**Alien Enemy Registration During World War I**

**(Teaching with Documents)**  
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On June 22,1918, Johanna Kater, a sixteen-year-old German immigrant living in Newton, Kansas, registered with the U.S. Department of Justice as an "Alien Female." The four-page registration form that she completed and signed is featured in this article. As the form reveals, Johanna provided the government with information about her citizenship, family, occupation, marital status, and residence. The government also required her finger-prints on the fourth page of the form (see facing page). According to the form, she was giving proof of her peaceful disposition and her intention to conform to the laws of the United States, by registering. Johanna was one of an estimated 520,000 unnaturalized Germans who registered as "alien enemies" as required under section 19 of President Woodrow Wilson's Proclamation of November 16, 1917.

Earlier that year, on April 6, 1917, the same day that the 65th Congress declared war on Germany, President Wilson defined "alien enemies" and outlined twelve of the eventual twenty regulations placed on them. "All natives, denizens, or subjects of Germany, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be within the United States, and not actually naturalized" were considered alien enemies. The regulations prohibited unnaturalized Germans from owning fire arms, operating "an aircraft or wireless apparatus," or entering the District of Columbia. The proclamations prohibited alien enemies from going to the beach, traveling, or moving to a new house. By November, they were also required to register. Even those from the contested territory of Alsace-Lorraine, many of whom could prove French parentage, were required to register. Eventually, however, they were allowed to cross out "alien enemy" on their form. Although Wilson claimed to have no "quarrel" with the people of Germany, the list of regulations endorsed the belief that Germans were considered a collective threat to the safety and security of the United States.

The term alien enemy was later extended to include Austro-Hungarians (December 11, 1917) and women (April 16, 1918). Many of the regulations restricting alien enemy behavior, however, remained applicable to Germans only, presumably because they were considered a larger threat since their government was actively hostile toward the United States.

Between 1890 and 1910, Germans consistently constituted the largest percentile of the foreign-born population in the United States. The Bureau of Naturalization reported that between 1910 and 1917 alone, 97,930 individuals from Germany filed petitions for naturalization. Yet from 1917 until after the war had ended, Germans were barred from obtaining U.S. citizenship. Both naturalized and unnaturalized individuals witnessed significant challenges to their culture. In Cincinnati, Ohio, German literature was taken from the shelves of public libraries and schools and burned as citizens attempted to demonstrate publicly their patriotic zeal. Both New York's Metropolitan Opera and the Chicago Opera House banned German operas from their stages. German language teachers more often than not lost their jobs due to their assumed dose affiliation with the enemy. Even sauerkraut was renamed "liberty cabbage" in order to eliminate its association with the German culture.

Prompted by numerous petitions and letters from the American public, Walter Kehoe, a congressman from Florida, went as far as to present a bill that would have required all alien enemies to wear a button "conspicuously upon his or her person at all times when in a public place" Drafted during the second session of the 65th Congress, this bill (H.R. 12056) was presented to the Committee on Military Affairs, but never passed.

Of the twenty regulations concerning alien enemies issued by President Wilson through his Proclamations of 1917, perhaps the most disconcerting to German residents was the requirement to register. Despite the fact that individuals like Johanna Kater appeared to be of little or no danger to the American public, anti-German sentiment, related to acts of German aggression such as the Zimmerman Telegram, caused the government to believe it was necessary to classify all unnaturalized Germans as enemies. Thus, unnaturalized Germans had little choice but to register at a federally appointed facility, such as a post office, or face possible arrest and internment at one of the three designated internment facilities in Georgia and Utah for failure to register. In fact, by October of 1917, more than nine hundred German aliens, mostly merchant sailors, had already been arrested because of their affiliation with America's enemy. Between 1917-20, approximately 6,300 individuals were further interned, 2,300 of whom were civilians interned because of their pro-German behavior or speech that was deemed threatening.

For many individuals who had lived peacefully in the United States for decades, signing one's name to a piece of paper that acknowledged him as an "enemy" was offensive and humiliating. (The word enemy appeared only on those forms filled out by male aliens). Albert Sockland, for example, had lived in the United States since 1850 and had even fought in the Civil War. Yet he was obliged to register along with approximately 260,000 other unnaturalized German males between February 4th and 13th of 1918 because he never officially became a citizen.

Registrants such as Johanna and Albert were reassured that they were merely "giving proof of their peaceful disposition and their intention to conform to the Laws of the United States" Declaring one's "peaceful disposition," however, did not necessarily protect such individuals from losing their jobs or being harassed by their neighbors. The lynching of Paul Prager in Collinsville, Illinois, on April 5, 1918, was one of many incidents in which German aliens were the victims of nationalistic mob violence.

Furthermore, the process of registering was far from comfortable. Asked to provide basic personal information, registrants were also occasionally required to fill out "Secret Questionnaires." Such questionnaires were essentially used as intelligence devices, through which officials could obtain the names and addresses of individuals who were considered potential threats. One questionnaire asked for the names of "any such persons who seem to be traveling from place to place conferring with Germans ..." and then warned, ironically, that it was "verboten" to discuss answers with anyone. Furthermore, registrants had to provide fingerprints, in addition to photographs, on their registration forms for identification purposes. Despite the Department of Justice's attempts to legitimize fingerprinting as a valid way to identify individuals, at the time, it was associated almost exclusively with the arrest of criminals. Therefore, many registrants felt that they were being stigmatized as criminals simply because they came from Germany.

At the war's end in 1918, hoping to restore the normalcy of pre-war America, Wilson finally declared that the Proclamations under which unnaturalized Germans were regulated and registered were to be annulled as of Christmas Day, 1918. Therefore, most of the alien enemy registration forms were lost or destroyed. Forms such as the one belonging to Johanna Kater, however, are among the few documents that exist today and serve as reminders of what many in the German American community endured during World War I.