

A scientist during wartime: Richard Goldschmidt's internment in the U.S.A. during the First World War

Marsha L. Richmond*

Department of History, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, 48202 USA

Introduction

In 1913, the German zoologist and prominent Mendelian Richard Goldschmidt (1878–1958) was selected to head the division of animal genetics in the proposed new Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Biology. The biology institute was to join those in chemistry and physical chemistry and physical chemistry within the “campus” of new scientific institutes in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem, funded by a joint partnership between the government and the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, a consortium of wealthy industrialists and bankers. Goldschmidt's appointment was a dream come true. Having long served as assistant to Richard Hertwig, professor of zoology and director of the Munich Zoological Institute, Goldschmidt had come to prominence as a leading figure in the new field of genetics since abandoning experimental morphology in 1910 for what he viewed as the more promising research program of Mendelian heredity.¹ His reputation was enhanced by his discovery of curious facts connected with sex determination. Investigating reports of abnormal sexual morphs produced by crossing European races of the gypsy moth *Lymantria dispar* with Japanese varieties, Goldschmidt found moths exhibiting a mosaic of male and female traits. First interpreting these as gynandromorphs, upon further analysis he realized they were not sex mosaics but actually males or females with parts or organs characteristic of the opposite sex. This phenomenon, which he called “intersexuality,” was not only novel but also offered the prospect of unraveling how genes might control the development of secondary sexual characteristics—a major desideratum in genetics at the time. It was the promise of this research program that earned him a place in the new institute.²

To explore this intriguing discovery further, Goldschmidt required pure stocks found in different regions

of Japan. Thus his new appointment was doubly welcome, for his association with the Kaiser Wilhelm Society led to his name being put forward as a candidate for one of the coveted Albert Kahn Travelling Fellowships, awarded to scholars in German, France, Britain, Japan, and the United States with the aim of promoting cultural understanding. The sole stipulation was that the recipient had to travel around the world.³ Elated by his good fortune, Goldschmidt set sail from Genoa on 4 January 1914 for Japan, with stops en route that allowed him to explore tropical countries and view organisms he only knew from textbooks. At the end of this experience he fully expected to return to Berlin in plenty of time to attend the opening ceremonies of the biology institute planned for the end of the year.

Goldschmidt spent six magical months in Japan, not only collecting the eggs of as many geographically dispersed populations of *L. japonica* as possible but also interacting with esteemed Japanese zoologists and touring remote areas of the country. After a successful trip, in late July 1914 he boarded a ship headed for the United States, the final leg in his momentous around-the-world voyage. He was looking forward, once he got back to Germany, to undertaking new crosses that might help him unravel the secrets of intersexuality.

A few days out from Hawaii, the ship received word that war had broken out in Europe. Suddenly all Goldschmidt's plans had to be altered.⁴ Once his ship reached San Francisco, he was faced with difficult choices. While seeking the advice of American colleagues in the Bay area, he tried to arrange for his passage back to Germany, but owing to the British naval blockade this proved impossible. Believing he might be more successful were he on the East Coast, he traveled to New York. Again, however, he was unable to secure a transatlantic carrier. He began to accept the possibility that he faced an extended stay in the United States. Wanting to find a place where he could work, he

Corresponding author: Richmond, M.L. (marsha.richmond@wayne.edu).

* Tel.: +1 734-277-2421.

¹ Goldschmidt was impressed by the prospect Mendelism offered of solving one of the leading biological problems of the time – the basis of heredity and development – as laid out in Wilhelm Johannsen, *Elemente der exakten Erblichkeitslehre* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1909).

² Marsha L. Richmond, “Richard Goldschmidt and Sex Determination: The Growth of German Genetics, 1900 – 1935,” Ph.D. diss. (Indiana University, 1986); and “The Making of a Heretic: Richard Goldschmidt and German Genetics, 1900 – 1940” (in preparation).

Available online 1 April 2015

³ See Richard Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower: The Autobiography of Richard B. Goldschmidt* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 80 – 81. For a contemporary description of the fellowships, see Christopher D. Morley, “The Kahn Travelling Fellowship: A Unique Opportunity for American Teachers,” *Educational Foundations: A Monthly Magazine of Pedagogy*, 27 (September 1914 – June 1915), 143 – 45.

⁴ Further details of his experience in finding passage to Germany are provided in Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*, chap. 7.

sought the advice of E. B. Wilson, the renowned Columbia University cytologist who had previously worked in Munich, and his zoology colleague T. H. Morgan, whose recent discoveries in genetics Goldschmidt well knew. They put him in touch with the embryologist Ross G. Harrison, director of the Osborn Zoological Laboratory at Yale University. Harrison, who did his doctoral work in Germany and whose wife was German, was happy to welcome Goldschmidt as a visiting scholar in the lab (See Figs. 1 and 2).

Goldschmidt's stay in the United States

At Yale, to help him cope with the prospect of a longer separation from his wife and two young children and feelings of helplessness as his country engaged in a life and death struggle, Goldschmidt sought refuge in his research.⁵ He prepared for the spring breeding season of 1915, when he intended to hatch some of his *Lymantria* eggs and cross adult *japonica* moths with different European races to assess the appearance of the resulting hybrids. The gypsy moth, however, was an invasive species in the United States and strictly controlled for the threat it posed to forests in the northeast. Because areas of Massachusetts were already ravaged by the moth, Goldschmidt got permission to carry out his crosses at Harvard University's Bussey Institution in south Boston. He also was able to work during the summers at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, the Mecca for American biologists.⁶ He thus made the best of the situation.

America's wartime hysteria

Goldschmidt's stay in the U.S. was pleasant enough, especially after his family was able to join him in December 1915. As the war progressed, however, things began to change. Despite America's neutrality, with the sinking of the *Lusitania* in March 1915 with the loss of 1198 lives (including 128 Americans), public sentiment in the United States began to turn against Germany (and Germans).⁷ The growing "war hysteria" made life difficult even for an ostensibly apolitical German university scientist, but who was nonetheless a patriot (Fig. 3).

Goldschmidt held strong opinions about the war and did not shrink from expressing them, including his view that

⁵ As he noted, "Though I was certainly no militarist I felt like an outcast for not sharing the fate of my compatriots, and I was anxious to join the colors." Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*, 153 – 54.

⁶ Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*, 157 – 58. He not only was able to meet many biologists but also was able to present, at one of the Friday evening lectures, the results of his research as well as physiological theory of genetics. See, for example, Richard Goldschmidt, "A Further Contribution to the Theory of Sex," *Journal of Experimental Zoology* 20 (1917): 593 – 611.

⁷ For a good indication of the contemporary sentiment following the sinking of the *Lusitania*, see Yandell Henderson, "Ourselves as Germans See Us," *New York Times*, 21 May 1915, p. 12. Henderson, a well-respected Yale physiologist sympathetic to the German cause, mentions the belief that the ship carried war material. See Ron Roizon, "A Footnote to Pauly (1994): Yandell Henderson's Lusitania Letters," *Points: The Blog of the Alcohol and Drugs History Society*, 17 May 2012, (<http://pointsadhsblog.wordpress.com/2012/05/17/a-footnote-to-pauly-1994-yandell-hendersons-lusitania-letters/>). Accessed 09.09.12. Recent exploration of the *Lusitania* wreckage suggests that the ship was carrying Remington .303 bullets used by the British, which would make it a legitimate target for German U-boats. See Patrick O'Sullivan, *The Lusitania: Unravelling the Mysteries* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Sheridan House, 2000). For American public sentiment before and during the war, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).



Fig. 1. Goldschmidt in the Osborn Zoological Laboratory, Yale University, 1915. (Curt Stern Papers. American Philosophical Society).

Germany was not the aggressor in the hostilities. As he described in his autobiography, "I felt strongly that my fatherland was being maligned, and I had to say so – and this was not cautious or wise. But I did not think that honesty in discussions was damnable."⁸ Increasingly such convictions earned him enemies, especially among those who held strong anti-German sentiments. The noted Harvard entomologist and Dean of the Graduate School for Research in Applied Biology, which oversaw the Bussey Institute, William Morton Wheeler (1865 – 1937), along with the young Bussey geneticist Edward Murray East (1879 – 1938) stopped associating with Goldschmidt. As he noted, "Anti-German feeling was now worked up by systematic organization in the press, in speeches, in lectures by war correspondents and propagandists, and even from the pulpit."⁹ In New Haven, a few individuals began closely watching Goldschmidt's movements and posted letters about his "suspicious behavior" to government agencies, including the nascent Bureau of Investigation (later Federal Bureau of Investigation) at the Department of Justice. In March 1916, the Bureau opened a file on him, more than a year before the U.S. entered the war.¹⁰ Goldschmidt was naturally alarmed by the increasingly negative treatment of him and his family, but he was unable to do more than restrict their social contacts.

Goldschmidt as "alien enemy"

After the United States entered the war in April 1917, all German nationals in the country were declared "alien enemies." In the Presidential Proclamation 1364 of April 6, 1917, which declared war on Germany, President Woodrow Wilson laid out U.S. policy towards citizens of Germany and other hostile countries. This and the subsequent Proclamation of November 16, 1917 slightly modified the

⁸ Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*, 155.

⁹ Goldschmidt, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*, 162. Goldschmidt noted that Wheeler was "violently anti-German" and related a particular incident at a dinner party at his house at which Goldschmidt defended "the German cause" (157 – 58).

¹⁰ I obtained Goldschmidt's FBI dossier under the Freedom of Information Act: "Goldschmidt, Richard Benedict," Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Release; hereafter "Goldschmidt FBI file."

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1157745>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1157745>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)