

Pittsburgh 1941: War, Race, Biography, and History

Pearl Harbor in Pittsburgh

IT WAS 3:00 PM ON SUNDAY, December 7, 1941. There was a mass meeting in Pittsburgh's Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall, located in Oakland Civic Center, three miles from downtown Pittsburgh. The hall had been built by the Grand Army of the Republic (the Union veterans organization) to honor Civil War veterans. Styled after the ancient mausoleum of Halicarnassus, it was officially dedicated on October 11, 1910. Those inside the solemn war memorial on this grey Sunday afternoon had come to attend a large antiwar meeting on the theme of "Christianity and Intervention"—an America First Committee rally against American involvement in the European war.¹ The huge hall seated 2,550, and it was filled almost to capacity, decked out in red, white, and blue bunting and "Defend America First" placards. The building had been used before for an America First Committee meeting, in June 1941, over the protests of some patriotic veterans. On that occasion, the speaker had been Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, and he had denounced the project of bringing Roosevelt's four freedoms to the world. He had asked, "Who are we to tell Stalin that he must give his people freedom of speech, religion and press."² Those who came to the December meeting carried American flags and were even more intent on proclaiming their Americanism this time, even as they opposed the policies of their president.

The advertised speakers for this afternoon were Senator Gerald Nye, a Republican from North Dakota who was best known nationally as the chair of the 1934–36 Senate committee that investigated the munitions industry and the causes of war, former Democratic Pennsylvania state

¹ "America First Group Lists Speakers Here," *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, Dec. 4, 1941.

² "Wheeler Calls Crusade for Freedoms Fantastic," *Monessen (PA) Daily Independent*, June 6, 1941.

senator Chester Hale Sipe, and the celebrity dancer and animal-rights activist Irene Castle McLaughlin. Behind the speakers on the platform, in “huge dark letters,” were the words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and a placard saying “No War.”³ The meeting opened with choral selections from the Bellevue Methodist Church choir and an invocation by the Reverend John McKavney of St. John the Evangelist Church. The Pittsburgh A.F.C. chairman, John B. Gordon, made an appeal for peace and for the right of all people to a voice in the public sphere. “This is America,” he declared. “All shades of opinion are entitled to be heard.”⁴

Irene Castle McLaughlin spoke first. She told the story of how her husband, dancer Vernon Castle, had died in the First World War and said that she did not want her son also to die in war.⁵ Chester Hale Sipe followed, and he attacked the president, saying that Roosevelt was trying to “make everything Russian appealing to the United States” and that he was the “chief war maker in the United States.”⁶ A white-haired man, who had been sitting next to his wife in aisle seats towards the back of the hall, began calling out from the floor of the meeting, apparently trying to disrupt proceedings.⁷

The shouting man seemed to be a foreigner. From up on the stage, the chair of the meeting quickly drew what he perceived to be the obvious conclusion: “his broken English gave the impression that he was an agitator; and the ushers being prepared for such disturbers, took him out.”⁸ The meeting’s sponsors were well used to dealing with agitators in the course of their work organizing public protests against what they considered to be the covert and undemocratic attempts of the Roosevelt administration to involve the United States in another foreign war. A.F.C. rallies regularly drew protesters, both inside and outside meeting halls. As recently as October 1941, at a Pittsburgh meeting, a seventeen-year-old heckler and his mother had shouted repeatedly from the floor and tried

³ “Wire from Robert Hagy,” in *December 7: The First Thirty Hours, by the Correspondents of Time, Life and Fortune* (New York, 1942), 31.

⁴ “America Firsters Jeer President,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 8, 1941.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ “America Firsters Can’t Believe It,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Dec. 8, 1941.

⁷ A much earlier version of some of this Pittsburgh story appeared in David Goodman, “Loving and Hating Britain: Rereading the Isolationist Debate in the USA,” in *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre (Carlton, Vic., 2007), 188–192.

⁸ M. E. Armbruster, Letter to the Editor, *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 10, 1941.

to ask questions of America First speakers. They ultimately forced Senator Bennett Champ Clark to truncate his speech and prematurely close a large meeting.⁹ America First supporters were accustomed to using booing and jeering as a way of intimidating interrupters into silence or retreat. Some in the crowd shouted "Get out, you don't belong here" to the foreigner.¹⁰

The shouting man appeared excited. The chair of the meeting later recalled, "On the platform where I was we could not hear what he was saying for his imperfect English; we knew only that he was interrupting our meeting and we were prepared for that eventuality."¹¹ The antiwar audience responded vigorously. Reporter Robert Hagy witnessed "a blizzard of 'warmonger' shrieks and reaching women's hands" and cries of "throw him out!"¹² The America First Committee's local volunteer ushers began to "man-handle" the interrupter, but the police, led by Lieutenant George Pischke, intervened and escorted him—at his own request, some said—from the hall.

It turned out that the foreign agitator was a colonel in the U.S. Army. Colonel Enrique Urrutia Jr. was chief of the Second Military Area of the Organized Reserve. He was trying to tell the speakers on the stage about the Japanese attack that morning on Hawaii and the Philippines, which had rendered all their talk about keeping the United States out of war irrelevant. But how in the ensuing confusion might the organizers have known that he or his message were important? The chair of the meeting said later that, rather than yelling excitedly, a colonel should "certainly have sent a note up to the speaker in a manner compatible with the decorum of his station." Urrutia had acted, in the codes of the day, too impetuously and emotionally. He had lost his cool. In Anglo-American culture, public calm and coolness connoted high status, while agitation marked the outsider. Elite Americans had learned the importance and utility of restraint. Historian Peter Stearns describes a "declining tolerance for emotional intensity in others" in the United States from the 1920s, and he speculates that Nazism and World War II further heightened American concern about public displays of anger or aggression.¹³ Franklin

⁹ "Peace Rally Is Disorderly," *Indiana (PA) Evening Gazette*, Oct. 7, 1941.

¹⁰ "America Firsters Jeer President."

¹¹ M. E. Armbruster, Letter to the Editor.

¹² Robert Hagy, quoted in the *Pittsburgh Bulletin Index*, Sept. 10, 1942.

¹³ Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York, 1994), 203, 244, 250.

D. Roosevelt was cool, and admired for his calm manner. Emotional coolness was increasingly a measure of status in American society, of fitness for urbane modernity and leadership. It was a boundary marker in an increasingly fanatical world—and an ethnically and racially inflected one.

“Being in civilian clothes and agitated,” the secretary of the Pittsburgh America First branch reported of Urrutia, “we had no way of knowing whether he was an army official, a Communist, or what.”¹⁴ The speaker on the stage, Hale Sipe, said that he “could not make out” what the agitator was saying. On the other hand, Robert Hagy, one of the reporters present, heard Urrutia say some quite pointed things: “Can this meeting be called after what has happened in the last few hours?” and “Do you know that Japan has attacked Manila, that Japan has attacked Hawaii?”¹⁵ Others heard him call the speakers on the platform “traitors.”¹⁶ Some reports had Sipe telling the audience that “this poor bombastic man . . . is only a mouthpiece for Franklin Delano Roosevelt.” Sipe himself claimed that he had responded with great coolness, saying only, “I am glad you have come here. I will talk with you after I am through.”¹⁷ Either way, most of those at this meeting of patriotic Americans opposed to U.S. involvement in foreign wars had heard and seen only the agitation, the foreignness, and the noise in the voice and demeanor of Colonel Urrutia. They had neither acknowledged his authority nor heard his message.

After Urrutia had been escorted from the hall, Hale Sipe continued his political attacks. Elected a Pennsylvania state senator in 1936, having won a normally Republican seat for the Democrats for the first time in eighty years, Sipe had, by 1937, fallen out with the Democratic Party machine. He had received death threats—including warnings that he would meet the same fate as Huey Long—and threats to burn his barn. He was defeated by a Republican in 1940.¹⁸ It is not surprising then that, in 1941, Sipe was still angry with both major parties, describing Wendell Willkie, the 1940 Republican presidential nominee, as just “the mouthpiece of Roosevelt” and alleging that Secretary of War Henry Stimson slept at cabinet meetings.

¹⁴ M. E. Armbruster, Letter to the Editor.

¹⁵ Robert Hagy, in *December 7: The First Thirty Hours*, 34.

¹⁶ “America Firsters Can’t Believe It.”

¹⁷ C. Hale Sipe, Letter to the Editor, *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 10, 1941.

¹⁸ “Letter Threatens State Senator,” *Uniontown (PA) Morning Herald*, Sept. 29, 1937; “Sen. Sipe’s Life Threatened,” *Clearfield (PA) Progress*, Sept. 27, 1937.

Senator Gerald Nye, depicted by Hagy as “tall, dark, handsome,” took the stage at about 4:45 PM. Nye knew better than anyone how to get the crowd going—displaying vehemence rather than anger and a sly rhetorical agility. “Never, never, never again,” he roared, “must America let herself be made such a monkey of as she was 25 years ago.”¹⁹ He asked the crowd whose war it was—“Roosevelt’s!” came the practiced reply. Reporter Robert Hagy walked onto the stage with a note that read, “The Japanese Imperial Government at Tokyo today at 4:00 PM announced a state of war with the U.S. and Great Britain.” Nye spoke for an additional fifteen minutes (according to Hagy), or “completed the thought on which he was expounding” (according to the secretary of the local A.F.C. branch), before finally informing the meeting of the declaration of war.²⁰ “I have before me the worst news that I have encountered in the last 20 years,” he said. “I can’t somehow believe this. I can’t come to any conclusions until I know what this is about.”²¹ Suspicion and skepticism about the media and its collusion with the Roosevelt administration’s interventionism had been an integral part of isolationist politics.²² “I want time to find out what’s behind it,” Nye told the crowd, as “there have been too many funny things before.” He then returned to a standard America First refrain and spoke about the almost inevitable domestic consequence of war—the destruction of American democracy. He asserted, “If America goes to war, victor and vanquished alike will fall, and Communism will grow in the ruins.”²³ Finally, Nye revisited the announced theme of the meeting by telling the crowd that “Christianity and intervention are as completely opposed as anything under God.”²⁴ After leaving the stage, he apparently collected some further thoughts. The *New York Times* quoted him as saying that the attack on Pearl Harbor was “just what Britain had planned for us.” “Britain has been getting this ready since 1938,” he told reporters.²⁵

¹⁹ “America Firsters Jeer President.”

²⁰ M. E. Armbruster, Letter to the Editor.

²¹ *December 7: The First Thirty Hours*, 35.

²² On media collaboration with the administration, see Richard W. Steele, “The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940–1941,” *Journal of American History* 71 (1984): 69–92.

²³ “America Firsters Can’t Believe It.”

²⁴ “America Firsters Jeer President.”

²⁵ “Opinions of Senator Nye,” *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 1941.

The public controversy that now erupted inevitably centered on the question of why the meeting had been continued after the speakers knew that war had begun. The organizers admitted that as the speakers entered the hall just before 3:00 PM, a reporter had told them that Hawaii and Manila had been bombed.²⁶ Robert Hagy remembered that just before the meeting he had “shoved the pasted-up news” at Nye for him to read and that others had clustered around—the *Post-Gazette* indeed printed a photograph of Nye and two of the local organizers reading the news. Nye reportedly reacted at that time by saying, “It sounds terribly fishy to me. Can’t we have some details? Is it sabotage or is it open attack? I’m amazed that the President should announce an attack without giving details.” The America First organizers, judging, they said later, that the reports were unconfirmed and possibly untrue, decided to continue with the meeting. “Lacking confirmation,” the secretary of the Pittsburgh branch explained, “we waited. We could not hold up a great mass-meeting for a report.” Hagy described Nye as cool in this moment of crisis—“cool as a cucumber”—as he went on to compare the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor to the first news of the September 1941 firing on the *USS Greer*.²⁷ But now, in the moment of a historic national crisis, this reported emotional coolness was suspect, even dangerous.

The next day’s newspapers were scathing. “Never has there been such a disgraceful meeting in all Pittsburgh’s history,” the *Pittsburgh Press* proclaimed in its editorial. “Those who participated in it should forever hang their heads in shame.”²⁸ The Pittsburgh branch of the interventionist Fight for Freedom organization wrote an open letter to Nye, reminding him that, after he knew of the attack on Pearl Harbor, he had continued a meeting “marked by constant attacks upon the administration of your own country, by denunciation of its chief executive as a cheater and a war monger and by ridicule and abuse of those who have been and are our loyal allies.”²⁹ Some America First supporters also registered their intense dismay. “After I had heard of the unpatriotic, deceitful and despicable manner in which this meeting was conducted,” wrote one local businessman, “I wish to state emphatically that I desire to have my name stricken from your mailing list, and from now on I will have nothing whatever to

²⁶ “America Firsters Can’t Believe It.”

²⁷ Robert Hagy, in *December 7: The First Thirty Hours*, 32.

²⁸ Editorial, *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 8, 1941.

²⁹ *Huntington (PA) Daily News*, Dec. 9, 1941.

do with the America First committee or any of its branches.”³⁰ Over a year later, Pittsburgh’s *Jewish Criterion* was still angry, recalling the meeting as a “disgraceful incident.”³¹ Nye’s stubbornness and his skepticism about the media, both of them characteristics encouraged by the social-movement politics of isolationism, had—disastrously for a nationalist organization—left America First open to the charge of being unpatriotic.

Pittsburgh A.F.C. branch secretary Maxim Armbruster wrote to the *Pittsburgh Press* giving his version of events. He forcefully rejected the paper’s assertion that the meeting was “disgraceful.” A.F.C. members could, he asserted, hold their heads high “because they have contended nobly against unbelievable odds to keep their country from engaging in a war against another country.”³² The Pittsburgh America First Committee, however, dissolved itself on December 8 in a fifteen-minute meeting, preempting the national organization by three days.³³ Out of the public eye there was clearly anguish. Armbruster reported to A.F.C. headquarters that the Pittsburgh branch’s executive vice chairman, attorney John Brown Gordon, had been left heartbroken by the commencement of war. “Something precious to us,” Armbruster wrote, “has been torn away and ravished.”³⁴

The Pittsburgh America First Branch

Pennsylvania, while not the seedbed or the headquarters of isolationism, was both prominent in and very significant to the national movement. The Pittsburgh and Philadelphia America First Committee branches were among the twelve largest in the country.³⁵ Pittsburgh had enormous strategic value to the antiwar movement because of the importance of its industry to any war mobilization. The city had been hit hard by the Depression, with high unemployment in the crucial steel and coal indus-

³⁰ William McGrady to America First Committee, Dec. 11, 1941, box 131, folder “McCo,” America First Committee Records (hereafter A.F.C. Records), Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

³¹ *Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, Feb. 12, 1943.

³² M. E. Armbruster, Letter to the Editor.

³³ “Advisory Board of America First Dissolves,” *Corpus Christi Times*, Dec. 9, 1941.

³⁴ M. E. Armbruster to Page Hufty, Dec. 11, 1941, box 20, folder “Pittsburgh,” A.F.C. Records.

³⁵ The America First Committee formed in August 1940, and it proclaimed as one of its principles that “American democracy can be preserved only by keeping out of the European war.”

tries and an average unemployment rate that ranged from 33 to 40 percent during the peak Depression years and was still at 22 percent in 1940. Some antiwar leaders feared that in this context the promise of a return to prosperity could dampen enthusiasm for the cause in the region. "It is a pleasure to be in Pittsburgh," Senator Burton K. Wheeler had greeted the three thousand-strong crowd at the America First rally in the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall in June 1941. He expressed a hope for "a Pittsburgh which again sees smoke rolling from its mills—which again enjoys a real measure of prosperity." But, he had also carefully warned, the prosperity that came from war mobilization was only ever temporary, and he congratulated his audience on remaining "true to the cause of peace and democracy."³⁶

Wheeler's optimism about the isolationist cause in Pittsburgh was justified. The Pittsburgh branch of the America First Committee had close to fifteen thousand members. "Pittsburgh is really rolling!" someone at the head office scrawled on a memo from the branch in September 1941.³⁷ The local secretary, Kenneth D. Magruder, was very conscious of the strategic importance of Pittsburgh in the national struggle and elated at the local support the branch was receiving. "I wonder if even the National Committee realizes fully," he wrote to them in August 1941, "the fact that in this munitions centre, people, instead of being war mongers, are bitterly and overwhelmingly resentful towards the course of events."³⁸ Magruder's view is confirmed by reports from the other side of this "battle of committees." The Pittsburgh branch of the interventionist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies reported dolefully to its headquarters in 1940 that the Pittsburgh area was not a promising site for them. In response to a questionnaire that asked about "your community's attitude toward the objectives of the Committee," one replied that it was "DULL, stupid, unenlightened, half of them never heard of it." When asked whether there was "any particular element in your community which is particularly opposed to the Committee's objectives and why," one respondent named "PGH Keep Out of War Committee, Italian and German patriotic societies, Father Coughlin's followers, Radio professional Irishmen." Another observed that "Two out of three Episcopal

³⁶ "Speech of the Hon. Burton K. Wheeler . . . at Pittsburgh June 5th, 1941," box 19, folder 7, Wheeler Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

³⁷ Pinned to K. D. Magruder to Harry Schnibbe, Sept. 10, 1941, box 20, A.F.C. Records.

³⁸ K. D. Magruder to Harry Schnibbe, Aug. 26, 1941, box 20, folder "Pittsburgh," A.F.C. Records.

ministers here are Pacifists.”³⁹

There were of course influential interventionists in Pittsburgh; it was one of only six cities nationwide in which A.F.C. branches experienced difficulty in securing buildings or parks for meetings.⁴⁰ But, as 1940 turned into 1941, the divisions within the isolationist movement began to pose almost equally significant problems in Pittsburgh. Of these internal divisions, the most intractable were over the racial and ethnic inclusiveness of the nation in whose defense they were rallying. Burton K. Wheeler, in his June speech in Pittsburgh, had talked of how Americans had derived their “hardy—courageous—and intelligent” qualities from being the product of “commingled” races. This achieved racial peace was, he warned, now threatened by a coalition of dividers, “blood-thirsty war makers—fierce and savage old men—too old to fight—emotional women—hysterical columnists—and a few great financiers,” who wanted to drag the United States into “the cauldron of hate and blood that is Europe, Africa and Asia today.”⁴¹ Wheeler warned of people who wanted to raise the emotional temperature in the United States and to disrupt its cool and calm demeanor with a feminine, hysterical, emotional mode of conduct that would inevitably divide the nation and destroy its democracy.

National isolationist leaders understood very well the need for an ethnically and racially inclusive message in Pittsburgh. The Depression had increased the potential for ethnic and racial division—black unemployment in these years of economic crisis was consistently much higher than white, while the foreign born were less likely to be unemployed than native whites.⁴² While the proportion of foreign born in the city was declining from its turn-of-the-century highs of one in four, still, in 1930, 19 percent of the Pittsburgh population was foreign born and another 34 percent had foreign-born parents.⁴³ No mass movement could prosper

³⁹ Box 11, folder 11/10, Questionnaires July 23, 1940, Papers of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. The Pittsburgh A.F.C. committee also included a Catholic priest and a Baptist minister.

⁴⁰ Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention, 1940–1941* (New York, 1971), 31, 112.

⁴¹ “Speech of the Hon. Burton K. Wheeler . . . at Pittsburgh June 5th, 1941.”

⁴² Michael P. Weber, “Community Building and Occupational Mobility in Pittsburgh, 1880–1960,” in *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, ed. Samuel P. Hays (Pittsburgh, 1989), 368; Dennis C. Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible: Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875–1980* (Albany, NY, 1986), 120; Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants since 1880* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1981), 248.

⁴³ Nora Faires, “Immigrants and Industry: Peopling the ‘Iron City,’” in *City at the Point*, 10.

without the support of these people.

In this environment, most national isolationist organizational leaders carefully sought to create an inclusive nationalist movement rather than an uneasy coalition of ethnic and racial groups. But the task was always difficult.⁴⁴ Despite their efforts, the antiwar movement was, through 1941, always in danger of becoming more exclusive, fringed with anti-Semitism and hostility to foreigners, as the liberal members of the antiwar coalition moved over to the interventionist side.⁴⁵ Those who remained increasingly tended to understand their mission as one of defending the real America against the disguised representatives of foreign or cosmopolitan interests. As in America First branches in other parts of the country, in the Pittsburgh branch followers of the "radio priest" Father Charles Coughlin came to play a significant and often divisive role. Kenneth D. Magruder, the Pittsburgh branch secretary, was a Harvard graduate, a social worker, a Republican politician, an amateur historian, and a follower of Coughlin.⁴⁶ He was reportedly the leader of two hundred or so Coughlinites within the chapter.

Gerald Nye had also been a supporter of Charles Coughlin. He and Magruder shared a populist understanding of the significance of the antiwar movement as part of a broader restoration of democracy. This was a central part of the appeal of the antiwar movement—it offered a vision of an enhanced democracy, in which the people would regain power. Magruder wrote that:

We seem to have truly a people's crusade under our leadership, not merely an organization with strong support. The thought has been planted throughout the country that the mobilization of the people, themselves, through the influence of individuals who reside among them, must be achieved for restoration of government by the people and for the people.

He endorsed the principle behind Representative Louis Ludlow's pro-

⁴⁴ On John Flynn's efforts to keep Nazi sympathizers out of the New York A.F.C. branch, see John E. Moser, *Right Turn: John T. Flynn and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (New York, 2005), 126–30.

⁴⁵ John E. Moser, *Twisting the Lion's Tail: Anglophobia in the United States, 1921–48* (Basingstoke, UK, 1999), 135.

⁴⁶ In early 1940, Kenneth D. Magruder, described as the author of a forthcoming official "Encyclopedic History of Pittsburgh Methodism, 1784–1825," read a paper titled "Methodism's Struggle for a Permanent Foothold in the Pittsburgh Region," *Uniontown (PA) Morning Herald*, Jan. 4, 1940.

posed 1938 amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would have said that any U.S. declaration of war had to be approved by national referendum. Magruder maintained that this would “be a restoration of the forgotten principle which our ancestors longed to retain,” that of the people’s right of judging measures in the last resort. He thought that “modern facilities for communication” rendered such popular control possible again.⁴⁷ This kind of deep optimism that the people would reject war if given the chance, and that it was only when they had been duped by munitions manufacturers and international bankers and their own governments that they could be led into war, was a core component of isolationist populism.

As Coughlin himself, and his publication *Social Justice*, adopted more distinctly anti-Semitic positions, tensions between Coughlin sympathizers and the mainstream A.F.C. grew.⁴⁸ In areas with a significant Irish population, Coughlinite support was critical to America First. In Boston, the branch executive secretary reported that Coughlinites were “overwhelmingly the majority of our present membership.” She pointed out to headquarters some of the difficulties this created: whereas in the Midwest there was “a large group of the ‘Best People’ behind you—here we have almost none, and the bulk of our supporters are the poor people, most of whom are Irish-Catholic Americans.”⁴⁹ The national A.F.C. was increasingly careful to keep its distance from Coughlin and Coughlinites. In July 1941, there was a directive from national chairman General Robert E. Wood that *Social Justice* should not be sold outside America First meetings. Coughlinites were also to be kept out of A.F.C. leadership because the “Coughlin line” on the causes of the war was “conducive of hate and intolerance and directly harmful to the America First Committee’s program for a workable national unity based on non-intervention.”⁵⁰

On September 11, 1941, in Des Moines, headlining America First speaker Charles Lindbergh made his most controversial public speech. He asserted that “the three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish and the Roosevelt

⁴⁷ Kenneth Dann Magruder, “Self-Evident Truths about ‘Unalienable Rights,’” Pittsburgh: America First Committee, n.d., 8; and Kenneth Magruder to Robert Bliss, Apr. 27, 1941, both in box 20, folder “Pittsburgh,” A.F.C. Records.

⁴⁸ See Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York, 1994), 129.

⁴⁹ Margaret Welch to General Wood, July 7, 1941, box 56, folder “Social Justice,” A.F.C. Records.

⁵⁰ Joseph R. Boldt Jr. to James C. Bayley Jr., July 14, 1941, box 56, folder “Social Justice,” A.F.C. Records.

administration.”⁵¹ Most of the subsequent criticism of the Des Moines speech focused on the perceived anti-Semitism of identifying American Jews as warmongers—as people who were “agitating for war,” with all of the influence that came from “their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.” Lindbergh’s brief reference to the Jews resonated with some traditional themes in anti-Semitic thought—the widely circulated, fraudulent, but recurrently popular *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had portrayed the Jews as international warmongers, people who used discord and conflict among nations to assert their sinister control.⁵² This rhetorical strategy was, by 1941, readily identified by many Americans as anti-Semitic. The Jewish reference in the Des Moines speech, historian Wayne Cole concluded, “divided and weakened the non-interventionist movement and placed it on the defensive.”⁵³

For isolationist Pennsylvanians, the Lindbergh speech provided a moment of clarity and a parting of the ways. A Pittsburgh insurance agent wrote to the America First Committee offering his “congratulations to COLONEL LINDBERGH. He has placed his finger on the one principal conspirator in our deplorable foreign policy, the JEW.”⁵⁴ On the other hand, many on the anti-interventionist side were deeply hostile to the implications of Lindbergh’s speech. In Monessen, Pennsylvania, the *Daily Independent*, while professing anti-interventionist sympathies (“to keep America from being embroiled in a European war every twenty years is a cause eminently worth fighting for”), denounced the way people such as Lindbergh were using the aggregate force of the antiwar movement “to give weight to their own narrow prejudices and hatreds.”⁵⁵ In Pittsburgh, in October, the president of the Carnegie Institute made it clear that he would rent the Carnegie hall to the America First Committee, but only with the stipulation that Lindbergh not be a speaker because of his “unpardonable assault on a large and honoured section of

⁵¹ The speech is on the Web at <http://www.charleslinbergh.com/americanfirst/speech.asp>.

⁵² See Protocol 7 of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. On the history of the *Protocols*, see Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor about the Jews: Reflections on Antisemitism and the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (New York, 2000).

⁵³ Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York, 1974), 185.

⁵⁴ Richard Winkler to A.F.C., Oct. 1, 1941, box 156, folder “Wim,” A.F.C. Records.

⁵⁵ “War and Its Dividends,” *Monessen (PA) Daily Independent*, June 6, 1941.

our population—the Jews—as reflected in his speech at Des Moines.”⁵⁶

The Pittsburgh branch of America First, like many others, was riven by the Des Moines controversy. Emanuel Amdur, a Pittsburgh attorney, was active in the B'nai Brith and the Democratic Party, although he had come out against a third term for Roosevelt in September 1940.⁵⁷ He requested copies of Lindbergh's speech from the America First head office and, after reading it, resigned from the organization in protest at Lindbergh's "attack upon" the Jews, which he said followed the "totalitarian technique."⁵⁸ Kenneth Magruder reported that the Pittsburgh committee was unsympathetic. The view of "our Committee, including the officers," he wrote, was "that Lindbergh should be upheld 100%." Magruder asserted that any loss of members as a result of such a defense of Lindbergh would only strengthen the organization, in ridding it of "timid souls." He thought the national A.F.C. organization itself was too timid—he wanted a great march on Washington and thought the national committee's unwillingness to organize one was a sign of its "pussy-footing."⁵⁹

The Coughlinite America Firsters were pushing the organization in more divisive and exclusionary directions. One disillusioned follower described the Coughlinite faction within the Pittsburgh branch of America First as a clique that was "attempting to seize the organization"—"borers-from-within" who were "doing nothing but causing trouble" and who liked to "air their race hatreds" at meetings. At a September 1941 meeting, she reported that someone had said that they should call the interventionist Fight for Freedom organization the "Voice of Satan." Another Coughlinite had proposed going house to house in Pittsburgh "asking people if they were for us or against us." Another said that if all else failed, "there was still revolution" and that they would "get certain people."⁶⁰ There was a rhetoric and probably a feeling of extremism among the Pittsburgh A.F.C. Coughlinites. Their tactics were of the divide-and-purify rather than the build-a-mass-movement kind.⁶¹

When the national committee sent an organizer to examine the Pittsburgh branch a month later, he was initially impressed. He found a

⁵⁶ "Would Rent Hall but Bar Lindbergh," *Chester (PA) Times*, Oct. 4, 1941.

⁵⁷ "Former Roosevelt Supporter Balks at Third Term," *New Castle (PA) News*, Sept. 17, 1940.

⁵⁸ "As I See It," *Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion*, Sept. 26, 1941.

⁵⁹ K. D. Magruder to Harry Schnibbe, Sept. 17, 1941, box 5, A.F.C. Records.

⁶⁰ Mrs. Lou Scott to America First Headquarters, Aug. 14 and Sept. 17, 1941, box 20, folder "Pittsburgh," A.F.C. Records.

⁶¹ Cole, *America First*, 138.

"most efficient organization" doing "a grand job," with "damned attractive headquarters on the busiest street in the very heart of Pittsburgh." But, he quickly came to the conclusion that Kenneth Magruder was "very definitely a crack-pot" and that his group "can not submerge their Coughlinite feelings sufficiently to be sincere America Firsters." "They devote most of their time to expostulating against 'Imperialistic England,' and hoping Germany will win the war."⁶² Magruder retaliated by claiming that the A.F.C. organizer, Clay Pugh, was in favor of a federal union with Britain—the proposal most feared and reviled by America Firsters—and that he had repudiated George Washington's Farewell Address. Magruder resented what he claimed was Pugh's assertion that the organization was pro-Nazi if it was not pro-British. "Love of country motivates our workers," he insisted. "It is libelous to accuse them of being motivated by hatred."⁶³ By late October 1941, Magruder had resigned as secretary, having lost his fight with the national organization. He took a number of branch members with him.⁶⁴

Both Gerald Nye nationally and Kenneth Magruder locally found that, as the war debate progressed, their populist, class-based ideas about the economic causes of war became more and more mired in issues of ethnic and racial identity. Nye stood accused of anti-Semitism and pro-Germanism, while Magruder failed to convince even his own organization that the real issue was democracy and American nationalism, not tribal affiliation for or against certain nations or ethnicities. Their failures were symptomatic of the trajectory of the broader debate—each side claiming the civic-nationalist high ground, but inevitably becoming involved in public discussion of racial and ethnic identity and interest.

The war debate thus exemplifies Gary Gerstle's profound point that civic nationalism (faith in the American creed of democracy and equality) and racial nationalism (the idea of "a people held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government") have always existed side by side in the United States.⁶⁵ At a time of crisis, the tensions between the racial and civic conceptions of the nation became more apparent. The faiths and identities at stake were personal,

⁶² Clay Pugh to Page Hufty, Oct. 17, 1941, box 20, folder "Pittsburgh," A.F.C. Records.

⁶³ K. D. Magruder, Telegrams, Oct. 20 and 21, 1941, box 20, folder "Pittsburgh," A.F.C. Records.

⁶⁴ Pittsburgh Branch letter to Page Hufty, Oct. 23, 1941, box 20, folder "Pittsburgh," A.F.C. Records.

⁶⁵ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 4.

civic, and national, but at some point also racial. Each side accused the other of dividing the nation along ethnic and racial lines and announced its own higher civic nationalism centered on unity, democracy, and equality. But, other identities insistently surfaced in the discussion. Try as they might, Americans could not debate the war as raceless, history-less, ethnically neutral beings. They inevitably brought historically inflected issues of race and ethnic identity, explicitly or implicitly, to their arguments and responses to others' arguments about the war. They did so because they lived in history, not just in the present of 1941, and they brought their own biographies to the war debate, with all the wisdom of their accumulated experience and common sense. Thus, it is necessary to shift the focus from an ethnographic narrative of the Pittsburgh meeting, situated in the present of 1941, to a more historical account that places the major actors in the contexts of their own life histories.

Figures from the Tableau

The Pittsburgh *Bulletin Index* predicted that historians would "use and reuse that story" of the December 7 meeting in Pittsburgh for many years to come.⁶⁶ The incident has been mentioned occasionally in subsequent histories, although most often as a curiosity, a colorful footnote to a dramatic day in U.S. history.⁶⁷ But, what happens if instead of just narrating this story, we unravel it—follow the threads back to see where each originated? What we will see in doing so is how implicated the American nation—with its dominant but always unstable white and Anglo identity—was in other histories and with other peoples. The December 1941 attacks were against American territories in the Pacific that the United States had controlled for just over forty years. In Pittsburgh, Gerald Nye, once he had accepted the reality of war, talked of the need to give "American lives and blood and money to the protection of our people and possessions in the Pacific"—resignedly (or perhaps pointedly) adopting the language of imperial, rather than national, defense.⁶⁸ There were many such ways in which 1941 was connected to 1898, in which the nationalist isolationists were—almost despite themselves—products of earlier imperial moments. General Robert E. Wood, for example, the

⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Bulletin Index*, Sept. 10, 1942.

⁶⁷ One article retells the story of the meeting. See James A. Kehl, "The Pittsburgh Fallout from Pearl Harbor," *Western Pennsylvania History* 82 (1999): 176–81.

⁶⁸ "America Firsters Can't Believe It."

national chairman of the America First Committee, had fought with the Third U.S. Cavalry during the Philippine Insurrection between 1900 and 1902.

The war debate raised crucial questions about the American nation—about who truly belonged to it and how they defined themselves. President Roosevelt's remarkable 1936 Chautauqua speech is best known for its expression of revulsion for war and a commitment to avoiding it. But in that speech he also offered a gloomy prognosis for peace. "A dark modern world," the president warned, "faces wars between conflicting economic and political fanaticisms in which are intertwined race hatreds."⁶⁹ In early 1940, Gerald Nye accepted the term "isolationist" as a description of his position. He did not propose to cut off commercial intercourse with other nations, nor did he want a United States "indifferent to the political, moral and social problems of other nations." But he did think that Americans could "live within ourselves." He wanted them to turn their backs on Europe and the past. He explained, "We are all here because we, or our ancestors, left Europe because we didn't like it."⁷⁰

But who was the "we" in Nye's optimistic New World narrative? Was it a people somehow free from the modern racial hatreds to which Roosevelt had alluded? Or, did the shadow of modern racialism hang over the American republic, too? Gerald Nye's wish and hope that Americans could "live within ourselves" was always an impossible project. As with all nationalist formulations, it raised the immediate question of who was the "we" and the "our." The history of the United States meant that the frontiers of national inclusion were always contested and that, at the boundaries, there were always traces of past disputes about inclusion and incorporation, or of past struggles over racial and other hierarchies of subordination or exclusion. The white American nation rested upon appropriation of Native American land, on the institution of slave labor, which had left a postemancipation nation still struggling to assimilate the former slave population and its descendants, on imperial conquest, and on complex and contested patterns of immigration. Each of these events and processes left traces in the national history and in individual lives.

We know that the period from 1880 through the 1920s was an era of U.S. political history marked by unembarrassedly racial thinking. Rogers

⁶⁹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Peace: Speech at Chautauqua, New York, August 14, 1936* (New York, 1936).

⁷⁰ Gerald Nye, "Yes, Says Nye," *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1940.

Smith calls it the heyday of “ascriptive Americanism.”⁷¹ There is much recent historical work that documents the racial politics of that era, from the Spanish-American War, to the rise of the legally segregated South, to the movement for immigration restriction. When we come to World War II, however, a war fought against racialism and for democracy, that historical legacy of racial thinking and governing practice within the United States tends to recede from historical view, except in relation to some narrowly defined topics concerning the nation’s ability to fight—such as the irony of a Jim Crow army fighting a war against racialism, and the consequent problem of “Negro morale.” Yet, the actors in the bitter debate about American participation in World War II had of course been shaped by their earlier experiences and careers in a very different America. The remainder of this article retrieves and displays some of these connections between biographies and histories. In the war debate, the nation’s composition out of a series of subordinate relationships with nonwhite peoples could not be hidden for long.

If we freeze the scene in Pittsburgh’s Memorial Hall that Sunday afternoon and take each of the principal actors in turn, we gain a glimpse of what have recently been well described as the “endless struggles over the place of darker-skinned peoples in a nation that continues fundamentally to imagine itself as white.”⁷² In the course of the war controversy, the connections between that imagined white nation and people of color, and connections to wars that had resulted in the subordination of people of color, or national policies that regulated their inclusion in and exclusion from the nation, became more visible. Here I will be drawing out the connections between the biographies of the central actors in the Pittsburgh drama of Sunday, December 7, 1941, and their positions and views on that day. The aim is not simply to display and denounce racism. The existence of racial beliefs in this era can scarcely be a surprise, nor can the fact that it was often the best-educated and most representative figures that harbored them. What I do want to show here is the complexity and particularity of racial views and experience, the many paths that led Americans to formulate a personal position on the impending national commitment to war.

⁷¹ Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT, 1997), chap. 11.

⁷² James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and Robert G. Lee, “Introduction,” in *Race, Nation and Empire in American History*, ed. Campbell, Guterl, and Lee (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 7.

Enrique Urrutia

That in 1941 Enrique Urrutia appeared as an outsider at the Pittsburgh meeting must have been both painful and embarrassing to him. Born in Puerto Rico in March 1887, and only recently moved to Pittsburgh, he had already lived a part of his life in Pennsylvania. He was sent as a boy to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, which had been founded as an institution to aid the assimilation of Native Americans. Urrutia was one of about sixty Puerto Rican students accepted at Carlisle for education and assimilation—including, importantly, instruction in English.⁷³ After the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, John Eaton and his successor Martin Grove Brumbaugh, both secretaries of education in Puerto Rico, developed a scholarship scheme to bring Puerto Rican children to the Carlisle school and to the African American institutions—Hampton Institute in Virginia and Tuskegee Normal School in Alabama. Those chosen for Carlisle were often the children of the Puerto Rican elite, and some of them hoped for a professional education. Enrique Urrutia was apparently one of those from Puerto Rico's elite, and his family is said to have had links back to the Spanish Crown.⁷⁴

The families of the Puerto Rican Carlisle students were no doubt hoping for an education that would facilitate advancement in their newly American society. But, at Carlisle, the Puerto Rican students instead found themselves classified with subordinated racial groups in the United States and given the kind of industrial-school training that was deemed appropriate for them. Exactly where the Puerto Ricans fit into the racial order of the United States was always a little uncertain. Pablo Navarro-Rivera notes that Puerto Rican students at Carlisle often crossed off the terms "Indian" and "Tribe" and replaced them with "Puerto Rico" or "Puerto Rican" on school forms. Brumbaugh and the U.S. administration in Puerto Rico sometimes classified them as "colored" rather than Indian. But, Navarro-Rivera concludes that "notwithstanding any possible ambivalence . . . the perceived inferiority of Blacks, Indians, Puerto Ricans and Cubans in the United States was a constant."⁷⁵

⁷³ Earl C. Kaylor, *Martin Grove Brumbaugh: A Pennsylvanian's Odyssey—From Sainted Schoolman to Bedeviled World War I Governor, 1862–1930* (Madison, NJ, 1995), 147.

⁷⁴ For information from Urrutia family members, see <http://genforum.genealogy.com/urrutia/>.

⁷⁵ Pablo Navarro-Rivera, "Acculturation under Duress: The Puerto Rican Experience at the

Few of the Puerto Rican students at Carlisle graduated. Some ran away, some returned to Puerto Rico, and others found better opportunities for study or work within the United States.⁷⁶ Enrique Urrutia left Carlisle in 1905, having spent three years at the school. After his return to Puerto Rico, he worked as a printer, married his first cousin Pura Urrutia, and then began working as a clerk to the paymaster at the U.S. Naval Station in San Juan, Puerto Rico.⁷⁷ No doubt in part because of his mastery of the English language, he quickly moved through the ranks and was one of the first Puerto Ricans to serve in the military that had so recently invaded his country. He sat the exam for a second lieutenant position in the Puerto Rico Provisional Regiment in 1910, thus beginning a long and successful career as an officer in the U.S. military.⁷⁸ While many of the Puerto Ricans at Carlisle were evidently unhappy, Urrutia professed to be proud of his time at the school and grateful for what he had learned there. He wrote back to Carlisle, praising it as “the great Indian school” and reporting his success in becoming an officer in the U.S. Army— “one of the greatest honors a man can have.” He had become an American patriot and spoke the language of American civic nationalism fluently. He declared, “I am and always will be ready to defend the constitution of the United States, all its officers and the American flag.”⁷⁹

By the 1930s, Urrutia was a major in the Sixty-fifth Infantry Army National Guard Unit. In February 1938, now a lieutenant colonel, he commanded troops from the Sixty-fifth Regular Infantry in Puerto Rico as they participated in war games with units from other parts of the United States.⁸⁰ In Puerto Rico, Enrique Urrutia was by profession, and probably by conviction, on the side of the assimilators and aligned against the increasingly angry nationalist demands for independence from the United States. In 1938, many nationalists considered it a deliberate provocation that the military governor, Blanton Winship, chose to mark the fortieth anniversary of the landing of U.S. troops in Puerto Rico with

Carlisle Indian Industrial School 1898–1918,” *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 18 (2006): 237.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷⁷ I thank Sonia Rosa for sharing this information from her own research. Barbara Landis of the Carlisle Indian School Research Pages also very kindly provided some important information from the school’s records. See <http://home.epix.net/~landis/portorican.html>.

⁷⁸ Sonia M. Rosa, “The Puerto Ricans at Carlisle Indian School,” *KACIKE: Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology* (2003), <http://www.kacike.org/SoniaRosa.html>.

⁷⁹ Enrique Urrutia, quoted in Navarro-Rivera, “Acculturation under Duress,” 245.

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1938.

celebrations in Ponce rather than San Juan, the capital, or Guanica, where the troops had actually landed.⁸¹ Back in 1898, General Nelson A. Miles had told the people of Ponce that his army came as protectors, rather than invaders, to bring “the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.” But, in 1938, the nationalist movement was gaining strength and many Puerto Ricans rejected that story about paternal benevolence. Anger was still high over the 1937 “Ponce massacre,” in which police shot nineteen nationalist marchers. The Nationalist Party had made clear its view that Puerto Ricans who attended the celebration of the invasion were “a shameless disgrace to their island.”⁸² On July 25, 1938, an assassin attempted to kill Governor Winship as he presided over the festivities. An exchange of gunfire took place in front of the reviewing stand and a crowd estimated to be between twenty and forty thousand. Colonel Irizarry of the Sixty-fifth Infantry was shot and killed as he stood just behind the governor; the wounded included the speaker of the House of Representatives and the owner of the local radio station. Police opened fire and killed one of the nationalist assailants and arrested five others. U.S. newspapers ran dramatic photographs of the “bullet-riddled body of Miguel Angel Antongiorgi.”⁸³

The American governor was cool in the crisis, and he made a point of displaying his coolness to the press. “What damn poor shots they are,” he was reported to have remarked. When the parade was over, Winship read his prepared address “as if nothing had happened.” He talked about the importance of Puerto Rico retaining the “help and sympathy” of the United States and that the people “do nothing to cast doubt on the unquestionable fact that the island as a whole is decidedly loyal to the United States Government and the American flag.”⁸⁴

It was a time for taking sides. Enrique Urrutia testified at the trial of the nationalist Elifaz Escobar for the murder of Irizarry. He stood in the court as a prosecution witness and identified the regiment’s American flag and the bullet holes made in it by the nationalist assassins.⁸⁵ The following year—perhaps as a reward for loyalty during the nationalist insurgency, or perhaps to offer him protection from reprisal—the army promoted

⁸¹ See Arturo Morales Carrion, *Puerto Rico, A Political and Cultural History* (New York, 1983), 238–39.

⁸² *Connellsville (PA) Daily Courier*, July 26, 1938.

⁸³ *Middletown (NY) Times Herald*, July 29, 1938.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, July 26, 1938, 1; *Connellesville (PA) Daily Courier*, July 26, 1938.

⁸⁵ *New York Times*, Aug. 31 and Sept. 2, 1938.

Urrutia and transferred him to the U.S. mainland. In 1940, he was in Indiana as state recruiting officer, reporting proudly on the state's achieving a peacetime volunteering record.⁸⁶ He was a Carlisle success story and a loyal defender of the United States. His experience of empire had left him an ardent civic nationalist. In May 1941, the army transferred him to Pittsburgh to become chief of the Second Military Area of the Organized Reserve.⁸⁷

Enrique Urrutia attended the December 7 America First meeting as a civilian. He told a reporter afterwards that the meeting had made him angry. "I thought this was a patriots' meeting, but this is a traitors' meeting!" he said. Perhaps, as a product of American empire himself, the America First crowd's fierce belief that military engagement and expansion overseas inevitably threatened democracy at home offended him. Perhaps the logic of isolationist nationalism eluded him. He brought to the mainland some of the sharp polarities of Puerto Rican politics—for the United States or against it, American patriot or nationalist rebel. But, western Pennsylvania was a different place. What it meant to be an American in the multiethnic society of Pittsburgh was contested along many fronts. In Puerto Rico, the issue was assimilation or independence. In Pennsylvania, there was Anglo ascendancy amid an immigrant society, and there was the novel sense, for a man from one of the elite families of San Juan with its connections to Spain and another empire, of being perceived as an outsider—or, as one observer remembered him being called, an "Oakland bum."⁸⁸

The presence of Enrique Urrutia, his embodied identity—his voice, appearance, and demeanor—was a living reminder of American empire. He came from the empire to speak for the nation. The America First organizers' self-understanding was that they came from the nation to speak against empire. Urrutia embodied the history of colonization, and his personal history contained reminders of the historical subordination of those perceived as nonwhite peoples within the American nation. The America First organizers generally denied that racial history, preferring the languages of civic nationalism, equality, and democracy. They saw democracy threatened by too close an engagement with (nonwhite)

⁸⁶ "Indiana Recruiting Reaches All Time High in October," *Kokomo (IN) Tribune*, Nov. 1, 1940.

⁸⁷ *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, May 27, 1941.

⁸⁸ Marylynne Pitz, "A Decision That Will Live in Infamy," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Dec. 2, 2001.

peoples abroad. But, of course, even within the territory of what became the United States, there was a history of racial subordination, which could be glimpsed that day in December in the biographies of the other figures on the stage.

Chester Hale Sipe

Chester Hale Sipe, the former state senator was born, lived, and died in the same house in South Buffalo, Pennsylvania.⁸⁹ In 1941, he was sixty-one years old, and Robert Hagy described him on that day in December as “ruddy” and “ruralish” in appearance.⁹⁰ Like many of the eminent Pennsylvanians who took a public stand on the war, Sipe had deep historical interests. A lawyer by profession, he had devoted considerable time and energy, as a much-published amateur historian and prolific public speaker, to keeping alive the memory of Pennsylvania’s frontier wars. His books on early Pennsylvania Native American history included *The Indian Chiefs of Pennsylvania* (1927), which he claimed had had “a larger circulation than any other specialized books relating to Pennsylvania history,” and *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania* (1929).⁹¹ Among his five other books on colonial history were one on Mount Vernon and the Washington family and his popular history *Fort Ligonier and Its Times* (1932), which told the story of the first fort “built by men of the Anglo Saxon race” west of the Alleghenies. Sipe presented that book as a contribution to balancing the dominance of New England, and a too-Anglocentric history of the United States, with the Pennsylvanian story, in which Germans and Swedes had also played important roles.⁹² He lamented that Pennsylvania children could name the *Mayflower*, but not the ships that had brought the Swedes to Delaware and Pennsylvania. This was an important part of the nation’s history because Pennsylvania, “in having religious liberty and the mixture of racial stocks from the very first, was AMERICAN from the very first.”⁹³ Sipe campaigned to get Pennsylvania schools to adopt history books that did “adequately treat the

⁸⁹ “C. Hale Sipe, “Once State Senator, Dies at Age 79,” *Kittanning (PA) Simpsons’ Daily Leader-Times*, July 27, 1960.

⁹⁰ *December 7: The First Thirty Hours*, 3.

⁹¹ See Sipe lecture flyer at: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/traveling-culture/chau1/pdf/sipe/1/brochure.pdf>.

⁹² “Pennsylvania Crusader,” *Time*, Oct. 23, 1933.

⁹³ Sipe lecture flyer.

part Pennsylvania played in the formation of this great American union." Too many books in current use, he said, "fail to tell the complete historical story."⁹⁴

Sipe's history was nationalist as well as regionalist. Much of *Fort Ligonier* recalled the "infamous alliance" of the British with the Indians of the region, who had spread "terror desolation and death" through western Pennsylvania.⁹⁵ In 1933, Sipe spoke at the reinterment of the bones of a party that died in 1780 in the Revolutionary War, "killed by Indian allies of the British" who had "stained the soil of these valleys with the blood of patriots, combatants and non-combatants alike." In a long emotive passage, Sipe reminded his audience that it was the British who had paid their Indian allies to perform these deeds ("the Indian was paid for slaughtering children before the eyes of their anguished parents") and suggested that it was the British, as "children of civilization, education and Christianity," who deserved the greater part of the moral condemnation for unleashing a "storm of blood and death" in revolutionary Pennsylvania.⁹⁶ Sipe's history not only aimed to decenter New England within American history, but also to place the role of the British in North America under a sharp moral scrutiny.

As a historian, Sipe was drawn to writing about war and its place in the making of nations and the unmaking of empires. In 1938, he spoke at the commemoration of the Battle of Bushy Run—"the most bitterly contested battle between the Indian and the white man on the Western continent," which had ended in a victory that "assured colonists the ownership of the continent of North America, and marked the end of Indian supremacy." His was an admiring history of frontier warriors. On the settler side, he directly linked the revolutionary birth of the nation to frontier conflict, observing that the Pennsylvania frontiersmen, "accustomed from childhood to the war whoop of the Indian and the whistle of bullets," had thus "received that training in hardship which made them the backbone of Washington's army." In fact, were it not for these Indian wars in Pennsylvania, he concluded, "the Revolutionary War would have been doomed to failure." But, there was also martial valor on the other side. In his lecture on "The High Spots of the Indian History of

⁹⁴ "Histories Scored at SAR Banquet," *New Castle (PA) News*, Mar. 15, 1934.

⁹⁵ Chester Hale Sipe, *Fort Ligonier and Its Times* (Harrisburg, PA, 1932), vii, 586; Sipe lecture flyer.

⁹⁶ "The Massacre of Capt. Wm. Phillips' Scouts," *Huntington (PA) Daily News*, May 29, 1933.

Pennsylvania,” Sipe was concerned to point out “the many virtues of the great race which fought to the death for its home and hunting grounds and whose beautiful and sounding names will linger forever on our Pennsylvania mountains and along our Pennsylvania streams like the vibrations of deathless music.”⁹⁷ The indigenous peoples could take an honored place in the national history as fallen warriors.

Sipe believed strongly in the present nation-making purposes of history. One of the “principal guarantees of the perpetuity of the American Nation,” he wrote, “is a proper appreciation on the part of its citizens of the sufferings and sacrifices of its founders.”⁹⁸ He was very concerned that those who had fought for the nation receive adequate recognition and honor. In 1929, as an attorney in Butler, Pennsylvania, he had persuaded a judge to suspend sentence on a veteran who had been charged with possessing intoxicating liquor. The old soldier told the court that he had been among those assigned to guard Sitting Bull after his capture in 1876 and that he had also fought in the Spanish-American War. Sipe succeeded in persuading the judge that leniency should be shown because the man’s life had been one of “great hardship” and because, as he reminded the court, a U.S. army soldier on the Indian campaigns was actually supplied by the nation with a weekly liquor allowance, thus awakening, in this case, a continuing desire for it.⁹⁹

Sipe and his work would have reminded an informed observer in December 1941 that the democratic nation in whose defense the America First Committee was rallying rested upon victories in earlier racial and imperial wars. He spoke up regularly for the memory of the colonial and frontier past and discovered ways to memorialize that past in the present. He sought means to educate modern Pennsylvanians about the origins of their nation in war and the long history of Anglo-American relations in the region. A reader of his histories would not have been surprised that he came out against assisting Britain in defending its empire in 1941, nor that he was distressed at the prospect of war that was not immediately required for the defense of the nation. In a settler society in which the claims to land and legitimacy rested upon “civilization,” the failure to achieve civilized modernity without war was deeply troubling. An

⁹⁷ *Gettysburg Times*, Aug. 4, 1938.

⁹⁸ Sipe, *Fort Ligonier*, 661.

⁹⁹ “Judge Galbraith Shows Leniency to War Veteran,” *Kittanning (PA) Simpsons’ Daily Leader-Times*, June 18, 1929.

America First supporter from Pennsylvania wrote to Gerald Nye in June 1941 to say that the memory of the First World War, and the propaganda that had led to American involvement, was still strong, but that this time the people were better informed and, hence, less likely to be fooled. "They had better turn the country back to us common folk," he wrote, "And if we can't do better we'll 'give it back to the Indians.'"¹⁰⁰

Irene Castle McLaughlin

In 1941, a newspaper reader would have recalled that Irene Castle McLaughlin had been in the news for all the wrong reasons. The manager of her suburban Chicago animal refuge, Orphans of the Storm, had been accused of stealing pets from good homes—of racketeering in dogs.¹⁰¹ Sonya Zaranof, a milliner once employed by Castle McLaughlin, unsuccessfully sued her former boss for slander, claiming that Castle McLaughlin stated at a public event in Los Angeles that "her hats are terrible" and "she is a drunkard."¹⁰² Meanwhile, Irene was suing her third husband, Major Frederick McLaughlin, the wealthy coffee merchant and owner of the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team, for divorce and custody of their two children on the grounds of violence.¹⁰³

None of that detracted, however, from her enduring celebrity, which stemmed from her early dancing career with first husband Vernon Castle. The Castles had huge success as a dancing team, popularizing ragtime and foxtrot dances, in part through their dance school (Castle House) and nightclub (Castles by the Sea).¹⁰⁴ Their major cultural achievement was to introduce black forms of dance among white people, rendering them tamer, safer, and more respectable. In their book *Modern Dancing*, the Castles set out to show that dancing "properly executed, is neither vulgar nor immodest, but, on the contrary, the personification of refinement, grace, and modesty."¹⁰⁵ They toured with James Reese Europe's African American orchestra and then employed it as their house band, the Castle

¹⁰⁰ George Bentley (Perkasie, PA) to Senator Gerald Nye, June 12, 1941, Nye Papers, Hoover Library, West Branch, IA. The reference was, perhaps, to a Rodgers and Hart song, "Give It Back to the Indians," from the 1939 musical *Too Many Girls*.

¹⁰¹ "Irene Defends Her Dog Haven at Pet Trial," *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1939.

¹⁰² "Irene Castle Denies Charges in \$150,000 Slander Trial," *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 1940.

¹⁰³ "Beating Alleged as Irene Castle Seeks Divorce," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 24, 1937.

¹⁰⁴ Eve Golden, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution* (Lexington, KY, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Vernon and Irene Castle, *Modern Dancing* (New York, 1914), 18.

House Orchestra.¹⁰⁶ Lewis Erenberg argues that their work was one of containment, utilizing the energy of black dance, but controlling it. Irene described how they learned dances from Africa, which had to be “considerably toned down before they can be used in the drawing room.”¹⁰⁷ Such dances, she recalled, started “in the waterfront dives in New Orleans or out on the Barbary Coast,” but when she and Vernon “came along and danced in what people considered a distinguished way, they used to bring ministers to the café de l’Opera in New York to watch us to prove that it didn’t have to be sinful.”¹⁰⁸ In 1939, the *Chicago Defender’s* columnist, Lucius Harper, commented approvingly that the Castles had “represented our people’s effort and interest in the realm of popular music and stage”—they “went the limit in recognizing musical ability in our race.” When theater managers objected to the Castles’ using Europe’s “Negro orchestra,” he reported, Irene would respond, “If you don’t want them, you can’t have us.”¹⁰⁹

Irene’s career had thus been closely associated with negotiating the color line and with deftly importing across it. But her racial record was mixed. Vernon Castle died in a plane crash in 1918, and Irene subsequently increased her work in cinema. She starred in a 1917 serial film—*Patria*—made by Wharton Studios in Ithaca, New York, with the backing of William Randolph Hearst. Castle’s character, Patria Channing, was the “sole survivor of a patriotic American family of munitions makers,” who ended up fighting an invading army of Mexican and Japanese soldiers. President Woodrow Wilson wrote personally to request that the film be withdrawn because “it is extremely unfair to the Japanese and I fear that it is calculated to stir up a great deal of hostility.”¹¹⁰ *Patria* dramatized Hearst’s belief that the Japanese were a “domineering, intolerant race with a bitter hatred for the white race.”¹¹¹

In 1939, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers starred in the film *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, and Irene served as advisor. The film was

¹⁰⁶ R. Reid Badger, “James Reese Europe and the Prehistory of Jazz,” *American Music* 7 (1989): 51–52.

¹⁰⁷ Irene Castle, quoted in Lewis Erenberg, “Everybody’s Doin’ It: The Pre-World War One Dance Craze, the Castles and the Modern American Girl,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (1975): 163.

¹⁰⁸ “Dancing’s Queen to Be Judge at Music Festival,” *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1947.

¹⁰⁹ Lucius C. Harper, “The Castles Knew No Color Line in Music World,” *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 8, 1939.

¹¹⁰ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston, 2000), 261–62.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Gray A. Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2006), 230.

generally well received, but Lucius Harper noted acidly in the *Chicago Defender* that the studio had rejected requests to use a black orchestra—"Hollywood has a tendency to rewrite history to its own liking."¹¹² The film had no black characters, nor any hint of the Castles' role in adopting and popularizing African American dance forms. Irene noted in an interview that their "Negro factotum and protector" Walter Ash, "who watched over us like a parent," had become a white character in the film. "Those things were to be expected I suppose," she added.¹¹³

Irene joined the America First Committee at least in part under the influence of the man who was to become her fourth husband, George Enzinger. Her son told a biographer that she gave her support because she hated war, but also because of the German husband—"George spoke German. They got a German cook. . . . They were very much against getting into the war."¹¹⁴ That may have been her main motivation. But her earlier career demonstrated that Irene Castle understood very well how much the respectable white nation depended upon a process of cultural importation and appropriation across lines of ethnicity and race. As a cultural entrepreneur, she knew that ethnic and racial borders were porous and changing. Her biography illustrates well the point often made at the time by those who preferred the label "anti-interventionist" to "isolationist"—it was possible to be a cultural nationalist and not be isolated from the world; one could still be actively engaged with diverse cultures. Even those Americans who most prominently aligned themselves with an isolationist position had lives that were deeply intertwined with the nation's complex racial history.

Gerald Nye

Gerald Nye was a nationalist who professed to know for certain what was American and what was not. "We ought to have a policy of our own," he told a meeting in New York in 1940, "and we will have it if we will do more loving of things that are American and less hating of things that are exclusively European."¹¹⁵ Nye was also a populist democrat—he had begun his political career by running on the slogan "North Dakota for the

¹¹² Harper, "Castles Knew No Color Line in Music World."

¹¹³ Bosley Crowther, "Castles in Pictures," *New York Times*, Apr. 2, 1939.

¹¹⁴ Golden, *Vernon and Irene Castle's Ragtime Revolution*, 246.

¹¹⁵ "Nye Sees Nation on Road to War," *New York Times*, June 12, 1940.

North Dakotans,” and he had been a strong supporter of Father Charles Coughlin and Dr. Francis Townsend in the 1930s. He championed the idea that, except in cases of direct attack, a referendum should be required before Congress could issue a declaration of war, and in December 1940 he announced that he would sponsor a bill seeking a constitutional amendment requiring a popular vote before American troops could be committed outside the western hemisphere.¹¹⁶ Finally, Nye was a materialist who sought economic explanations for most forms of national and international behavior. Long before Eisenhower named the “military-industrial complex,” Gerald Nye warned, in plain and dramatic language, of the links between industry and the military. He cautioned, “What we need to fear is the establishment of an economy here that is dependent upon war, an economy that affords prosperity through the flow of human blood.”¹¹⁷

Nye’s racial views were less pronounced than his economic views, but they were nonetheless important to his career. He opposed enactment of the quotas in the 1924 Immigration Act on the grounds that they would decrease the flow of immigrants from northern Europe—those “rugged, hardy, honest, and courageous people” from Germany and Scandinavia, who were of course a significant part of his North Dakota constituency.¹¹⁸ He sponsored the Nye-Lea bill in 1935, which granted citizenship to American veterans of Asian ancestry.¹¹⁹ In the fall of 1941, he chaired a Senate inquiry into Hollywood’s alleged support of intervention in the war, charging that a small group of movie producers, “all born abroad and animated by the persecutions and hatreds of the Old World,” had been injecting prowar propaganda into American films.¹²⁰ Accused of anti-Semitism, anti-interventionists responded with charges about British and U.S. interventionist racism. The investigating committee heard that the British Purchasing Commission in the United States would not employ anyone whose parents were German, Jewish, or Irish Catholic.¹²¹ Nye

¹¹⁶ “Nye, Capper to Seek Referendum on War,” *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1940.

¹¹⁷ “Nye Sees Nation on Road to War.”

¹¹⁸ Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis, 1962), 64–65.

¹¹⁹ Lucy E. Salyer, “Baptism by Fire: Race, Military Service, and U.S. Citizenship Policy, 1918–1935,” *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 847–76.

¹²⁰ Frederick R. Barkley, “Movies Fed Propaganda, Nye Charges at Inquiry,” *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1941.

¹²¹ “Charge British Hire Help Here on Racial Basis,” *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1941.

accused interventionists of fostering racial prejudices throughout the nation and of pointing the “finger of suspicion” at racial groups such as the Germans.¹²² He also accused them of bringing the politics of racial prejudice to the United States by speaking publicly about anti-Semitism—“if we are going to adopt racial prejudice in our American thinking and planning,” he said, the consequences would be the same as in Europe.¹²³ More threateningly, Nye warned American Jews of the dangers of the perception that “our Jewish citizenry would willingly have our country and its sons taken into the foreign war.”¹²⁴ Like other isolationist leaders, then, Nye’s career record inevitably revealed a life-long engagement with issues of race and nation.

David Aiken Reed

The chair of the Pittsburgh A.F.C. branch was former U.S. senator David Aiken Reed. Born in Pittsburgh in 1880, educated in Pittsburgh and at Princeton University, he practiced as a lawyer and served in World War I as a major in the field artillery. His father, James H. Reed, was Andrew Carnegie’s attorney and helped found the U.S. Steel Corporation. David Reed served as a conservative Republican senator from Pennsylvania between 1922 and 1935, losing his seat to a Democrat in the 1934 election. In 1939, journalist Raymond Clapper described him as an “unusually able, courageous, inflexible Tory.”¹²⁵ Reed displayed his independence when he denounced Lindbergh’s Des Moines speech, saying that he deplored any insertion of “the religious or racial issue into so grave a concern” as the antiwar movement.¹²⁶

As a decorated war veteran, Reed spoke with some authority on the subject of war. “I have seen the horrible side of war from the front,” he told the League of Women Voters in 1934, “and I would consider it the greatest thing of my life if I could prevent war.”¹²⁷ In 1923 and 1924, Reed served as a member of the American Battle Monuments Commission. He opposed revision of the Neutrality Act in 1941—allowing

¹²² “Aim of President Is War, Nye Says,” *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1941.

¹²³ “Nye Blames Anti-Semitism on Opponents,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1941.

¹²⁴ “Nye Hits Back at Willkie in Movie Inquiry,” *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1941.

¹²⁵ Raymond Clapper, “In Washington,” *Chester (PA) Times*, Nov. 29, 1939.

¹²⁶ “As I See It.”

¹²⁷ “Reed Stands for Adequate Defense,” *Chester (PA) Times*, Oct. 27, 1934.

the arming of merchant ships would be a step towards war, he warned, and “if we stay out of war our influence for a just peace will be greater.”¹²⁸

The management of the racial composition of the United States was the central theme in Reed’s political career. With Representative Albert Johnson from Washington State, who had strong links to the eugenics movement, Reed was one of the architects of the 1924 Immigration Act, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act.¹²⁹ The act based American immigration quotas on the percentages of different national groups already in the United States in 1890. But, it included in that base population only the “white” population—it explicitly excluded immigrants from the New World or Asia and their descendants, as well as descendants of slaves and of the “American aborigines.” The calculations were complex and dubious, conflating race and nation as though immigrants themselves normally came from ethnically homogenous nations, so that their national origins also represented their race.¹³⁰ In 1929, President Herbert Hoover made it clear that while he was in favor of immigration restriction, he had serious doubts about the quota calculations. He did, however, bow to congressional pressure and signed the quota law into effect in July 1929.¹³¹ The result was a formula that significantly increased the number of people permitted to emigrate to the United States from the United Kingdom, while it lowered the allowable number from most other nations—hence Nye’s concerns about German and Scandinavian immigration.¹³²

David Reed’s arguments in favor of this quota system had to do with collective racial capacities for self-government. Recent immigrants, he maintained, had come from races “untrained in self government,” and hence they were liable to remain too dependent upon government. Such immigrants were likely to shun the “common life” of the American people. In Reed’s account, the racial antipathy was mutual. The reason native-born Americans were loath to do manual labor, he claimed, was because of their “unwillingness to associate in intimate daily contact with men of alien speech and thought and habits.” Reed professed to be well

¹²⁸ “President Backs Ship Law Repeal,” *New York Times*, Oct. 23, 1941.

¹²⁹ Desmond S. King, *In the Name of Liberalism: Illiberal Social Policy in the United States and Britain* (New York, 1999), 107–8.

¹³⁰ On this point see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 23.

¹³¹ “Hoover Insists National Origins Act to Be Repealed,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1929.

¹³² Roger Daniels, “Two Cheers for Immigration,” in *Debating American Immigration: 1882–Present*, ed. Roger Daniels and Otis Graham (Lanham, MD, 2001), 22.

pleased with the effects of the new law. It finally settled the question of European immigration so that future American population increases would derive from northern and western Europe—"mostly people who speak our language before they get here, mostly people who have inherited from their forebears a capacity for self government."¹³³

A United States that was more racially homogenous would also, Reed argued, be more individualist in outlook. Asserting the connection between the two, he looked forward to the United States becoming a "more homogenous nation, more self-reliant, more independent and more closely knit by common purpose and common ideas."¹³⁴ In 1927, he spoke out against critics of the immigrant quota system, describing them as "internationally minded," rather than "American minded," people—"somebody owns this country," he said, "either we own it, or they do," but "we got here first." A key difference, Reed claimed, was that immigrant minorities were group minded, whereas "the American minded person has no group sense."¹³⁵

Albert Johnson was particularly opposed to Japanese immigration, and Reed was one of those senators who had swung to supporting the exclusion of the Japanese, as well as other Asian peoples, from the United States. He explained that he thought the friendship between Japan and the United States would prove "more lasting" under such a policy.¹³⁶ Reed was part of the U.S. delegation to the 1930 London naval disarmament conference, and his task was to negotiate relative naval strength with the Japanese. Harold Nicolson recalled that Reed "dealt with great ability with the Japanese problem."¹³⁷

Reed's prominent role in formulating and advocating immigration-restriction policy earned him fame in national politics, but it forever complicated his political status and damaged his ability to get elected in multiethnic Pennsylvania. In election campaigns after 1924, Reed constantly battled accusations that he was prejudiced against immigrants. He made the outer limits of his own racial views known in 1924, when he denounced the Ku Klux Klan. He claimed, "I see no excuse for the use of masks and other disguise by men who profess to be acting on proper

¹³³ "New Alien Law Dams Floods of Immigrants," *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 15, 1925.

¹³⁴ David A. Reed, "America of the Melting Pot Comes to End," *New York Times*, Apr. 27, 1924.

¹³⁵ "Senator Warns against Opening Gates to Aliens," *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1927.

¹³⁶ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 49.

¹³⁷ Harold Nicolson, *Dwight Morrow* (New York, 1935), 358.

motives. I see no excuse for a revival in this country of race prejudice and religious prejudices.”¹³⁸ But, in the 1928 election campaign, the significant Italian American community in Pennsylvania mobilized against him, the Italian-language press identified him as the archenemy of Italian Americans, and Reed then attempted to appeal to Anglo-American voters with the message that his immigration bill had saved them from the “competition of hordes of aliens.”¹³⁹ Kenneth Heineman suggests that Reed was able to support immigration restriction and retain the backing of the big steel industries in Pennsylvania because they had turned to importing southern blacks as “a new source of labor that was Protestant, Republican, and willing to work for even less” than European immigrants.¹⁴⁰ There was however one Italian whom Reed publicly professed to admire. In 1932, he called for a strong dictatorial leader, saying that “if this country ever needed a Mussolini, it needs one now.” But that comment also came back to haunt him—it was gleefully recalled in October 1934 by Postmaster General James Farley in his speech to celebrate the opening of the new eight million-dollar Pittsburgh post office.¹⁴¹

In the 1934 election, in which he lost his senate seat to a Democrat, Reed’s opponents again regularly accused him of harboring denigratory racial views. The National Catholic Welfare Conference labeled him “racist” for his role in restricting Catholic and Jewish immigration—the 1924 act had drastically reduced Catholic and Jewish immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Reed defended himself against what he described as an “unfair and untrue” negative campaign, a “vicious whispering attack” upon his racial views, by stating:

I am supposed to hate the negroes, yet I have been one of the staunchest supporters in the U.S. Senate of the anti-lynching bill. I am supposed to hate the Jews, yet there is nothing in my record to justify any such suggestion.

It all came back, Reed recognized, to his authorship of the 1924 act and its quotas. “It is true I was the father of that bill,” he said, “and I am proud

¹³⁸ “Klan Has No Excuse to Live, Says Senator David A. Reed,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 8, 1924.

¹³⁹ Stefano Luconi, *From Paesani to White Ethnics: The Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany, NY, 2001), 63.

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park, PA, 1999), 38, 65.

¹⁴¹ “Farley Says Reed Wanted Dictator,” *New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1934.

of it." It had saved the jobs of fifty thousand Americans. "There is no discrimination by race, nationality or religion in the immigration law," he continued, "unless it is the fact that we gave no quota to the Congo district in Africa."¹⁴² That Reed's best retort rested upon the absence of a quota that would have allowed African immigration into a nation with an African American population of thirteen million—when otherwise the act was structured specifically to allow more immigration from nations already well represented in the United States—illuminates well his taken-for-granted sense that the United States was in essence a white nation.

Conclusion

The Urrutia incident was a fascinating and visible moment of confusion about identity and authority—confusion about the boundaries of the nation in whose name these loyal Americans were rallying. That a voice with a foreign accent should provoke suspicion of political radicalism—and even a feeling that its owner need not be heard, especially when speaking out of turn—was perhaps not in itself surprising, although in a city of immigrants such as Pittsburgh, it is worth some reflection. The reflex sense that authority did not speak with a foreign accent—that the real America whose interests needed to be protected by America First spoke unaccented English—is of course highly significant in the midst of a public debate in which Britain and Britishness were always at the very center of contention.

In the heat of the war debate, on both sides, the idea that Americans were fundamentally and enduringly defined by their racial and ethnic identities surfaced frequently—in a state like Pennsylvania, it was part of the common sense of the day that German, Italian, and Irish Americans opposed U.S. intervention, while the Anglophile upper classes and the Jews supported it. Too much historical work, however, simply revisits the polemics of the time by identifying these broader patterns of response, adjudicating the claims and counterclaims of racial, religious, and ethnic prejudice, and listing the ways in which ethnic and religious group self-interest operated. That path leads only to a shopping list of apparently self-conscious groups with clearly defined self-interests—a too-rational

¹⁴² "Unfair, Untrue Says Reed," *Titusville (PA) Herald*, Nov. 1, 1934.

history and, ultimately, an ahistorical one. Panning further back, we see that the issues in the war debate were never only to do with attitudes towards nations and nationalities as fixed and stable entities.

What I have tried to demonstrate here is that, in Pittsburgh in 1941, while ethnicity and race were never far from the surface of public discourse about the war, nor very distant from the experience of participants in the war debate, their effects were not always linear or predictable. The war debate exposed, rendered visible, the tissues of ethnic and racial connections that held the nation together. It made the protocols of public speech—to what extent ethnic and racial identities were publicly discussable—matters of urgent public concern. The race-free, democratic nation—the civic-nationalist nation—could be imagined only by suppressing the biographical traces of the racial and ethnic legacies of previous history.

Isolationists, no less than other Americans, were influenced by and lived within the nation's racialized history. Isolationists were cultural nationalists—people with a strong and coherent ideology. Far from actually being isolated, they were people with a populist, democratic, but exclusive vision. Their heart-felt desire to isolate the United States from the world and from history embodied a fantasy of retreat into a safe and familiar home. The lives of the main actors on the Pittsburgh stage in 1941 demonstrate how symbolic, even fantastic, that desire was. Each individual biography reveals not isolation from difference, but a life spent actively managing, shaping, memorializing, and reimagining the racial identity of the nation.

That nations are imagined communities is old news in the humanities and social sciences. But, a more nuanced rereading of the war debate makes it clear that, even in this moment of national crisis, the definition and boundaries of the nation were contested and unclear. Was it defined by its civic qualities, or by racial identities? That Pennsylvanians, like other Americans, were confused is not surprising. They lived—as individuals as well as citizens—in history, surrounded by the traces of the past, and they made their choices about the future by looking backward as well as forward. This account of the war controversy draws attention to the history sedimented in individual biographies, to all the ways in which the American nation—represented in nationalist discourse as a natural and self-evident unit—was itself the product of earlier migrations and cultural mixings, controversial wars, violent conquests, and explicit and

covert racial subordinations. We need to understand the isolationist desire to “live within ourselves” both as a powerful American longing and as a fantasy, wholly unrealizable in the actual, historical United States.

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