved scholars,” wrote “R.W.” to the *New York Times*. The writer seemed convinced that the men could only have acted under duress, inquiring about “how long they resisted pressure” and “whether the delegation that visited them was composed wholly of scholars or perhaps a majority of militarists.”<sup>18</sup> An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* asked similar questions and added: “One wonders how much of the other side the censors allowed the philosophers to see and ponder.”<sup>19</sup> Frank Jewett Mather, who had studied in Berlin and was now professor of modern languages at Princeton University, also saw his German colleagues “under the spell of militarism.”<sup>20</sup> While he was less willing to find excuses, he was still devastated: “To see these two venerated thinkers, international figures both, indulging a violent unconsidered and malevolent nationalism is a profoundly depressing spectacle,” he wrote to the *New York Times*, and dolefully asked, “Where professors Eucken and Haeckel have fallen, who shall stand?”<sup>21</sup>

What most upset Jewett was the fact that these men were employing a language and a line of argument that did not adhere to academic standards: “[W]riting without composure, judging without consideration of the data, applying [sic] with the cheap phrases borrowed from chauvinistic journalism.”<sup>22</sup> These reactions, intensified once the Appeal was published, show how the American public, both in academia and beyond, judged the German professors based on the image formed in the preceding decade. In the American interpretation, Germany’s scholarly achievements were founded on two principles in particular: going back

to an almost mythical veneration of Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideals, empirical research was to guide all inquiry free from interference of all kinds. Academic pursuits, therefore, had to be politically—and indeed, socially—disinterested and removed from the pull of current affairs.<sup>23</sup> In fact, already before the war some American academics of a younger generation had started to question the unconditional value of this “German” version of science. Progressivism and populist tendencies in the United States were demanding to hold higher education accountable for how it contributed to society and thus stressed the notion of service over an endorsement of mere research for the sake of research, as they dismissively labelled what they saw as the German approach.<sup>24</sup> However, in a way, that very ivory-tower identity of the German mandarins made their (self-) mobilization somewhat more morally despicable than that of their Anglo-American colleagues, who ultimately could argue that they were just doing their duty to society as citizens. While, administratively, German professors were state employees, the keystone of their professional identity, again evoking Humboldt, was independence and political impartiality. For them, therefore, it was pivotal not to be seen as being mobilized by the authorities or as serving the government, but to explicitly act upon their own impulse and for a national cause that was abstract and idealist rather than political and practical.

A heated exchange on the pages of the *New York Evening Post* in May 1915 illustrates the diverging opinions on German academic tradition. A three-column letter extolled the achievements of German science, ending with the vehement plea: “[the author] considers German aggression and conduct in general in the war as hopelessly brutal, without warrant and without a redeeming feature. He is not, however, willing to see the beautiful plains of German endeavour and accomplishment overridden, lava-like by the eruptions of the present.” Another reader, thoroughly appalled by “our obsession over German science,” passionately disagreed: “[This] is a typical example of the tendency prevalent in America to belittle our own science.” True genius, he elaborated, lay with America, as opposed to Germany, where “scientific literature is made up of details, often extremely trivial.”<sup>25</sup> Militarism had turned the once-admired empiricism into soulless drudgery. The older generation of American scholars, many of whom had spent time during their student days in Berlin, Heidelberg, Leipzig or Göttingen, may have been hesitant to readily abandon their admiration for German academia. Their younger colleagues, however, who were striving for acceptance, and a public that

was sceptical of academic elitism anyway, all but jumped at the opportunity to step out of the German shadow. Using their clout as German professors in the United States thus arguably counteracted the propaganda effort of Eucken, Haeckel and many others like them who attempted to turn their transatlantic academic networks into a public platform for the German cause.

### AIMING FOR THE HEARTS AND MINDS

The writing of articles was not enough for the philosopher Eugen Kühnemann. “Among German scholars I have always been the one to advocate the importance of energetic speech in public life [...] all my life I had practiced the spoken word as something sacred,” he reminded the readers of his memoirs.<sup>26</sup> Incidentally, for many of the influential German academics of the time, including Eucken and Haeckel, their signing of the Appeal is often mentioned today only as an afterthought to their academic legacy. Kühnemann, on the other hand, who specialized in Kant, Schiller and Nietzsche, is usually remembered, if at all, for his agitation during the war and not for his scholarly accomplishments. This may be attributed to the fact that, even during his lifetime, his reputation stemmed more from his oratorical skills and his ability to rouse his listeners than from any lasting academic achievement. The German papers, for example, knew him as a “well-known orator” who habitually delighted audiences with his “artful speeches.”<sup>27</sup> During a later journey to the United States, the *California Staatszeitung* described his manner of speaking most vividly: “His captivating eloquence is well known. He doesn’t deliver his speeches like a daily routine. His organ sweeps along [the audience] like organ-music and the power of fanfare.”<sup>28</sup> So much praise came his way for his presentations that Kühnemann almost grew irritated. “Ever since the beginning of my career,” he noted, slightly hurt, in 1934, when a colleague had yet again congratulated him on his rhetorical skills, “my opponents have tried to find the reason for my influence in some kind of rhetorical tricks. However, I may be a speaker but I am no rhetorician.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, these skills rendered him ideally suited to undertake propaganda work. Moreover, he was fluent in English, which was by no means a given at the time, and all the more relevant as the common language was considered one of Britain’s main advantages in the struggle for US public opinion.

During his three terms as exchange professor (twice at Harvard University and again in 1912 at the University of Wisconsin), Kühnemann had developed a good understanding of American life. Looking back in his memoirs, he remembered his first visit to the United States and mused: "Why should I deny that from this first contact I brought back a deep love for America, why should I hide that this love grew constantly until the World War put it to the ultimate test."<sup>30</sup> He had from the beginning seen his work abroad as part of a larger mission for German spiritual and ethnic strengthening and he directed considerable effort towards the German-Americans. Firmly rooted in German idealism, for him the "German spirit" was key to a glorious future for the fatherland. Just months before war broke out in 1914 his collection of essays *Vom Weltreich des deutschen Geistes* clearly outlined his ideas.<sup>31</sup> Keenly aware of the ideological dimension of the war, Kühnemann explained in 1915: "We now know that war today consists of three parts of equal importance and that it has to be won on three battlefields: arms, economy [...]—and public opinion."<sup>32</sup> Consequently, he considered his own role as much a part of warfare as that of the fighting soldier on the front line and he was as enthusiastic about volunteering as were the young men who marched the streets of Berlin (and Paris) in the summer of 1914. "The call of the hour appeared clear," he remembered. "We were all part of the Fatherland's great struggle."<sup>33</sup>

In 1915, as part of his propaganda work, Kühnemann authored a pamphlet called *Germany, America and the War*. It was published in English in the pro-German series *Issues and Events*, edited in New York City. A German version followed soon after, published in Chicago. Priced at only ten cents, both made his ideas available for his audience to re-read after he had impressed them with one of his speeches.<sup>34</sup> We can thus distil some of his ideas from these sources. Interestingly, even if the reports quoted above clearly indicate that his success was largely based on delivery, it is worth scrutinizing the construction of his arguments as well. Here his previous experience and his knowledge of American life and history served him well.

Kühnemann's main concern was to justify Germany's actions and to settle the question of who carried the blame for the outbreak of war. He elaborately laid the blame at the feet of Britain and Russia. The issue of German atrocities, especially in Belgium, that dominated British propaganda in America, received only very brief attention. Expressing his astonishment at the "gullibility of the world," he passes over the topic

almost as something no educated person would take seriously.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the authors of most of the other, rather generic German pamphlets, he did not simply dwell on notions of honour and culture. While both, of course, did feature prominently, he also cunningly aimed to gain American understanding by comparing and relating the events in Europe to US history and politics. “Would America endure from Mexico what Austria too long suffered Serbia to do?” he asked, well aware of the critical situation on the Rio Grande in 1914. And he went even further and characterized “Mexico, somewhat like Serbia, [as] a little bandit nation [...] trying to break up the Union.” In order to make a point about Germany’s desperate encirclement, he again painted a creative picture that played on Americans’ sensitivities: “[I]magine the time when Canada may be a nation of 200 million with a national will of her own, South America a single great Latin republic with a national will of her own; Japan, mistress of the Pacific with a mighty fleet [...] Would not every American then be a soldier [...]?”<sup>36</sup>

He also elaborately tried to counter the strong charges of militarism that had become a dominant trope in the American disparagement of Germany. In Kühnemann’s interpretation, the German army became a great democratizing force, where “the nobleman serves shoulder to shoulder with the peasant.” Incidentally, the idea that military service could propel democratic development was not new in America. None other than Theodore Roosevelt had extensively dwelled on the idea during the Spanish–American War in 1898.<sup>37</sup> Later it also became a key argument in the American war effort after 1917, when general conscription was introduced for the first time on a large scale.

The trope of “the first modern war,” so often employed by contemporaries and historians alike in regard to the First World War, also includes psychological warfare. Analysing the mobilization of academics for a war of ideas, at a time when the very concept of propaganda was only just taking shape, poses the question of how these scholars themselves reflected upon the war work they were doing.<sup>38</sup> After all, “intent” and “deliberation” are key premises in the modern definition of propaganda.<sup>39</sup> Some signatories of the Appeal, for example, in justifying their actions, emphasized the public responsibility that came with their social position. Kühnemann, however, on an abstract level, seems to have been aware of the ambivalent nature of engaging in the kind of work he was doing, but he believed, since this was war, the end justified the means. “The efforts we undertook during the war in America we called

educational work and our opponents called it German propaganda,” he mused with hindsight. For him, however, he concludes that it was neither, but rather a “free service rendered from love.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, in line with the case he was building against the Allies, he took the moral high ground and pointed the finger at Britain: “The Germans [...] went into war with the conviction that wars are decided by men and weapons on the battlefield. The English [...] have made a real discovery, to wit: that it is quite effective to carry on a war in the souls of men and the public opinion of the world.”<sup>41</sup> The British were waging a war away from the battlefields in the academic world, but also in the press. Like in the war at large, Germany, he argued, was only defending herself.

Among his German and German-American friends Kühnemann readily admitted—even boasted—about his own role in the conflict over public opinion. With no little pride he specified at any given occasion during his later life that he had delivered 296 speeches in 137 different American cities.<sup>42</sup> He considered America’s entry into the war on the side of the Allies almost a personal failure.<sup>43</sup> In an open letter to an American friend—published in Germany in 1917—the returned and disillusioned propaganda professor presented his seething analysis of the unprofessionalism of German intelligence work and propaganda. He criticizes the naïvety, the dilettantism and the lack of funds and organization. Germany had done too little too late in order to win the war of ideas in America. It should have paid more attention to its “largest culture-colony [*Kulturkolonie*],” he later concluded.<sup>44</sup> He complained that the condescending didactic attitude many advocates of the German cause had adopted brought more harm than good. He seemingly failed to see his own efforts as part of this heavy-handed conduct. Many of his contemporaries, though, thought him decidedly overzealous. Moritz Julius Bonn, who spent the neutrality years in America as an exchange professor, remembered his colleague as “a travelling salesman for German culture [who] oozed culture and [...] boomed culture.”<sup>45</sup> Kühnemann can clearly be considered a modern propagandist. He carefully framed his message to be most effective for a specific foreign audience, and he consciously defined his public appearances, his speeches and his publications not only as a patriotic duty or as his contribution to the general war effort, but as part of actually fighting the war itself. This also distinguished him from his academic peers mobilizing at home.

### AIMING FOR THE HEADLINES

Publishing newspaper articles and delivering public addresses may be considered the more traditional way of seeking an audience to influence. Kuno Meyer, another German professor, was to take a yet more modern approach as he carefully placed aside-comments or attempted to invoke the unwieldy power of the press to intimidate his opponent. These actions generated what twentieth-century sociology and media studies have diagnosed to be the power derived from dominating the news circle.<sup>46</sup>

Kuno Meyer boarded the Dutch steamer *Rotterdam* in November 1914 on a mission not unlike Kühnemann's. As a professor of English, he also knew how to express himself capably in the foreign language, having lived in England for more than 30 years. Moreover, he specialized in Celtic Studies, and his scholarly commitment to the study of Irish culture and the translation and analysis of the Irish language had earned him an academic reputation among his colleagues on the British Isles, as well as the appreciation of Irish nationalists like Roger Casement.<sup>47</sup>

Based on this particular skill set and his expertise, Meyer contrived a plan to travel across the Atlantic and particularly target the Irish-Americans, who, in view of their antagonism to England, Germany hoped to draw onto her side. The idea had come to him while taking a cure at Bad Nenndorf just west of Hannover.<sup>48</sup> In conversations with friends and colleagues of the ultra-nationalist and annexationist Pan-German League, the plan took shape. The two historians Wilhelm Wiegand and Theodor Schiemann especially, who repeatedly visited Meyer in the quiet little North German spa during the late summer of 1914, encouraged his transatlantic endeavour.<sup>49</sup>

Before 1914, Kuno Meyer had never been to America. However, his brother, Eduard Meyer, a renowned scholar of ancient history, had spent a semester at Harvard in 1909 and was well connected in the overlapping circles of the social and academic elites along the US East Coast. A personal friend of Columbia University President Nicholas Butler and Harvard President Lawrence Lowell, whose inauguration he had attended, Eduard could provide his brother Kuno with the necessary conspicuous connections to grant him access to American society.<sup>50</sup> The provocative Celticist was well prepared to make the most of it. Upon his arrival in New York, Kuno wrote to Richard Irvine Best, an old friend from his student days, now an influential scholar in Dublin: "Unless they

keep it out of the papers you will soon hear from me.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, in the weeks that followed, Kuno Meyer repeatedly generated publicity through incidents that the press could not ignore.

A short notice in the *Boston Evening Post* on 18 December 1914 made a brief mention of Meyer that was to develop into a minor scandal. Two-thirds of the article dealt with a rally of the New York Irish Volunteers Committee the night before. A “vitriolic speech” by Irish labour leader James Larkin had almost descended into turmoil. Apparently a fist fight had only been avoided thanks to the two-man band who “direct[ed] the excited emotions of the audience into patriotic manifestations by Irish songs.”<sup>52</sup> The article then, in its final paragraph, rather suddenly turned to Meyer, insinuating his presence at the event but never explicitly placing him there. The paper reported the scholar’s strong reaction after Harvard University supposedly cancelled a lecture engagement on account of a speech he had given at another Irish rally a few weeks earlier in Brooklyn. “I am glad it happened so,” Meyer is quoted as saying, “because I could never breathe an atmosphere so close and dense as that which seems to prevail at Harvard.”<sup>53</sup>

This provocation did not fail to engender a reaction from the university. Having just weathered a storm of indignation by alumni for refusing to dismiss two of his German members of staff when war broke out, President Lawrence Lowell would not stand accused of partiality and censorship. The next day, the *Boston Globe* placed the affair on the front page, even sparing space for a photograph of Kuno and the verbatim reprint of the “laconic statement from Harvard authorities.”<sup>54</sup> The press release had clarified that, while informal talks had been considered an invitation, Kuno Meyer had never officially been asked to come to Harvard.<sup>55</sup> The statement also confirmed that this final decision was taken because of the professor’s “active propaganda among the Irish” that would have compromised the “neutral attitude assumed by the University.”<sup>56</sup>

A week later, when asked about the incident by the *Gaelic American*, Meyer aimed to underscore a narrative that cast President Lowell as the arbitrary censor of academic freedom. He had never attempted to conceal his intentions in coming to America, Meyer insisted, he had even sent a copy of one of his speeches to a colleague at Harvard. This innocent openness, he implied, had caused the regrettable turn of events.<sup>57</sup>

Eduard Meyer—Kuno’s brother back in Berlin—was using the episode for his own propaganda at home. In a passionate article in the

German *Vossische Zeitung*, he voiced a loathing of Harvard and Lowell that, arguably, could only have been spurred by a feeling of personal insult by the former friend. He decried the entire professorial exchange and concluded that, even if in future new networks may grow, “let us hope that no German scholar will ever sink so low as to accept an invitation from that university.”<sup>58</sup>

As long as the Irish-American papers and the Boston press had primarily reported on the affair, it had remained almost local—even if the wide circulation of the *Boston Globe* reached beyond the city and its environs. However, via Berlin and the *Vossische Zeitung*, by early 1915 the *New York Times* and even the London papers had picked up the story.<sup>59</sup> The run-in with Harvard University had drawn international attention to the Meyer brothers’ propaganda work. Ramifications were quick to follow. Liverpool University, where Kuno Meyer had taught for almost 30 years, passed a resolution condemning him as “an agent of sedition,” and he lost the Freedom of the City from both Cork and Dublin.<sup>60</sup> By April 1915 it appeared that Kuno Meyer’s attempt to stir up negative publicity against Lowell and his institution had backfired—no matter how calculated it had actually been.

But the Meyer–Harvard controversy was not over. An anti-German poem had won first prize in an undergraduate competition of the student paper *Harvard Advocate* and had consequently been published in the *New York Times*.<sup>61</sup> Livid, Meyer penned a letter to President Lowell—sending it simultaneously, as he pointed out in a postscript, to all the major American newspapers: “At a time when it behoves all academic institutions [...] to exert all their influence for promoting amenity in international relations, for safeguarding the common interest of science, scholarship and learning [...] the University of Harvard has wantonly and wickedly gone out of its way to carry strife into the hallowed peace of the academic world.”<sup>62</sup>

Again, Lowell would not let such strong words stand unchallenged, and he replied—just as publicly—with a calm yet firm letter: “As you are aware, the freedom of speech of neither the professors nor the students in an American University is limited [...] for we believe it to be the only [policy] which accords with the principle of academic freedom. I hope the time will come when you and your colleagues in Germany will recognize that this course is the only right one; and that it is essential to the course of universal scholarship.”<sup>63</sup>

Papers far and near picked up the story and some publications even editorialized it.<sup>64</sup> University presidents congratulated Lowell on his stand and a flood of letters arrived at the Harvard President's office from newspaper readers all over the country, who simply felt the need to weigh in on the issue. Most writers were in favour of Lowell's decision to allow the poem. Amusingly, about two-thirds of this correspondence included alternative versions of the poem in question, or some other kind of lyrical commentary of varying quality and length. Emotions were running high as, when the hullabaloo about the incident continued into early May, it coincided with the sinking of the *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915, which caused a passionate anti-German reflex among the American public.

Space allowing, the newspapers usually printed both letters and, of course, the poem, which thus ironically received a circulation far beyond what a second-year student author could ever have expected—and, in fact, what Kuno Meyer could have wanted, had he really only been concerned about the poem. Again, his publicity act appears to have backfired. However, building on the previous incident, Meyer had also grandiosely announced in his letter that, prompted by the poem, he had resigned his position as exchange professor at Harvard that he was to start that autumn. Years earlier, possibly initiated by his brother—Harvard exchange professor of 1909 Eduard Meyer—Kuno's name had been discussed for the temporary position at Harvard. But in the spring of 1915 no such arrangement had been made. Quite the contrary: any possible remaining inclination to extend an invitation had been halted by the éclat over the Irish rally a few months before. After all, none other than Kuno's brother, Eduard Meyer, had raged against the exchange program in his article in the *Vossische Zeitung*.<sup>65</sup> In short, the decision to discontinue the exchange had become apparent soon after hostilities had erupted.<sup>66</sup> Yet only the *Boston Globe* clarified that "Prof Meyer actually declined something that was never offered to him."<sup>67</sup> All the other papers, including the *New York Times*, reported his claim without question and it smoothly passed into history.<sup>68</sup> Even today it lingers in most biographical sketches.<sup>69</sup> Lacking his personal papers of that time, it is impossible to determine how much of the dynamics of publicity and media logic Meyer could have planned or predicted. Arguably his exchange-professor publicity stunt benefited his personal legacy more than the German cause in the war: professor of Celtic Studies Kuno Meyer, who due to his propaganda work among the Irish had never officially been invited to speak at Harvard University, became famous as the

German professor who sacrificed a prestigious exchange position for his patriotic duty. But even if at home he could gain some personal credit from this coup, he could not win American sympathies for Germany's supposed injury at the hands of an undergraduate poet. The bulk of press coverage rather ridiculed the affair and its engineering agent, the German propaganda professor, who was now losing any remaining credibility. Even the *Chicago Tribune*, which had reported quite favourably on Meyer up to that point, ruefully conceded that "the incident is permitted to embitter the most useful German in the United States [...] we have lost an advocate in the court of German opinion."<sup>70</sup>

Beyond all the spin, Kuno Meyer's public dispute with Harvard University shows how, during the neutrality period, the war of ideas challenged American higher education to define an institutional identity. The Harvard President had pointed towards academic independence to keep out propaganda, yet he had pointed to academic freedom to defend against censorship. It was an attempt to claim a moral prerogative without committing to a political agenda of any one side; the US universities were grappling with their own version of the dilemma of American neutrality.

### UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The German schemes on the American campuses before the First World War, especially the professorial exchange, did indeed influence the German propaganda effort during the neutrality period between 1914 and 1917. The long-term effect, though, was not necessarily what the German government had intended or hoped for. With hindsight, Americans read sinister intentions into the pre-war cultural diplomacy and considered it the kind of manipulation one Michigan alumnus described in 1918: "Many of the exponents and apologists of *Kultur* were craftily 'planted' by Germany in our innocent colleges and universities."<sup>71</sup> German professors, who believed they were using the benefit of their old American connection when they reminded the US public of those pre-war efforts, really only reiterated that conspiratory narrative. French observers had always been careful not to replicate the heavy-handed German approach.<sup>72</sup> Hence, during the war, while other nations like France also sent academics across the sea, it was the German propaganda professor that became a trope in the American public perception—even if, for example, French representatives like Albert Geouffre Lapradelle

had more explicit instructions and reported more directly to their government.<sup>73</sup> Neither Kühnemann nor Meyer had been recruited for their propaganda work, and only with much effort did they secure at least some financial backing through semi-official government sources.<sup>74</sup> In fact, arguably, it was precisely the lack of coordination and the fact that propaganda was undertaken by privately passionate and overzealous individuals that made it appear overbearing and rendered it yet more ineffective. German ambassador Heinrich von Bernstorff reportedly complained to Moritz Julius Bonn about those “professors [...] who were running around the country presenting themselves, with more eloquence than sagacity, [and thereby] tended to increase his difficulties.”<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, a somewhat naïve attempt to manipulate the press could only backfire in a media landscape where the press perceived of itself as the guardian of popular rights and public freedom. Finally, German professors banked on a social standing afforded to them by their academic rank and position that was well established in Germany but nowhere near as powerful in the United States, where the social position of the academic was decidedly less elevated and often even under attack.

While academics mobilized all over the belligerent nations, the particular historical context of German–American relations in the academic world since the turn of the century created a unique breeding ground. Coupled with the particular nature and dynamic of US journalism and public discourse at the time, caught between populist ideals and everyday sensationalism, this environment allowed for the emergence of the propaganda professor as a persona specific to this setting.

## NOTES

1. Eugen Kühnemann, *Germany, America and the War*, vol. 12, Issues and Events (New York: Francis Dorl, 1915), 3.
2. Konrad H. Jarausch, “American Students in Germany, 1815–1914: The Structure of German and U.S. Matriculants at Göttingen University,” in *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917*, ed. Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking and Jürgen Herbst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
3. Jörg Nagler, “From Culture to Kultur,” in *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions. Germany and America since 1776*, ed. David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997).

4. J.W. Buel: *Louisiana and the Fair*, bd. VIII (St. Louis: World's Progress Publishing Cooperation, 1905), 2823.
5. Bernhard vom Brocke, "Internationale Wissenschaftsbeziehungen und die Anfänge einer deutschen auswärtigen Kulturpolitik. Der Professoren Austausch mit Nordamerika," in *Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Wissenschaftspolitik im Industriezeitalter: Das "System Althoff" in historischer Perspektive*, ed. Jürgen Backhaus and Bernhard vom Brocke (Hildesheim: A. Lax, 1991), 185.
6. Schmidt-Ott Papers 541: Amerika Verschiedenes [Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin]. Thank you to Elisabeth Piller, Trondheim, for drawing my attention to this material. See also Friedrich Schmidt-Ott, *Erlebtes und Erstrebtes: 1860–1950* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1952), 113.
7. It is difficult to assess whether Münsterberg's rather uncompromising stance would have changed after the United States entered the war in 1917, for he died in December 1916. Therefore, he was never forced to prove his loyalty with the same urgency that Boas faced in Columbia, for example, once the policy of 100% Americanism had swung into action.
8. Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime. Containing an Assortment of Lies Calculated Throughout the Nation During the Great War* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1929), 25.
9. "How German Scholars Have Wronged the German People," *Philadelphia North American* (Sept. 26, 1914).
10. Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf "An die Kulturwelt!": Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1996).
11. "Haeckel and Eucken on War," *The Chicago Tribune* (Sept. 14, 1914): 6.
12. Ernst Haeckel and Rudolf Eucken: "A German Declaration," *The New York Times* (Sept. 10, 1914): 8. [Address dated: August 18, 1914].
13. "Ernst Haeckel and Rudolf Eucken Rally to the Flag. Declaration," *The Fatherland*, 1: 7 (Sept. 23, 1914): 8. [Address dated: 18 August, 1914].
14. Ibid.
15. "Germany's Culture. Philosophers Eucken and Haeckel Appeal to American Scholars," *The New York Times* (Sept. 25, 1914): 10. [Address dated: August 31, 1914].
16. Ibid.
17. cf. Fritz Ringer's thorough study of the German academic milieu and its seeping politicization. Fritz K. Ringer, *Die Gelehrten: Der Niedergang Der Deutschen Mandarine 1890–1933* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987).

18. R.W. "The Eucken and Haeckel Statement. To the Editors of the New York Times," *The New York Times* (Sept. 27, 1914): 14.
19. "Haeckel and Eucken on War," *The Chicago Tribune* (Sept. 14, 1914): 6.
20. Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "Eucken and Haeckel. Sad to See Them Sink to the Level of Chauvinists," *The New York Times* (Sept. 12, 1914): 8.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Mitchell G. Ash, *Mythos Humboldt* (Wien: Böhlau, 1999); Roy Steven Turner, "Humboldt in North America? Reflections on the Research University and Its Historians," in *Humboldt International. Der Export des deutschen Universitätsmodells im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Rainer Christoph Schwinges (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 2001).
24. Richard Hofstadter, "The Revolution in Higher Education," in *Paths of American Thought*, ed. Jr. Schlesinger, Arthur M. and Morton White (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963); Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
25. Both letters appeared under the title "German Science" and are cited here from a collection of clippings that dates them both to the *New York Evening Post* (1 May, 1915). However, the second letter must be slightly later, as it directly references the first one. Cf. "World War History. Daily Records and Comments as Appeared in American and Foreign Newspapers 1914–1926. Compiled for the New York Historical Society by Otto Sprenge," 400 vols. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
26. Original in German. Eugen Kühnemann: *Den Freunden den Meinen und mir an meinem siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Heilbronn: Eugen Salzer, 1938), 2. Eugen Kühnemann Papers, Marburg University.
27. Clipping [no date] in Kühnemann Papers Box 2, Marburg University.
28. Original in German. "Erfolgreiches Olympiade-Fest," *California Staatszeitung* 14: 11 (May 20, 1932): 1.
29. Original in German. Draft for a letter to "My dear Colleague". Kühnemann Papers, Box 3, Marburg University.
30. Original in German. Kühnemann: *Den Freunden den Meinen und mir*.
31. Eugen Kühnemann, *Vom Weltreich Des Detuschen Geistes: Reden und Aufsätze* (München: C.H. Beck, 1914). The title translates: "Of The World Dominion of the German Spirit".
32. Ibid.
33. Original in German. Eugen Kühnemann: *Deutschland und Amerika: Briefe an einen deutsch-amerikanischen Freund* (München: Beck, 1917), 2
34. cf. advertising material, Kühnemann Papers, Box 2, Marburg University.
35. Kühnemann, *Germany, America and the War*, 28.

36. Ibid., 38.
37. Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible. Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 20.
38. While the term “propaganda” first originated with the Vatican to describe their fight against the Protestant Reformation—it only really gained broad use through the First World War. A theoretical analysis would then begin in the decades that followed. Cf. Philip M. Taylor, *Munition of the Mind. The History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002); Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 2 and 111.
39. See, for example, the definition by Jowett and O'Donnell in *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 7 see also Taylor, *Munition of the Mind*, 7.
40. Original in German “Aufklärungsarbeit,” which could be rendered as “educational work” or “information effort”. Kühnemann: *Deutschland und Amerika*, 19 and 22.
41. Kühnemann, *Germany, America and the War*, 4.
42. cf. e.g. Kühnemann: *Den Freunden den Meinen und mir*, 12; *Deutschland und Amerika*, 13; “Mein Erleben der USA im Weltkriege von 1914–1917. Vortragsentwurf für das militärische Vertragswesen” typewritten manuscript (no date—probably late 1930s), Kühnemann Papers, Marburg University.
43. Kühnemann: *Den Freunden den Meinen und mir*, 13.
44. Kühnemann: “Mein Erleben der USA im Weltkriege.”
45. Original in English—Bonn does not use the German term ‘Kultur’. He may indeed refer to Kühnemann’s more general ideology placing the German spirit and its cultural outpourings above all. Cf. Bonn, Moritz Julius, *Wandering Scholar* (New York: The John Day Company, 1948), 175.
46. Jürgen Habermas for example has explained the political power-relations created by managing and manipulating publicity. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1965), 212; Similarly, Daniel Boorstin has commented on the ever-growing impact of being perceived and publicly mediated through the media. Cf. Daniel J. Boorstin, *Das Image oder was wurde aus dem Amerikanischen Traum?* (Frankfurt: Rohwolt Paperback, 1964).
47. Seán Ó Lúing, *Kuno Meyer 1858–1919. A Biography* (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1991).
48. Cf. E. Meyer to his wife Rosine Meyer (Sept. 13, 1914) Eduard Meyer Papers, Box 2, Prussian State Library, Berlin. [digitized transcript, Humboldt University Berlin <http://www.kohring-digital.de/rosine-eduard-meyer.html>].

49. Andreas Huether, "'In Politik verschieden, in Freundschaft wie immer'. The German Celtic Scholar Kuno Meyer and the First Word War," in *The First Word War as a Clash of Cultures*, ed. Fred Bridgham (Rochester: Camden House, 2006), 232.
50. e.g. arrangements for K. Meyer's introduction into the New York University Club. See K. Meyer to Butler (22 December, 1914) and the reply (24 December, 1914), Butler Correspondence, MS 0177 (#258 Kuno Meyer), Columbia University Archives, New York.
51. K. Meyer to Best (Nov. 1914) cited in Ö'Lüing, *Kuno Meyer*, 167.
52. "Larkin Talks as Hearers Fight," *The Boston Post* (18 December, 1914).
53. Ibid.
54. "Harvard Barks at Prof Meyer," *The Boston Globe* (19 December, 1914): 1 and 3.
55. Ibid.
56. A representative of the English department had approached Meyer informally about a talk on campus shortly after his arrival in New York, but he never received an official invitation. Cf. F. Robinson to L. Lowell (December 4, 1914) Lowell Papers, UAI 5.160 (67 #330 Kuno Meyer), Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.
57. "The Job on Kuno Meyer," *The Galic American* (Dec. 26, 1914): 1 and 5.
58. Original in German. Eduard Meyer: "Der Geist von Harvard," *Vossische Zeitung*, 212 (7 March, 1915): 1 and 2. Cf. also E. Meyer to O. Crusius (April 13, 1915). Crusiana I: Meyer, Eduard, Bavarian State Library, Munich [digitized transcript, Humboldt University Berlin, <http://www.kohring-digital.de/crusius-meyer.html>].
59. "Angry with Harvard," *The New York Times* (March. 13, 1915): 4.
60. "Answers Kuno Meyer," *The New York Times* (Mar. 8, 1915): 2; "Irish Resent Meyer's Words," *The Los Angeles Times* (Mar. 20, 1915): III.1.
61. "Harvard Prize War Poem," *The New York Times* (Apr. 10, 1915): 4.
62. K. Meyer to Lowell (Apr. 26, 1915) Lowell Papers, UAI 5.160 (67#330 Kuno Meyer), Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.
63. Lowell to K. Meyer (Apr. 27, 1915) Lowell Papers, UAI 5.160 (67#330 Kuno Meyer), Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.
64. Reports appeared e.g. in *The Boston Globe* (28 April, 1915), *The Boston Post* (29 April, 1915), *Yale Daily News* (29 April, 1915), *The North American*, Philadelphia (29 April, 1915), *Los Angeles Times* (29 April, 1915), *Chicago Tribune* (1 May, 1915) *The Post Intelligencer* Seattle (28 April, 1915), et al.
65. "Angry with Harvard," *The New York Times* (Mar. 13, 1915): 4; Eduard Meyer: "Der Geist von Harvard," *Vossische Zeitung* 212 (Mar. 7, 1915): 1–2.

66. On 14 November, 1914 Schmidt-Ott reported to the rector of Berlin University that, “under the present circumstances,” the exchanges with Harvard and Columbia had been discontinued for the time being. Lowell reported in his annual report for 1915 that the exchange had ceased in accordance with a request from Germany. Cf. Schmidt-Ott to Rektorat (14 November, 1914) Phil. Fak 1421. Bl.36, Humboldt University Archives, Berlin; and *Report of the President and Treasurer to Harvard College 1914/15* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1916), 26.
67. “Harvard Didn’t Invite Mayer,” *The Boston Globe* (Apr. 29, 1915): 11.
68. “Barred by Harvard, Meyer Retaliates,” *The New York Times* (Apr. 28, 1915): 3.
69. Besides short texts in encyclopaedic collections, even the thoroughly researched biography by Ò’Lúing relates the incident. Ò’Lúing, *Kuno Meyer*, 169; The most detailed study of the history of the professorial exchange also names K. Meyer as a nominated candidate who actively withdrew. Bernhard vom Brocke, “Der Deutsch-Amerikanische Professorentausch,” 142.
70. “Kuno Meyer and Harvard,” *The Chicago Tribune* (May 1, 1915): 8.
71. Jesse F. Orton to Lawrence Lowell (May 11, 1918) quote from enclosed draft for a letter to the editor of *The Nation* (dated May 4, 1918—not published?), Lowell Papers UAI 5.160 (127#1803 Academic Freedom), Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.
72. Robert J Young, *An American by Degrees. The Extraordinary Lives of French Ambassador Jules Jusserand* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 67.
73. Tomás Irish, *The University at War, 1914–1925. Britain, France, and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 86.
74. Egbert Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten. ‘Amerikanisierung’ in Deutschland und Frankreich 1900–1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 118.
75. Moriz Julius Bonn, *Wandering Scholar* (New York: The John Day Company, 1948), 178.

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