

PREQUEL



AN AMERICAN FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM

RACHEL MADDOU

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BLOWOUT

PREQUEL

AN AMERICAN FIGHT
AGAINST FASCISM

RACHEL MADDOW

 CROWN
NEW YORK

Copyright © 2023 by Rachel Maddow

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Crown, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

CROWN and the Crown colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Photograph credits appear on [this page](#).

Hardback ISBN 9780593444511

Ebook ISBN 9780593444528

crownpublishing.com

Book design by Elizabeth Rendfleisch, adapted for ebook

Cover design: Christopher Brand

ep_prh_6.1_145301140_c0_r1

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Cast of Characters](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One: The Glass House](#)

[Chapter Two: "Come to My Feast"](#)

[Chapter Three: *Umwege*](#)

[Chapter Four: "Louisiana Was Not Quite Ready"](#)

[Chapter Five: "He Had a Very High Opinion of Me"](#)

[Chapter Six: Bullet Holes](#)

[Chapter Seven: Silver Shirts](#)

[Chapter Eight: *Tikkun Olam*](#)

[Chapter Nine: "Probably Ten Times More"](#)

[Chapter Ten: Bound and Obligated](#)

[Chapter Eleven: "The Handwriting on the Wall Is Clear as a Bell"](#)

[Chapter Twelve: Hollywood!](#)

[Chapter Thirteen: Country Gentlemen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen: Small World](#)

[Chapter Fifteen: Trip 19](#)

[Chapter Sixteen: "Promiscuous Use of His Frank"](#)

[Chapter Seventeen: "I'm Not Supposed to Be Doing This Kind of
Work"](#)

[Chapter Eighteen: To Tell the Truth](#)

[Chapter Nineteen: "Mr. Maloney Would Have Pulled No Punches"](#)

[Chapter Twenty: Bedlam](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one: “Paralyze the Will”](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two: “Wise Choices”](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Notes](#)

[Photograph Credits](#)

[Index](#)

[By Rachel Maddow](#)

[About the Author](#)

145301140

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There were millions of words written about the rise of (and fight against) fascism as it was happening in pre–World War II America: material in books, magazines, newspapers, congressional hearings, government investigations, FBI files, trial transcripts, personal correspondence, et cetera. This makes for many big haystacks to search for many hidden needles. Luckily, I had the benefit of a remarkable amount of recent scholarship by really impressive historians who had already done some serious sifting. Among the most important to this book are Steven J. Ross (*Hitler in Los Angeles*), Charles R. Gallagher (*Nazis of Copley Square*), Bradley W. Hart (*Hitler's American Friends*), and Nancy Beck Young (*Why We Fight: Congress and the Politics of World War II*). These four not only are friends to this book but were friends to the podcast that first got me going on this topic.

Outside of that small group, I need to acknowledge a few other historians and writers, all of whom were key to my understanding both specific pieces of this sprawling story and the larger context. These are James Q. Whitman (*Hitler's American Model*), Laura B. Rosenzweig (*Hollywood's Spies*), Mark Lamster (*The Man in the Glass House*), Gerald Horne (*The Color of Fascism*), Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (*The Nazi Spy Ring in America*), and Steven Watts (*The People's Tycoon*).

I should also mention that there are a bunch of great, very readable contemporaneous sources that you won't regret spending time with if you're lucky enough to find them in used bookstores. I commend to you Henry Reed Hoke (*It's a Secret* and *Black Mail*), John Roy Carlson (*Under Cover*), Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn (*Sabotage*), and O.

John Rogge (*The Official German Report*). There is also Lawrence Dennis's own published account of being a defendant in the great sedition trial (*A Trial on Trial*). Academic sources and biographies on this topic are sparse and sometimes even harder to find than the really old stuff, but there are some great ones out there that were indispensable to this work: Glen Jeansonne (*Women of the Far Right*), Leo P. Ribuffo (*The Old Christian Right*), Donald Warren (*Radio Priest*), Niel M. Johnson (*George Sylvester Viereck*), and Harnett T. Kane (*Huey Long's Louisiana Hayride*).

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

GEORGE SYLVESTER VIERECK, German immigrant, American citizen, Nazi agent

PHILIP JOHNSON, American fanboy of Hitler and fascism who became one of the world's most renowned architects

HUEY LONG, Louisiana pol who gave America a 1930s test-drive for dictatorship

LAWRENCE DENNIS, author of *The Coming American Fascism* and similar treatises; a man with an unexpected and hidden personal history

FATHER CHARLES COUGHLIN, the antisemitic Catholic "Radio Priest" with an audience in the tens of millions

ARNOLD ERIC SEVAREID, cub reporter in Minneapolis who went on to become a famous and erudite CBS News commentator

WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY, who believed he had been visited by Jesus, multiple times; pined after the job of America's Hitler

HENRY ALLEN, violent white supremacist who once tried to "purchase" the Ku Klux Klan

LESLIE FRY, promoter of the Illuminati, the New World Order, and other fantasies she pitched as real; gave the toxic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to Henry Ford

LEON LEWIS, antifascist spymaster of Southern California, American hero

GEORGE DEATHERAGE, American fascist who sought advice from the German embassy, and got it

GENERAL GEORGE VAN HORN MOSELEY, a man big enough to make a play to be the American führer, but small enough that he was not willing to risk his U.S. Army pension to do it

CHARLES B. HUDSON, Nazi-supported antisemitic pamphleteer who came to Washington from Omaha to buck up General Moseley

JOHN C. METCALFE, German American newspaper reporter who went undercover to investigate Nazis all across America

LEON TURROU, FBI special agent who sparked a new kind of cinema in Hollywood

JOHN F. CASSIDY, who led an armed insurrectionist group, complete with automatic rifles from a local U.S. military armory and handmade bombs; considered himself a good, God-fearing Christian

O. JOHN ROGGE, Justice Department prosecutor who was up to his eyeballs in fascist/Nazi treachery for more than a decade

SENATOR ERNEST LUNDEEN (AND HIS WIFE, NORMA), George Sylvester Viereck's first collaborators inside Congress

HARRIET JOHNSON, PHYLLIS POSIVIO, EDWARD CORNEABY, Senate staffers who dropped the dime on the Lundeens

HENRY HOKE, direct-mail advertising guru who helped uncover a remarkable Nazi plot inside Congress

SENATOR BURTON K. WHEELER, powerful U.S. senator with friends in even higher places

SENATOR ROBERT RICE REYNOLDS, rip-roaring pro-fascist pol with some novel ideas about restricting immigration

DILLARD STOKES, *Washington Post* reporter with a knack for being in the right place at the right time

WILLIAM POWER MALONEY, hard-charging and cantankerous Justice Department prosecutor

GEORGE HILL, George Sylvester Viereck's "keyman" inside Congress

REPRESENTATIVE HAMILTON FISH, Hill's boss, who was on good terms with senior officials in Hitler's Germany but detested Franklin Delano Roosevelt

LAURA INGALLS, the most famous and accomplished female pilot living in 1940; also a paid Nazi agent

ELIZABETH DILLING, who did yeoman's work popularizing "Red Scare" tactics long before Joe McCarthy came on the scene, with financial backing from Henry Ford

LOIS DE LAFAYETTE WASHBURN, an antisemitic activist so convinced of her own explosive power that she sometimes called herself T.N.T.

SENATOR WILLIAM LANGER, nicknamed "Wild Bill" for good reason, the best friend a Nazi agent could have in Congress

PROLOGUE

The *House of the Vampire* arrived in 1907, with a pinch of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a dash of Swinburne, and a major crush on Oscar Wilde. Two of the novella's main characters, Jack and Ernest, were named after the split-personality lead character in Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In *The House of the Vampire*, the hero, Reginald Clarke, is a handsome middle-aged boulevardier, bon vivant, and night prowler. Clarke is also a magnet for impressionable and gifted young males, often ones with fetchingly long eyelashes, and always with "subtler, more sympathetic, more feminine" ways than the general run of men. The book's twenty-two-year-old author, George Sylvester Viereck (he went by Sylvester, which sounded more continental), was himself a pillow-lipped and self-professed sensualist who said he worshipped Wilde as one of his three life models, alongside Napoleon and Christ. "Wilde is splendid," he wrote. "I admire, nay I love him. He is so deliciously unhealthy, so beautifully morbid. I love all things evil! I love the splendor of decay, the foul beauty of corruption." Sylvester, at age seventeen, had struck up an apparently romantic friendship with Wilde's most notorious paramour, Lord Alfred Douglas. Young Viereck also loved to show off the framed violet he said he had plucked from Wilde's grave.

The House of the Vampire is seen today by precisely no one as the world's greatest gay vampire fiction, but it does have the distinction of being the world's first known publication in that now ample oeuvre. Viereck's hero vampire, Reginald, swaggers through the book seducing younger men, gently tugging them away from the unerringly difficult or hag-like women who otherwise seek their attentions. "A tremendous force

trembled in his very fingertips,” Viereck wrote of Reginald. “He was like a gigantic dynamo, charged with the might of ten thousand magnetic storms.” In Viereck’s voluptuous, pretentious, deeply stupid romp, Reginald is seeking not blood—like Bram Stoker’s original vampire—but something more rarefied. He squeezes from his prey every drop of literary, musical, and aesthetic juice they possess, “absorbing from life the elements essential to artistic completion,” as the hero explains. By the novel’s close, everybody is drained but vampire Reginald.

“In every age there have been great men—and they became great by absorbing the work of other men,” Viereck wrote of his first novel. “My vampire is the Overman of Nietzsche. He is justified in the pilfering of other men’s brains.”

Viereck loosed his genre-pioneering book on the world in 1907 with considerable hopes. “You’ve heard of the ‘great American novel’?” Viereck wrote to one critic. “Well, I’ve written it.”

The critics did not agree.

“The style of the book was quite impossible,” wrote one, “keyed from the first word to the last in the highest pitch of emotion.” Still, though, the book did sell some copies, and it even had its own brief run on the stage, in an adaptation by a man who later co-wrote the screenplay for *The Wizard of Oz*.

—

VIERECK HAD BEEN born in Munich and immigrated to America with his parents in 1896, when he was eleven years old. He had always been drawn to the memory and the landscape of his birthplace. There was mystery and intrigue in Sylvester’s family history in Germany, including unproved claims to royal lineage. Viereck’s father, Louis, was rumored to be the issue of a brief affair between a famous stage actress in the Prussian royal court and Kaiser Wilhelm I. The kaiser, if he was indeed the father, was in no position to acknowledge this son, and he never did.

Royalty or not, Louis ended up a Marxist, joining the anti-monarch Socialist Party in Germany, and possibly getting involved in a plot to assassinate the kaiser. This tale seems a tad on the nose, in the Oedipal sense, but it is true that Louis was run out of Berlin and then Munich and

then all of Germany, on account of his Marxist proclivities. He landed in New York, but not exactly on his feet. Sylvester's father never found much success in the New World. He organized German Americans in support of the presidential candidates William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, wrote a forgotten monograph on German-language instruction in American schools, and gave the occasional lecture on German culture and society. For his young son, rife as he was with artistic gifts and a robust, unerring self-confidence in those gifts, Louis was a distant and feckless father. While Louis eventually ended up putting his tail between his legs and going back to Berlin to finish out his days giving lectures, this time about American culture and society, Sylvester, naturalized citizen of the United States, decided to stay put in New York, an electrified city in an up-and-coming country—a place with a trajectory matched to his own arcing ambition.

By the time he was in his mid-twenties (the commercial and critical flop of *The House of the Vampire* notwithstanding), Viereck was recognized as a rising star in American literature. He had published a volume of well-regarded poems. Whispers that he was maybe the grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm I were probably good for sales, and also for contributing to the almost inexplicably fawning publicity he had a knack for attracting. He was “the most widely discussed literary man in the United States today,” one glossy middlebrow magazine wrote of Viereck, “unanimously accused of being a genius.”

Whatever his gifts in the realm of literature, poetry, or self-promotion, where Viereck truly distinguished himself was as an advocate to the American public for his beloved fatherland, a cause that he took on with crusading passion at the advent of World War I. When a German U-boat torpedoed a New York-bound passenger liner in May 1915, drowning 1,200 civilians, including 124 Americans, Viereck defended Germany for doing it. “The facts absolutely justify the action of the Germans if the *Lusitania* was, indeed, torpedoed by a German submarine,” Viereck wrote in a statement to reporters. “Legally and morally there is no basis for any protests on the part of the United States. The *Lusitania* was a British ship. British ships have been instructed by the admiralty to ram submarines and to take active measures against the enemy. Hence every British ship must

be considered in light of a warship.” Germany “means business,” Viereck explained to his fellow Americans, and “does not bluff.” It was, to say the least, an unpopular stand in a country enraged by the loss of civilian life on that torpedoed ocean liner.

Just weeks later, Viereck found himself at the center of an even more concentrated fury. While squiring a visiting German official around Manhattan, Viereck managed to leave behind a briefcase full of secret documents on the Sixth Avenue elevated train. The satchel was quickly grabbed by a federal agent who had been tailing them. Its contents were ferried to Washington and then—with the Wilson administration’s quiet blessing—leaked to the *New York World*, which released them in installments as a bombshell exposé of Germany’s designs on America. The documents in the left-behind briefcase—as showcased in the pages of *The World*—showed vast financial transfers by the German government into a long list of private U.S. bank accounts and detailed discussions among German officials about their efforts to keep American public opinion aligned against the United States joining the world war, to hamper our ability to help our allies, and to generally mess with us in the meantime. The documents showed that Viereck was not just a high-profile pro-German U.S. citizen; he was a paid agent of the German government, which was handsomely bankrolling all his publishing efforts.

After an ensuing furor, Viereck moved to change the name of his pretentious, well-funded, pro-German magazine from *The Fatherland* to the much more corn-fed-sounding *Viereck’s American Weekly*. But the damage was done. The documents from the Sixth Avenue El showed that the German government was spending \$2 million per week (in 1915 dollars; nearly \$60 million a week today) on propaganda and espionage efforts targeting the United States. They also revealed German government discussions about serious sabotage plans, including using straw buyers to secretly purchase U.S. munitions factories and military supplies to prevent that matériel from being provided to our allies fighting Germany in the war.

It was a pain for the Germans to have this all exposed, and a pain for Viereck personally, particularly after the United States finally joined the war effort in 1917. Viereck had been living with his wife’s family in

sleepy Mount Vernon, New York, until an angry mob descended on the house and forced him out into the night. He decided he would wait out the conclusion of the war in New York City, where it was easier to blend into the crowd. But he never really did manage to regain the small purchase he had acquired on the American literary scene.

There's a cracking letter in the files of former president Teddy Roosevelt from around this time in which Roosevelt tells Viereck that if he's so much more supportive of Germany than of the United States, then perhaps Viereck is being a bad citizen of both, so maybe he should renounce his American citizenship, piss off back to Germany, and join the German army, which would at least make him useful to one of the two countries. Viereck did no such thing, but you can tell from the letter how much Roosevelt enjoyed telling him to do it. (He leads off by telling Viereck he has "mental shortcomings" and is "unutterably base," and by the end he is just hollering at him to get out: "You are not a good citizen here. But neither are you a good citizen of Germany. You should go home.") Roosevelt also endorsed a move to eject Viereck from the roster of the Poetry Society of America—perish the thought.

After World War I, as he neared his forties and came to realize he was unlikely to ever scale the tiers of fame he desired, Viereck began, vampirically one could say, to cultivate relations with more celebrated men. He shuttled between Europe and America, seeking out famous statesmen, soldiers, doctors, scientists, businessmen, and writers, then persuading them to sit for interviews. "To me the men to whom I have talked and whose thoughts I record are flashes of the great World Brain," he wrote in a collection of these personality profiles. "Some are incandescent in their intensity; in others the divine flame burns more dimly. Their colours are more varied than the spectrum. I am the spectroscope that reveals the stuff of which they are made, or, translating colour into sound, I am the trumpet through which they convey their message."

His first big get was Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was living in exile in Holland after his defeat in the massively deadly, epic war he had started. "In view of your years-long manly struggle for truth and right, I feel no hesitation in authorizing you to publish the impressions you gathered at

Doorn as the guest of His Majesty,” the kaiser’s aide wrote to Viereck. “I do this the more willingly because I know the communications entrusted to you by his majesty will be made use of by yourself in a manner calculated to promote the true, just interests of Germany.”

Viereck became an annual visitor to Doorn and a trusted mouthpiece of the kaiser, who often greeted him, Viereck’s own son remembered, as “*mon cousin*.” Viereck seemed proud to be able to help the fallen, mostly despised, mostly insane German monarch make sense of why exactly God had abandoned him, the divinely chosen leader of a great nation, in his pursuit of a Christian empire in Europe. The kaiser settled on the shortcomings of the German people as the problem. “We refused in the end to face all risks in preserving faith,” Wilhelm II told Viereck. “The German people performed miracles of endurance, but, at the last, they failed.... We should have fought to the *very* last carrot, the *very* last man, the *very* last round of munitions.... The odds against us, toward the end, were twenty to one. We could still have prevailed, with complete faith in God. We should have trusted in God, not in human logic.”

Viereck ended up getting a remarkable number of Great Men to sit down and talk politics, economics, faith, sex, psychology, and general worldview: Henry Ford, Nikola Tesla, Benito Mussolini, Albert Einstein, the military and political generals of the late war. *I am not a journalist*, he would tell them, *I am a poet*. Viereck was “80 percent clever and strong minded, and 20 percent an impenetrable blockhead,” the playwright George Bernard Shaw said of him. “He generally brings the 20 percent to bear on me.”

But it was Dr. Sigmund Freud who seemed to understand his interviewer best, according to an exchange Viereck recorded. “Our [psychological] complexes are the sources of our weakness,” Freud said to Viereck. “They are also often the source of strength.”

“I wonder what my complexes are?” Viereck asked.

Freud gently reminded him that a serious assessment could take two or three years of real work, but the father of psychoanalysis did have a quick take on George Sylvester Viereck. “You have sought, year after year, the outstanding figures of your generation, invariably men older than yourself.”

“It is part of my work,” Viereck reminded Herr Doktor.

“But it is also your preference,” Freud replied. “The great man is a symbol. Your search is the search of your heart. You are seeking the great man to take the place of the father. It is part of your father complex.”



George Viereck as a young man

George Sylvester Viereck did finally settle on—and worship—a particular father figure. The man was five years his junior, an Austrian plebeian whose rise in the kaiser’s military ranks during the war topped out low at the rank of corporal. When Viereck met him for an interview in 1923, the man had virtually nothing to say about his past and refused to be photographed for the article Viereck was writing. He appeared more poet than politician, Viereck wishfully noted, and sipped tea or cordials with the polish of a “high brow.” But when the thirty-four-year-old housepainter and wannabe messiah shouted the beauties of his new political movement—National Socialism—his listener felt an almost

physical heat. “His voice filled the room,” Viereck wrote, and “cords” on his “forehead stood out threateningly.” His eyes flashed “something of the Blonde Beast of Nietzsche.” *Like a gigantic dynamo*, the journalist-poet might have been thinking, *charged with the might of ten thousand magnetic storms*. The first words Viereck wrote of the man would prove prophetic: “Adolf Hitler must be handled with care. He is a human explosive.”

Hitler was already a divisive figure in his native land, but Viereck suggested the rising pol was welcomed even by his countrymen who were shy to say so. “There is no one in Germany who does not recognize the importance of his emblem, the ‘Hakenkreuz,’ the ancient swastika, sometimes standing by itself and sometimes superimposed on a cross or a shield, a mystic symbol of militant Germanism,” wrote Viereck. He drew applause across the social strata, Viereck claimed. “He overcomes them with his eloquence. He storms their reserve with his passion.” Hitler spoke to Viereck of the unfairness of the Treaty of Versailles, which settled World War I and clipped the kaiser’s drive for empire, hemming Germany into newer, narrower borders. He then turned to the communist doctrine that now ruled Russia. “The Peace Treaty and Bolshevism are two heads of one monster,” Hitler insisted. “We must decapitate both.” Decapitating Bolshevism, in Hitler’s calculus, required ridding Germany of the “alien in their midst”—the Jews. When Viereck suggested to the younger man that perhaps his sweeping antisemitism might displace many great artists, scientists, manufacturers, and generally esteemed citizens, Hitler disagreed: “The fact that a man is decent is no reason why we should not eliminate him.”

In the face of that ominous forecast, Viereck remained neutral on Hitler’s politics, but not on his personality: “If he lives, Hitler, for better or for worse, is sure to make history.”

Almost ten years later, as Hitler was about to ascend to the chancellorship of Germany, Viereck recycled his interview for the popular U.S. magazine *Liberty* (“America’s Best Read Weekly”), with added touches on Germany’s need for physically healthy citizens, for the re-expansion of its territories, and, above all, for an arousal of the national spirit, the national pride, the national might. When Hitler’s army began to

storm across Europe in 1939 and 1940, Viereck was all in. Finally, a Germany that seemed prepared to “fight to the very last carrot.” Viereck was quick to warn his fellow Americans of the futility of challenging the führer’s military machine. Viereck had gazed into Hitler’s “magnetic blue eyes,” he would write. He deemed it unwise for the United States to test the man’s resolve.

—

THE FÜHRER’S PORTRAIT now held pride of place in Viereck’s home office on Riverside Drive in New York City. Of the three dozen photographs of famous acquaintances—including Albert Einstein, Theodore Roosevelt, George Bernard Shaw, Marshal Foch, and Kaiser Wilhelm II—Hitler’s was the largest. Hitler, by Viereck’s lights, was first in the pantheon of the Great Nietzschean Overmen. “There must be a great crop of oysters before one pearl is born. Millions of flowers grow in the garden to achieve one matchless rose, and billions of men must be born to produce one superman like Goethe, Napoleon, Da Vinci or Hitler,” Viereck said, later adding that Hitler “out-Napoleons Napoleon.”

By 1940, Viereck had become what he so wanted to be: a reliable servant to his father figure from the fatherland. After his incompetent but earnest try at it in World War I, now in the second war the long-ago poet had positioned himself as the mastermind of one of Hitler’s crucial plans for America; he was the center wheel of a propaganda campaign, funded by the German government and its agents in the United States. “Propaganda helped us to power,” Joseph Goebbels announced at the Nazi Party congress in 1936. “Propaganda kept us in power. Propaganda will help us conquer the world.”

Hitler explained the plan in typically blunt terms: “Our strategy is to destroy the enemy from within, to conquer him through himself.” Viereck had literally written a book on the subject in 1930 (dedicated to Dr. Sigmund Freud of all people), assessing the weakness of the kaiser’s propaganda campaign in America during the first great war. “We were pikers,” Viereck claimed to have been told by one downhearted German officer. “What was a million dollars compared to the stake for which we were playing? For centuries to come, the German people will have to pay

for our stinginess.... We lacked the vision, the authority, and the inexhaustible funds of the Allies.” Viereck specifically castigated his German paymasters for the debacle of the suitcase full of secret documents that he and his visitor left behind on a subway train, as if that were an expenses problem and not just his own sheer idiocy. “If the German Government had provided [the visiting official] with an automobile or a bodyguard, this disaster would have been averted. Governments, reckless in some matters, are at times prodigiously stingy.”

But that was last time around. The lead-up to this next world war would be different: lessons learned, no expense to be spared. Nazi Germany poured money and manpower into dividing the American polity, hoping to keep the United States and its arsenal of democracy out of the war in Europe. “America for Americans,” as Hitler said in an interview widely published in the United States in 1940, “and Europe for the Europeans.” His government blanketed America with isolationist and antisemitic literature. According to records discovered after the war was over, the German Foreign Office rained down on Americans more than 1 million leaflets and postcards, about 2.5 million pamphlets and magazines, and 135,000 books just in the single summer of 1941. The Nazis’ Special War Fund expended seemingly endless resources in the effort. When the German embassy was ordered shuttered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that same summer, the embassy vault still held more than \$3.5 million—about \$75 million today—in cash.

A good chunk of the German money devoted to this effort passed through the hands of George Sylvester Viereck, who used it to try to exploit a key weakness he had discerned in the American political system. “The more I study the record of foreign propaganda in the United States, the more I am surprised by the long patience of the American Government,” he wrote. “While the law requires that the ownership of a newspaper must be fully disclosed, there was nothing to prevent the German government or an individual German from making a present of several million dollars to an American sympathizer; nor was there anything to prevent the sympathizer from making his money talk—for Germany! There is no safeguard which the law can create which human ingenuity cannot circumvent.”