

of the rights of individual freedom and the claims of national need. Progressive intellectuals, such as Herbert Croly, author of *The Promise of American Life* and a founder of the *New Republic*, had long lamented the excessive individualism and consequent chaotic drift of American life. Many progressives yearned for some experience that would heighten social consciousness and tighten social bonds. Woodrow Wilson's successor as president of Princeton, John Grier Hibben, had worried as early as 1914 that Europe might emerge from the war "chastened and purified," while Americans, "far removed from these grim and desperate scenes, should remain insensible to our great opportunities and responsibilities, and continue in our habits of self-seeking and self-indulgence and self-concern."<sup>66</sup> Many intellectuals, in short, welcomed war as the forge in whose fires they might shape a new ethos of social duty and civic responsibility.

There was a dilemma here. Europe had always represented to Americans a version of that very ethos—a perverted version, to be sure, one that exemplified the perils of regimentation, the miseries of individual unfreedom from which millions had fled westerly across the Atlantic, but a model nonetheless of the social philosophy that many people found so harmfully absent in the United States. Could Americans now recross the ocean on a mission that was at once to redeem the old continent and make America more like her? Did not the achievement of American maturity imply loss of innocence and even assimilation to Europe? Those questions, turning always on the relation of the Old World to the New, evoked no certain answers in the spring of 1917.

66. *Literary Digest* 49 (Oct. 17, 1914), 741.

## 1

*The War for the American Mind*

"If the war didn't happen to kill you," one of George Orwell's characters observed, "it was bound to start you thinking."<sup>1</sup> The remark might have been applied with special accuracy to Americans. Safely distant from the war zone, they had unique opportunities for reflection. In Europe the swift crisis of 1914 had swept both governments and peoples over the brink with scant time for thought about the war's meaning. In the months that followed, the proximity of the fighting had helped to keep men's minds fastened closely on the war's immediate tasks, rather than its ultimate significance. But during more than two and a half years of neutrality, Americans felt no such restraints on their thinking, and they elaborated vigorous and quite various ideas about the war and its meaning for America. Even the submarine attacks that finally provoked the United States to belligerency had a certain remoteness, and did not instantly clear the national mind about America's relation to the European conflict. President Wilson himself had responded deliberately, even haltingly, to the U-boat assaults, first severing diplomatic relations and then arming American merchant ships before at last asking for a declaration of war. The congressional debate on the war resolution had further reflected the persistent confusion

1. George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 144.

about America's stake in the fighting, and about the precise causes and purposes of American entry.

More than the other belligerent governments, the Wilson administration was compelled to cultivate—even to manufacture—public opinion favorable to the war effort. Lacking the disciplinary force of quick-coming crisis or imminent peril of physical harm, Wilson had to look to other means to rally his people: to the deliberate mobilization of emotions and ideas. Here, the Great War was peculiarly an affair of the mind.

Wilson seemed to sense that fact as early as 1914, when he had called not merely for legal neutrality but for neutral "thought" and "sentiments" as well. The plea had been in vain, for Americans began to divide about the war and its implications for their country as soon as they received the first news of the European armies clashing in Belgium and East Prussia in the summer of 1914. But if Wilson found those divisions of opinion unfortunate in peacetime, he regarded them as intolerable after April 1917. "Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way," he warned peace advocates in June 1917. They had small idea, as yet, just how much woe was to befall them.

Many factors contributed to the intense concern to create a "correct" public opinion in 1917-18. Foremost, of course, was the simple fact that no such opinion could be easily taken for granted, given the conflicting loyalties of America's diverse accumulation of ethnic groups, and given the wrenching departure from usual American diplomacy that entrance into a European war constituted. Other factors, too, had roots deep in the nation's past. America had from the first been a society extraordinarily preoccupied with the problem of like-mindedness. William Bradford had worried at Plymouth Plantation in the early seventeenth century that the independent settlers "on their particular" might corrupt the godly community he was struggling to build in the wilderness. The witch hunts at Salem later in that century further testified to an aggressive concern for uniformity of spirit. In the nineteenth century, some radical abolitionists, like William Lloyd Garrison, had deemed differences of opinion over slavery sufficient reason to dissolve the social contract itself. Garrison on that ground had damned the Constitution as a "covenant with death and an agreement with hell." As Alexis de Tocqueville had observed in the 1830s, few countries displayed less genuine independence of mind and real freedom of discussion than America. Those deep-running historical currents, darkly moving always

beneath the surface of a society more created than given, more bonded by principles than by traditions, boiled once more to the surface of American life in the crisis of 1917-18.

Concern for sameness of opinion, for commonality of mind as the indispensable prerequisite for a stable community, carried with it a corollary, especially evident in the reform agitation of the prewar years: that social change should come about primarily through education and the appeal to people's enlightened, better selves. For progressive reformers particularly, faith in publicity as the chief instrument of reform was axiomatic. Underlying that faith was the hopeful premise that men and women in the mass were rational beings, uniformly responsive to reasoned argument and incapable of serious disagreement in the face of scientifically demonstrated facts. Its crowning appeal was the assurance that informed public opinion could substitute for radical institutional reordering or for the naked brandishing of state power as a solution to the problems of the day. Education could cancel out class antagonisms, improve the efficiency of workers, and assimilate immigrants. Publicity could tame the trusts and extinguish corruption; it could settle strikes and pass legislation; it could clean up the slums and end "white slavery." These were comforting beliefs in a society wracked by new social ills but reluctant to repudiate the laissez-faire, anti-statist heritage that Americans prized.

Even Herbert Croly's influential progressive tract of 1909, *The Promise of American Life*, had in its closing pages abruptly attenuated its argument for enlarging the power of government, and had instead called for an educational campaign to "nationalize" the consciousness of the American people. The faith in education, preached most prominently by philosopher John Dewey, was revolutionizing the nation's schools in the prewar era. The faith in publicity animated the countless exposés of the muckrakers as well as the crusades of Theodore Roosevelt against the "malefactors of great wealth." Thomas W. Gregory, Woodrow Wilson's Attorney General, declared flatly that America was a "country governed by public opinion," small exaggeration in an era when the formal instrumentalities of government were so feeble.<sup>2</sup> In the progressive era, under the press of necessity and in the absence of more formal alternatives, the manipulation of mass opinion for political purposes was becoming a highly refined art—and Woodrow Wilson

2. *Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Year 1918* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 21.

was its consummate practitioner. He had used publicity adroitly to discipline the Congress in the struggle for his "New Freedom" legislation in 1913 and 1914. Now he would use it to discipline the country in the struggle to win the war.

Wilson brought to this effort great gifts—and liabilities. He had all his life been a moralizing evangelist who longed with a religious fervor to sway the public mind with the power of his person and his rhetoric. The war furnished him with a wider stage for the ultimate performance of the act he had long been perfecting. Moreover, Wilson was in many ways an outsider in American politics, an educator who had taken no significant part in public life until his campaign for the New Jersey governorship in 1910. His late start in a political career, and his rocket-like rise to the presidency only two years later, made him an unfamiliar figure in the national corridors of power, and reinforced his already considerable obsession with popular opinion. By temperament he was a traditionalist and by training a conservative historian with a refined appreciation of the value of inherited institutions. But Wilson was a political newcomer who knew not how to manipulate the traditional levers of influence, nor how to move comfortably within existing structures of power. So handicapped, without well-established bases in either party or in Congress, he still had one constituency to which to turn: the public at large, whose collective opinion he repeatedly sought to shape and direct to his political ends. From the beginning of his political career to the end, from his attack on lobbyists in the tariff fight of 1913 and his swing around the circle for preparedness in 1916, to his futile appeal to the Italian people during the Paris peace negotiations about Fiume, down to his self-destructive speaking tour on behalf of the League of Nations in 1919, Wilson had a single master strategy: appeal directly to the people, unify their convictions, awaken their emotional energy, and turn this great massed force on his recalcitrant foes.<sup>3</sup> So Wilson, for all his reverence toward order and formality, was frequently forced by his own peculiar political circumstance to circumvent established forms. He subverted the more or less orderly processes of politics by stirring and heating the volatile cauldron of public opinion.

3. "The real people I was speaking to," Wilson typically said after his "peace without victory" address to the Senate in January 1917, "was neither the Senate nor foreign governments, as you will realize, but the people of the countries now at war." Wilson to J. P. Gavit, Jan. 29, 1917, quoted in Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 271.

Therein lay both his greatest political genius and a major source of his eventual downfall.

When Wilson summoned the American people to arms in April 1917, he strained even his large talents for swaying men's minds. Only months earlier he had won re-election to the presidency as the man who "kept us out of war." Now, just as he had reversed himself on the preparedness question in 1915, he reversed his stand on the ultimate question of war itself. And just as that earlier shift had visited special cruelties on Wilson's progressive supporters, so did he now inflict on those same persons what John Dewey called "the immense moral wrench involved in our passage from friendly neutrality to participation in war."<sup>4</sup> For the progressive men and women who had devoted themselves to the settlement house movement, to the campaigns against civic corruption and corporate power, to the struggles for political reform and economic justice, for workers' rights and immigrant education, to all the schemes to civilize the cities and to tame capitalism—for those people in particular the war had seemed distant, repugnant, malicious. They saw it as a regression to medieval violence, a kind of lunatic vestige from the feudal past that had incredibly intruded its way into the modern world, a vile eruption from the pit of corruption that was Europe. As citizens of the New World, believers in the future, in progress and intelligence, they wanted no part of such madness. The immense popularity of Norman Angell's 1910 book, *The Great Illusion*, which argued that a modern war would be monumentally insane and therefore impossible, attested to the faith of the progressive generation that the world must improve by conforming to the precepts of reason and moderation. The reformers thus found abundant moral grounds on which to condemn the war; on practical grounds, too, they naturally worried that American intervention might choke off the movement for domestic reform to which many of them had committed much of their adult lives.

Some of those persons of sensitive conscience would indeed find the passage from neutrality to war impossible to negotiate. The steadfast pacifists—like those who held to the original anti-war principles of the American Union Against Militarism—increasingly found themselves isolated in a wilderness of opposition from which nearly all their country-

4. John Dewey, "Conscience and Compulsion," in Joseph Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy by John Dewey*, 2 vols. (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), II, 577.

men had fled by the end of 1917. But most of the progressives, like most other Americans, did ultimately make that passage, though the reformers only tempered, rather than abandoned, their earlier misgivings about American belligerency.

The philosopher and educator John Dewey best articulated the rationale that helped to guide the pacifistically inclined progressives into the ranks of enthusiasts for war. He argued that the war constituted a "plastic juncture" in history, a time when the world was made momentarily more malleable to the guiding influence of reason. The war presented an opportunity pregnant with "social possibilities," which were not the direct objects of the martial enterprise, but which it might be made to yield. Dewey therefore looked hopefully to the crisis to bring about "the more conscious and extensive use of science for communal purposes," to throw "into relief the public aspect of every social enterprise," to create "instrumentalities for enforcing the public interest in all the agencies of production and exchange," to temper "the individualistic tradition" and drive home the lesson of "the supremacy of public need over private possessions."<sup>5</sup> So Dewey argued repeatedly throughout 1916 and 1917 in the pages of the influential *New Republic*, the flagship of the pro-war progressives and a journal so closely aligned with Wilson's policies that its editors—Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, and Walter Weyl—were sometimes suspected of being his minions. That suspicion was surely exaggerated, but it is nevertheless important to note the extent to which progressive thinkers identified with Wilson and placed their faith in his person and in his carefully stated reasons for American belligerency. "I hardly believe the turnover could have been accomplished under a leadership less skillful than that of President Wilson," wrote Dewey, "so far as he succeeded in creating the belief that just because the pacific moral impulse retained all its validity Germany must be defeated in order that it find full fruition. That," he concluded, "was a bridge on which many a conscience crossed. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

5. John Dewey, "The Social Possibilities of War," *ibid.*, II, 551-60; see also Sidney Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors: Effects of World War I on Some American Liberals," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17 (1956), 347-69.

6. John Dewey, "Conscience and Compulsion," in Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events*, II, 577. Even pacifistic Jane Addams acknowledged that "certainly we were all eager to accept whatever progressive social changes came from the quick reorganization demanded by the war." Quoted in Stuart I. Rochester, *American Liberal Disillusionment in the Wake of World War I* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 41.

That so many thoughtful men and women passed so swiftly from favoring peace to embracing war testified less to the weakness of their convictions than to the deep-running consistency of the progressive mentality, able to find grounds for hopeful affirmation even in the face of unprecedented calamity. It testified equally strongly to Wilson's remarkable adroitness at figuring the war in terms congenial to the American mind, and particularly appealing to the progressives: a war for democracy, a war to end war, a war to protect liberalism, a war against militarism, a war to redeem barbarous Europe, a crusade.

Flying those seductive colors, the *New Republic* steamed into battle in 1917, its helm guided always by the lodestar of Wilson's idealism. In its wake followed legions of faithful progressives, their ears filled with Dewey's siren song. But in the summer and fall of that year, an embittered young intellectual named Randolph Bourne launched from the pages of the short-lived radical periodical *Seven Arts* a series of highly explosive salvos against Dewey's effort to pilot the progressives over the shoals of indecision and into the swelling current of support for the war. Bourne had once been Dewey's enthusiastic pupil, an active exponent of his mentor's philosophic and educational theories. If Dewey's pronouncements on the war crackled with the hot and cranky zeal of the recent convert, Bourne burned with the resentment of betrayal. He aimed his fire almost entirely to the left, at his erstwhile comrades in the progressive reform camp; he had little to say against the forces of reaction on the right, whose support for the war Bourne found altogether predictable. He proclaimed wounded indignation at "the relative ease with which the pragmatist intellectuals, with Professor Dewey at their head, have moved out their philosophy, bag and baggage, from education to war."<sup>7</sup> The pro-war spokesmen, Bourne charged, were sacrificing principle to expediency, values to technique, abandoning reason and endorsing violence as the instrument of social change. Most tellingly, they had in the process identified themselves "with the least democratic forces in American life."

Bourne did not merely disagree with Dewey about the war. His argument, abbreviated though it was by the closing of *Seven Arts* in late 1917, and by his own death a year later, called into question the entire intellectual system that had permitted the philosopher and his followers

7. This and the following quotations from Bourne are taken from Carl Resek, ed., *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915-1919* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

to endorse American belligerency. Dewey's position, said Bourne, revealed nothing less than "the inadequacy of his pragmatism as a philosophy of life in this emergency." This was truly radical criticism, taking the progressives' support for the war as but the outward sign of the corruption at the core of their thought. Bourne's shafts at the pro-war reformers dripped with scorn. There was, he said, "a peculiar congeniality between the war and these men. It is as if the war and they had been waiting for each other." Committed above all to staying close to the action, they had been easily and contemptibly swung loose from their philosophic moorings by the tide of war. Dewey, in good pragmatic fashion, had claimed that the war was a fact to be dealt with, an ugly fact that might, however, be turned to good ends. Bourne countered with a famous question: "If the war is too strong for you to prevent, how is it going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes?" The question strongly compelled its own answer, and its sharp point pierced close to the heart of the difficulties in the pro-war position. History was largely to confirm the prophetic implications of Bourne's query, and later generations have canonized Bourne and anathematized his discredited progressive adversaries. So thorough has been Bourne's vindication in the history books that it takes a certain effort to recall that he did not have a monopoly on intelligence and courage in 1917.

The remarkable thing about the support that Dewey and most other progressive thinkers gave to the war was its carefully qualified and highly contingent character. Their conversion from peace to war signified neither stupid self-delusion nor weak-kneed whoring after "influence," as Bourne notoriously argued. They were not oblivious to the dangers that lay athwart their path. Rather, they crossed the "bridge of conscience" with cautious and measured step, their eyes fixed on quite specific goals, faith in which alone secured their allegiance to the cause. No one knew better than Woodrow Wilson how provisional was the support of the progressives for the war. They were a significant part of the constituency that had narrowly re-elected him in 1916, and he was not deaf to their insistent calls for reform and a liberal peace.

Dewey wrote in August 1917 that he harbored a "vague but genuine vision of a world somehow made permanently different by our participation in a task which taken by itself is intensely disliked. . . . But it is ridiculous," he stressed, "to say that [progressive goals] are mere idealistic glosses, sugar-coatings of the bitter pill of war. They present

genuine possibilities, objects of a fair adventure."<sup>8</sup> That language—"possibilities," "fair adventure"—accurately caught the progressive mood. The words suggested neither tender-minded naïveté nor swooning surrender to sonorous idealistic slogans. They suggested, rather, an attitude of calculated risk. The progressives gambled on Wilson because they felt the stakes were high; but neither did they forget that the odds were long. In 1917, it was not wholly unreasonable to believe that the "fair adventure" might, just possibly, be crowned with success; but the progressives were not so foolish as to presume that success would be easy, an affair of pious wishes and moral incantations. They had few illusions of that sort, though they did have abundant—if cautious—hope. Their story, therefore, is not simply a tale of innocence rudely violated; it is a far more complex matter than that. Locked in deadly embrace with their palladin, Woodrow Wilson, the pro-war progressives began in the spring of 1917 to trace with him an ironic circle of history whose outcome would be the stuff of genuine tragedy.

Progressives and their pacifist former comrades, whose numbers and will were in any case severely diminished by the declaration of war, were not alone on the field of ideological battle in the America of 1917. Conservative organizations, like the National Security League, and special-interest groups of all kinds now sought to invest America's role in the war with their preferred meaning, and to turn the crisis to their particular advantage. All, of course, mantled their activities in the raiment of patriotism. But that loose garment could be stretched to many sizes and shapes, and the struggle to define the war's meaning often cloaked purposes far removed from Wilson's summons to a crusade for a liberal peace and democracy.

The nation's schools swiftly became skirmishing sites for those competing groups. Holding more than 22,000,000 impressionable young minds, they were natural objects of attention. Dispersed through more than 100,000 school districts, they lent themselves to a kind of ideological guerrilla warfare. The decentralized character of American education meant that the struggle to control teaching about the war had to be waged in countless local actions, in communities scattered across the country. Most of the groups that contended to bring their version of the war into the classroom were themselves local in origin, like the Cham-

8. John Dewey, "What America Will Fight For," in Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events*, II, 561-65.

bers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs. But soon national organizations were making their presence felt, among them the National Education Association, the Committee on Patriotism through Education of the National Security League, the National Industrial Conference Board, a manufacturers' association publicity arm, and the National Board for Historical Service, a group of historians devoted to the "progressive" or "New History" belief that study of the past should promote present-day social reform.

The initial victories in those skirmishes confirmed the long-voiced criticism that crabbled provincialism was the unfortunate concomitant of local control in American education. District after district did its patriotic bit for the war effort by banning the teaching of the German language. Many states did likewise; the California State Board of Education condemned German as "a language that disseminates the ideals of autocracy, brutality and hatred."<sup>9</sup> The anti-German animus soon extended to teachers. An Iowa politician charged that "ninety percent of all the men and women who teach the German language are traitors."<sup>10</sup> Loyalty oaths were increasingly demanded of school personnel. All texts that failed to condemn the Germans or that made too much of past Anglo-American friction were suspect. The New York legislature created a commission to receive complaints about "seditious" schoolbooks in "civics, economics, English, history, language and literature." Montana barred a modern history textbook for its "pro-German" views, presumably because it asserted in one passage that "Christianity advanced from the Rhine to the Elbe."<sup>11</sup> The perpetrators of these measures cared little for President Wilson's nice distinctions between the German government, with which the United States was at war, and the German people, toward whom Wilson wished to extend the hand of respect and conciliation. Nor did the National Industrial Conference Board appear to agree with Wilson's concept of democracy when it objected to a wartime course of study as too favorable to "the eight-hour day, old age pensions, social insurance, trade unionism, the minimum wage, and similar issues."<sup>12</sup>

It is against this backdrop of local excess and special-interest pervers-

9. Lewis Paul Todd, *Wartime Relations of the Federal Government and the Public Schools 1917-1918* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1945),

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10. *Idem.*

11. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

12. Quoted in *ibid.*, 68.

sion of Wilson's war themes that the federal government's efforts to influence wartime education must be understood. Commissioner of Education P. P. Claxton at first resisted all attempts to propagandize in the schools, and he encouraged the nation's teachers to maintain their normal educational program. He denounced the expulsion of German from the curriculum, and against the "hate-the-Hun" zealots he pointedly argued that "the fewer hatreds and antagonisms that get themselves embodied in institutions and policies the better it will be for us when the days of peace return."<sup>13</sup> But Claxton could not long ignore the pressures of the various "patriotic" societies. Reluctantly, he allowed the Bureau of Education to cooperate with the National Board for Historical Service and with the official government propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information, in the distribution of various "war study courses" to the nation's schools.

Those courses sought both to counter the malicious influence of the "patriotic" groups and to present a considered version, suitable for school-age children, of the government's view of the war. Drafted by professional educators, many of them recruited from university history faculties, the study plans for the courses represented unusually clear distillations of the way the Wilson administration wished the public to understand the conflict.

"Patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice" were made the themes of the suggested study plan for elementary school children. Americans fought, teachers were urged to explain, to protect the victimized peoples of France and Belgium, burned and murdered in their homes, and "to keep the German soldiers from coming to our country and treating us the same way." While warning against emphasis on "the terrible and the repulsive," the government pamphlet nevertheless encouraged instructors to appeal "primarily to the imagination and to the emotions" of their young pupils. Students in more advanced elementary grades were to be instructed in the differences between the autocratic German form of government and the democratic American way. Those students were to be further edified by the study of "war biographies" of heroic figures from the Allied countries. Prominent among the biographical subjects was Joan of Arc, portrayed as the redemptress of a "France overrun with enemies." Nowhere, however, was it mentioned that the enemies then were English—an awkward instance of the untidiness of

13. *Ibid.*, 77-79.

history, knowledge of which might have sullied the bright cause of Allied unity.<sup>14</sup>

That omission typified the standards of scholarship that guided the government's educational work. The authors of the officially sponsored study plans spurned the right-wing hyperboles of the "patriotic" pressure groups, but they retailed simplifications of their own that were equally distorting. The approved elementary school course of study, noted one observer, presented war "as a glamorous adventure filled with deeds of 'patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice.'" <sup>15</sup> Neither negative notes nor ambiguities were permissible. Significantly, the National Board for Historical Service rejected one commissioned syllabus because it raised doubts about "the positive values of nationalism" and the "liberalism of Western Europe." Worse, it did not sufficiently distinguish between "predatory" imperialism and "that exemplified in the present relation of the self-governing colonies to the British Empire."<sup>16</sup> Nothing could be allowed to obscure the theme of autocracy *versus* democracy, principles embodied, respectively, in Imperial Germany and in the Western powers, especially, of course, in the United States. Discussion of "universal" factors like nationalism and imperialism that tended to spread responsibility for the war was not to be allowed.

This black-and-white approach also informed the government's favored war study plan for high school students. Prepared originally by Indiana University history professor Samuel B. Harding for the enlightenment of troops in the training camps, the plan was eventually distributed to nearly 800,000 secondary school teachers and students. Harding's work had the semblance of a scholarly presentation, replete with hundreds of footnotes. But most of his references cited either other publications of the Committee on Public Information, or the official propaganda statements of the Allied countries. On such evidence, Harding neatly demonstrated that Germany alone had caused the war, that German soldiers fought cruelly without regard to the laws of God or man, that Germany was a pervasively militarized society, and that the Allies sincerely wished peace, which the Germans callously scorned. Differences over war aims and peace terms among the Allies and the United States—an embarrassing subject, more difficult to simplify than the image of the bestial Hun—Harding deliberately ignored.<sup>17</sup>

14. "Outline of Emergency Course of Instruction on the War," reprinted in *ibid.*, 58-63.

15. *Ibid.*, 61.

16. *Ibid.*, 57.

17. *Ibid.*, 48-54.

Educators in the colleges and universities responded less swiftly and with more subtlety to the demand for instruction relevant to the war. But by the summer of 1918 mobilization had unmistakably reached the nation's campuses, with the announcement that beginning in the autumn academic term virtually all able-bodied male students in post-secondary educational institutions would be enlisted as privates in the army. As members of the Students' Army Training Corps, they would wear uniforms and live under military discipline. In addition to their regular studies, they would take several hours a week of military instruction. The colleges, in short, were to become a vast network of pre-induction centers where young men could be temporarily held prior to call-up for active military duty.

Integral to this scheme was a special "War Issues Course" which every participating institution was obliged to offer. No standard content was prescribed, though the National Board for Historical Service distributed a list of one hundred questions to be addressed, with accompanying bibliography to guide instructors in arriving at the correct answers. The course varied considerably from one institution to another, but it essentially consisted of a survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European history designed to expose the war's origins and fix the blame for its outbreak squarely on Germany. Everywhere the effort was made to include faculty members from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including history, philosophy, economics, political science, and literature. This cross-disciplinary collaboration, however, apparently failed to sustain the various scholars' sense of objectivity. All too frequently, the War Issues Course merchandised to captive college audiences crude historical simplifications, cultural stereotypes, hate propaganda, and reactionary political views. The fundamental purpose of the course, writes one commentator, was "to present the war as a life-and-death struggle between democracy and autocracy, upon whose outcome the future of civilization depended. This purpose was logical for a course designed to enhance the morale of students being trained for combat."<sup>18</sup>

18. This theme of indoctrination was also evident, in muted form, in one of the principal progeny of the War Issues Course. Educators at Columbia College welcomed the War Issues Course as an opportunity to "give to the generations to come a common background of ideas and commonly understood standards of judgment." They sought to continue that function with the creation of a required course in Contemporary Civilization, developed at Columbia in 1917 and widely imitated by American institutions of higher education in the next two generations. At least one of the founders of the Columbia course offered a

Like their colleagues at the elementary and secondary level, War Issues Course instructors had small patience with doubt-breeding complexities. At the University of Chicago, noted historian Andrew C. McLaughlin counseled his teaching staff that the students' work should be kept "below the ordinary college level." Lectures, he advised, "must be very simple, given very slowly, and thoroughly outlined . . . [because] a lot of these fellows do not know Peter the Great from Temerlane [*sic*] the Great, or Odessa from Petrograd."<sup>19</sup> Also like their fellow educators in the grade schools and high schools, the college-level teachers glided agilely around potentially embarrassing historical problems. One University of Michigan historian blamed the excesses of the French Revolution on "that same military autocracy, Prussia, which . . . goaded the French people into fury by senseless interference." The same professor blandly announced that the "subject people of France love their masters," as evidenced by the presence of so many French colonial troops at the European front.<sup>20</sup> For minds trained to scholarly skepticism, the War Issues Course seemed suddenly to have induced a comforting measure of unblinking certainty. Peacetime history teaching might be a matter of nuance and tempered judgment and vast impersonal forces; but the subject matter of the War Issues Course presented itself as a clear-cut contest between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. That certainty also carried over into issues only tangentially related to modern European history. Stanford's prestigious diplomatic historian Ephraim D. Adams, for example, concocted in 1918 a novel theory of "indirect treason." The perpetrators of that new crime were all those agitators—"Socialists, the Land Tax reformers, the Pacifists"—who refused to recognize "that special programs must, for the moment, be subordinated to the one great object of *winning the war*. . . . These people are traitors to our democracy."<sup>21</sup> As Carol S. Gruber accurately

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frankly political justification for it. The course, as he saw it, would prepare students to "meet the arguments of the opponents of decency and sound government," thus equipping the college-educated citizen to combat effectively the "destructive element in our society." See Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 240-44.

19. *Ibid.*, 239-40.

20. *Ibid.*, 241.

21. Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Why We Are at War with Germany* (San Francisco: Liberty Loan General Executive Board, n.d.), 20.

concludes, "the course placed educators in the position of war propagandists."<sup>22</sup> It was not their finest hour.

Concreteness, the appearance of "research," simplification, omission for the sake of simplicity and drama, and the appeal to the emotions stood out as the chief techniques of wartime propaganda in the nation's halls of learning. But those traits, exaggerated in war propaganda, also characterized the peacetime mass-circulation publications. Such tactics had been especially evident in the "advocacy journalism" of the prewar muckrakers. Muckraking journalists had made a deep impress on American culture in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. Their appearance had coincided with the rise of aggressively marketed popular magazines like *Collier's* and *McClure's*, and with the spread of the progressive reforming spirit. Indeed, the muckrakers helped to further both those developments. Seeking to boost circulation, magazine editors had eagerly published the muckrakers' sensational exposés of corruption in high places, such as David G. Phillips's startling attack in 1906, "The Treason of the Senate," which charged that the majority of U.S. Senators had been bought by the big corporate interests. Progressives had applauded when muckrakers laid bare the fraudulent practices of the meat-packing or patent-medicine industries, or the unfair tactics of the Standard Oil Company, or the sordid facts about child labor, racial injustice, or the white slave trade. Yet for all the energy that went into them, and for all the outrage they provoked, the writings of the muckrakers had produced few genuine reforms. Muckraking or exposé journalism was by its very nature a crude instrument, not directed precisely at the pivots of power, but rather aimed broadside, its target being the individual consciences of millions of readers. Like all scattered fire, the blasts of the muckrakers were easily defended against. Muckraking was a quintessentially progressive endeavor. It relied on publicity rather than the direct exercise of power, and it was content with agitation rather than accomplishment.

It was significant, therefore, that Woodrow Wilson chose prominent muckraker George Creel to head the Committee on Public Information. Creel surrounded himself with people like Ida Tarbell, Ernest Poole, Will Irwin, and Ray Stannard Baker—all passionate muckrakers before

22. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, 238; see also George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970).



the war and devotees of the progressive reforming faith.<sup>23</sup> Creel was arrestingly handsome, outspoken, and boundlessly vital. He was also impetuous and caustic, a man of whom it was said that an open mind formed no part of his inheritance. An ardent Wilson supporter in 1912 and 1916, he boasted impeccable credentials as a fire-breathing progressive reformer. Before the war he had harnessed his prodigious energies to reform crusades in Kansas City and Denver, and now he eagerly enlisted his facile pen and organizational talents in the greatest crusade of them all.

The Secretaries of War, Navy, and State proposed an official information agency to the President in April 1917, arguing that in wartime more than ever citizens should be "given the feeling of partnership that comes with full, frank statements concerning the conduct of the public business."<sup>24</sup> Not censorship but publicity, they suggested, should be the keynote of the government's policy toward news and opinion. Newton D. Baker later declared that the official philosophy of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) was "faith in democracy . . . faith in the fact."<sup>25</sup> That formula succinctly summarized the muckrakers' creed, and George Creel gave it his wholehearted assent. He took quite seriously the traditional regard of American democracy for the individual consenting will as the cornerstone of political legitimacy and social action. He made that scrupulous voluntarism the informing motif of the CPI's activities. He shunned coercion and censorship, techniques that he scornfully dismissed as "European." In common with other wartime administrators, Creel prided himself on the formal, legal weakness of his agency. "We had no authority," he trumpeted. "Yet the American idea worked. And it worked better than any European law." Creel drew satisfaction from the contrast between a Europe stultified by statutes and a happier America where persuasion and consensus had replaced stark authority and servile submission. His opposition to censorship derived not from First Amendment principles, but from his belief "that

23. To a lesser degree, these attributes were also characteristic of the "New History" of the so-called "progressive school." See Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians* (New York: Knopf, 1968), and John Higham et al., *History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), especially chap. 3.

24. Robert Lansing, Newton D. Baker, and Josephus Daniels to Woodrow Wilson, Apr. 13, 1917, WWP.

25. George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1920), xiv.

the desired results could be obtained without paying the price formal law would have demanded. . . . Better far to have the compulsions proceed from within than to apply them from without."<sup>26</sup>

Probably the most eloquent testimony to the sincerity of Creel's sentiments was the CPI's publication of the *Official Bulletin*, the first comprehensive, day-by-day guide to the proceedings of every government department and agency.<sup>27</sup> It was usually a dull document, perhaps, but it showed Creel's commitment to information and disclosure, pure and simple, as the preferred means to win what he unashamedly called "the fight for the minds of men, for the conquest of their convictions."<sup>28</sup> A similar attitude governed the work of the "Four-Minute Men," at least in the early months of the war. A small, fast-talking army of patriotic speechifiers, the 75,000 Four-Minute Men were selected in local communities from among applicants endorsed by at least "three prominent citizens—bankers, professional or business men."<sup>29</sup> Thus certified as to speaking prowess and safe political views, the men were turned loose for four-minute stints before any available audience to whip up enthusiasm for the war. But they were carefully instructed, at first, that "a statement only of patent facts will convince those who require argument more readily than doubtful disputations. . . . No hymn of hate accompanies our message."<sup>30</sup> Before the war was over, in addition to its activities in the schools, the CPI had distributed 75 million copies in several languages of more than thirty pamphlets explaining America's relation to the war. It had sponsored war expositions in nearly two dozen cities, attended by 10 million people. It had issued 6000 press releases to assist (and to influence) the nation's newspapers in their reporting on the war.

Creel never abandoned his faith in "the fact," but as the war went forward, the CPI strayed ever farther from its original, exclusively informational mission and increasingly took on the character of a crude propaganda mill. The Committee began to place illustrated advertisements in mass magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*, exhorting

26. *Ibid.*, 24, 16-17; italics in original.

27. *The Official Bulletin* was a kind of precursor of the now-familiar *Federal Register*, which began publication in the 1930s when the scope and importance of government's daily operations again expanded.

28. Creel, *How We Advertised*, 3.

29. *Ibid.*, 89.

30. James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 122-23.

readers to report to the Justice Department "the man who spreads pessimistic stories . . . , cries for peace, or belittles our efforts to win the war."<sup>31</sup> By the beginning of 1918, the Four-Minute Men were specifically encouraged to use atrocity stories. The Committee, which early in the war had produced upbeat films like *Pershing's Crusaders* and *Our Colored Fighters*, turned to promoting movies like *The Prussian Cur*, and *The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin*. And in a development chillingly evocative of the "Two Minutes Hate" exercise practiced by George Orwell's Oceanians in his novel, 1984, the CPI urged participatory "Four-Minute Singing" to keep patriotism at "white heat."<sup>32</sup>

The parallels between World War I America and the setting of Orwell's famous cautionary tale are instructive. The Oceania of 1984 was distant from the actual fighting (if indeed there was any actual fighting), its citizens ignorant about their country's purposes and interests, and its masters determined to use war anxieties to discipline fractious "proles" at home. So too was World War I America almost eerily distant from the battlefields. Many American citizens felt uncertain about the causes and aims of American belligerency. And conservative elements, increasingly abetted by the Wilson administration, anxiously sought to suffocate troublesome immigrant and working-class elements in an avalanche of "patriotism."

To be sure, neither George Creel nor Woodrow Wilson should be taken as models for Big Brother, nor can the content of the CPI's propaganda be closely assimilated to the creations of Orwell's Ministry of Truth. The Four-Minute Singers, after all, sang "Pack Up Your Troubles," and "There's A Long, Long Trail," tunes scarcely comparable to the ferocious chants Winston Smith and his co-workers flung at the telescreen in 1984. But neither should the parallels be quickly dismissed. The American experience in World War I (as, indeed, the experience of many other belligerents in that war) darkly adumbrated the themes Orwell was to put at the center of his futuristic fantasy: overbearing concern for "correct" opinion, for expression, for language itself, and the creation of an enormous propaganda apparatus to nurture the desired state of mind and excoriate all dissenters. That American propaganda frequently wore a benign face, and that its creators genuinely believed it to be in the service of an altruistic cause, should not obscure those important facts.

31. *Ibid.*, 65.

32. *Ibid.*, 124 and *passim*; Creel, *How We Advertised*, *passim*.

Creel confessed after the Armistice, "When I think of the many voices that were heard before the war and are still heard, interpreting America from a class or sectional or selfish standpoint, I am not sure that, if the war had to come, it did not come at the right time for the preservation and reinterpretation of American ideals."<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the paramount ideal in Creel's mind, as in the minds of many of his countrymen, was the ancient American longing for a unanimous spirit, for a single, consensual set of values that would guarantee the social harmony, not to mention the economic efficiency, of the nation. Active always in American culture, in war that longing grew acute. And no fact seemed more insulting to the ideal of unity in 1917 than the gaudy presence in American society of millions of unassimilated immigrants. The wartime drive for unity, spearheaded by Creel's Committee, led naturally to a campaign for accelerated "Americanization" of those newcomers. That campaign soon exceeded Creel's ability, or the ability of any of the reformers who had long lobbied on behalf of the immigrants, to control it.

Few issues festered more sorely in the American body politic in 1917 than those borne by the great waves of immigration that had washed the nation's shores in the preceding generation. Down through the nineteenth century, the country had given no sustained attention to the problem of assimilating the immigrants who streamed through the coastal ports and into the virtually empty hinterland. Confidence in the equalizing effect of abundant land, and the familiar cultural backgrounds of the immigrants themselves, combined to underwrite a national policy of laissez-faire toward immigration. The melting pot, Americans believed, would automatically fuse the various foreign elements into an acceptably homogeneous national amalgam. But around the turn of the century, many people began to doubt that item of national faith. The United States was changing, providing fewer opportunities for entrepreneurship or independent farming, and sucking more and more of Europe's "surplus" people into the mines and foundries and factories of an industrial America. Increasingly, the newcomers huddled together in the great cities, where they made up not an independent yeomanry but an industrial proletariat. They also came more frequently from the strange and suspect lands southeast of the Alps and beyond the Danube and the Vistula. Beginning in the 1880s, immigrants from the "new" regions outnumbered those from the "old" areas of northwestern Europe. By the end of the century, a movement actively

33. Creel, *How We Advertised*, 105.

to encourage the "Americanization" of those peoples had begun to stir.

That movement sprang from two not entirely compatible sources. One comprised the settlement house workers and social reformers, among them women activists such as Lillian Wald, Jane Addams, and Josephine Roche, and many of the people eventually associated with the American Union Against Militarism. Their first concern was for the immigrants themselves. Especially prominent in this camp was Frances Kellor, guiding spirit of the Committee for Immigrants in America, founded in 1914 to promote the education of immigrants and protect them from predatory *padrones* and exploiting employers.

Reformers of this stripe, writes historian John Higham, sought "to temper as well as improve the ordinary course of assimilation by providing a receptive environment for Old World heritages. Preaching the doctrine of immigrant gifts, Jane Addams and her fellow workers concentrated less on changing the newcomers than on offering them a home."<sup>34</sup> The other source of the Americanization movement was a loose coalition comprised of old-stock Americans who feared for the continued ascendancy of their cultural values and social position, and businessmen who sought to discipline a troublesomely varied labor force. This type of Americanizer, Higham observes, "preached a loyalty that consisted essentially of willing submissiveness. Above all, in the words of the D.A.R., they 'taught obedience to law, which is the groundwork of true citizenship.' The main object of such self-constituted champions of America was to combat the danger of immigrant radicalism or discontent; their chief motive, fear."<sup>35</sup>

The war thrust those two groups into unholy collaboration, and immediately tested which attitude toward the nation's immigrant masses would prevail. At first, war conditions seemed most to benefit the cause of the liberal Americanizers, as many old-stock Americans, awakened to the need for wartime unity, made genuine efforts to bring previously excluded aliens into the life of the community. Higham reports that in at least one New England industrial town many residents in the 1930s looked back fondly on the vital social spirit that prevailed in 1917-18, "when some of the traditional ethnic and religious barriers had broken down."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the Committee for Immigrants in America found its

34. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 236.

35. *Ibid.*, 237.

36. *Ibid.*, 216.

programs significantly advanced by the war. The Bureau of Education in close collaboration with the Committee (even with its financial support), inaugurated an ambitious "War Americanization Plan" that sponsored English and citizenship classes in schools, community halls, and factories. The Bureau of Naturalization reported that the number of such programs tripled in 1917, "rejuvenating, rebuilding, and placing within reach of the adult immigrant . . . those opportunities which exist on every hand but from which he is shut off by the barrier of a foreign tongue and foreign traditions."<sup>37</sup>

At the CPI, George Creel gave heart to the liberal Americanizers when he named one of their number, social worker Josephine Roche, to head the Division of Work with the Foreign-Born. Roche, with Creel's approval, set out to organize "Loyalty Leagues" in America's many ethnic communities. The Leagues served primarily as conduits for circulating extremely simple foreign-language pamphlets on various topics related to the war. The Division also sponsored rallies and pageants, including a much-ballyhooed "pilgrimage" to Mt. Vernon, in Virginia, on July 4, 1918. There, while Irish-born tenor John McCormack sang the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," representatives of thirty-three different ethnic groups reverently filed past Washington's burial place. In addition, drawing on reports from agents abroad, the CPI undertook to provide readers of the foreign-language press with "local, sentimental and humorous matter" culled from their old-country newspapers. As a CPI official explained, "If we . . . let them have this look-in they will feed out of our hands on all the propaganda we supply."<sup>38</sup> To ensure that CPI propaganda was being properly digested, the Committee established a network of bilingual watchdogs (many of them university professors), assigned to monitor the foreign-language publications in their area for "material which may fall under the Espionage Act."<sup>39</sup> In a remarkable twist on the "Americanization" campaign at home, which hoped to root out ethnic particularity, the CPI also mobilized American ethnic groups to carry propaganda back to their European homelands. Creel encouraged General Pershing, for example, to send wounded Italian-American troops to Italy for convalescence, where they spread the Wilsonian gospel and "turned out to be our best propagandists."<sup>40</sup>

37. Edward George Hartmann, *The Movement To Americanize the Immigrant* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 181.

38. Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 228.

39. Cruber, *Mars and Minerva*, 157.

40. Creel, *How We Advertised*, 244.

The Committee paid special attention to Austria-Hungary, where the doctrine of self-determination had great appeal. Creel encouraged immigrants from that polyglot empire to foment among their old-country brethren the very notions of ethnic consciousness and separatism that were under such brutal attack in the United States itself. The CPI thus showed that it cared as much about controlling and manipulating immigrant groups as it did about educating them.

Even the prewar immigrant education movement had contained illiberal and conformist elements. At Henry Ford's factory school for immigrants, the first English sentence to be mastered was "I am a good American," and the graduating pupils were made to act out a gigantic pantomime in which old-country-clad immigrants filed into a large "melting pot," while out of it poured a stream of men, "each prosperously dressed in identical suits of clothes and each carrying a little American flag."<sup>41</sup> But such exercises reflected, until the advent of war, subdominant themes. For the most part the impulse to Americanize through education was animated by a sincere regard for the immigrants themselves, by the desire to treat them fairly and equip them to survive and even prosper in their new land. Creel shared those sentiments, though he made clear that his highest ambition was to end "the tendency toward segregation" of ethnic communities.<sup>42</sup> Not pluralism but homogeneity remained his ideal, and in that preference he closely resembled many of even the most liberal Americanizers. In the last analysis, they differed with the exponents of forced assimilation more over tactics than ultimate goals.

With the quickening tempo of war, the enlightened tactic of education for immigrants steadily gave way to the harsh technique of repression. To a significant degree, the concern for preparedness and the concern for forced assimilation flowed from the same anxiety about the flabbiness of American society in a hostile world. It was not surprising, therefore, that the two campaigns had commingled. Many of the spokesmen who cried for greater military strength frequently spoke in the next breath about the necessity to create—by coercion if necessary—a strong, unifying nationalist sentiment among the immigrant masses where no such sentiment appeared to exist. Preparedness paraders on New York's Fifth Avenue in 1916, for example, had passed beneath a

41. Higham, *Strangers*, 248.

42. Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 231.

great electric sign that flashed: "Absolute and Unqualified Loyalty to Our Country."<sup>43</sup> And the speech in which President Wilson first presented his preparedness proposals to Congress in 1915 had also contained a vicious attack on foreign-born "creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy," who, he warned, must be "crushed out."<sup>44</sup> Even Frances Kellor, symbol of the humane and generous approach to Americanization, took herself before a receptive National Security League audience in 1916 to raise the specter of an America imperiled from within by alien influences.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the NSL itself exemplified the confounding of militaristic and anti-alien sentiments under pressure of war. Created originally to lobby for greater attention to national defense policy, the NSL had shifted its attention by war's end to a broad range of conservative concerns, especially internal security and the dangers of "hyphenated Americanism." Its educational director declared in 1918 that "the melting pot has not melted," and that "there are vast communities in the Nation thinking today not in terms of America, but in terms of Old World prejudices, theories, and animosities. . . . In the bottom of the melting pot there lie heaps of unfused metal."<sup>46</sup> League President Charles B. Leydecker announced in 1918 that the organization had a new set of goals, including "protecting our national legislators from dangerous proletarians."<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, Leydecker defined a "proletarian" as "that member of society who is devoid of thrift, industry, or any accumulation by reason therefore. . . . Our imported people are, unfortunately, some of them of that class."<sup>48</sup>

That kind of rank nativism, tinged often with anti-radicalism, seeped deeper and deeper into the American mind as the war progressed, carried by the current of a newly fashioned phrase: "100 percent Americanism." The 100 percenters aimed to stamp out all traces of Old World identity among immigrants. They visited their worst excesses on German-Americans, which at first glance was scarcely surprising. But the abuse directed at German-Americans did reveal the specific roots of the era's nativism in the war. Before 1914 the Germans had been proba-

43. Higham, *Strangers*, 200.

44. Albert Shaw, ed., *The Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 2 vols. (New York: Review of Reviews Corp., 1924), I, 151.

45. Higham, *Strangers*, 244-45.

46. "National Security League," *Hearings before a Special Committee of the House of Representatives*, 65th Congress, 3rd sess. (1919), 2013.

47. *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1918, sec. II, 1.

48. "National Security League," 221.

bly the most esteemed immigrant group in America, regarded as easily assimilable, upright citizens. Now they found themselves the victims of a brainless fury that knew few restraints. Familiar words like "hamburger" and "sauerkraut" were replaced by "liberty sandwich" and "liberty cabbage." In Iowa, the governor forbade the speaking of German on streetcars, over the telephone, or in any public place. On the day of Wilson's war message, a man in Wyoming who exclaimed "Hoch der Kaiser" was hanged, cut down while still alive, and made to kneel and kiss the American flag.

In one of the war's most infamous cases of vigilantism, near St. Louis in April 1918, a mob seized Robert Prager, a young man whose only discernible offense was to have been born in Germany. He had, in fact, tried to enlist in the American Navy but had been rejected for medical reasons. Stripped, bound with an American flag, dragged barefoot and stumbling through the streets, Prager was eventually lynched to the lusty cheers of five hundred patriots. A trial of the mob's leaders followed, in which the defendants wore red, white, and blue ribbons to court, and the defense counsel called their deed "patriotic murder." The jury took twenty-five minutes to return a verdict of not guilty, accompanied by one jury member's shout, "Well, I guess nobody can say we aren't loyal now." The *Washington Post* commented: "In spite of excesses such as lynching, it is a healthful and wholesome awakening in the interior of the country."<sup>49</sup>

Suspicion, intolerance, and vigilantism were not aimed exclusively at German-Americans. Every citizen, said the head of the Iowa Council of Defense, should join a patriotic society, denounce *all* those persons who dared even to discuss peace, and generally "find out what his neighbor thinks." In short, concludes Higham, "by threat and rhetoric 100 per cent Americanizers opened a frontal assault on foreign influence in American life. They set about to stampede immigrants into citizenship, into adoption of the English language, and into an unquestioning reverence for existing American institutions. They bade them abandon entirely their Old World loyalties, customs and memories."<sup>50</sup>

By the time of the Armistice, the 100 percent spirit, so distant from the original Americanizing aims of people like Jane Addams and Frances Kellor, reigned supreme. Where the liberal Americanizers had looked to the government for aid in the immigrant education program,

49. H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917-1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 202-7.

50. Higham, *Strangers*, 247.

100 percenters now pressed to enlist the state's authority for purposes of repression and exclusion. Significantly, the two campaigns met with markedly different fates. Both the 65th and 66th Congresses rejected bills to appropriate funds for the Bureau of Education "with the purpose . . . of giving aliens the ground work of Americanism."<sup>51</sup> But in 1917, Congress for the first time sustained over the President's veto a bill mandating a literacy test for prospective immigrants. And in 1921 Congress ended a phase in American history by imposing an absolute numerical limit on immigration, accompanied by a quota system based on national origin. This measure not only effectively closed the gates, but rankly discriminated against people from southern and eastern Europe. The postwar era thus began with an official salute to the 100 percent spirit the war had made ascendant.

Just as Creel's apparently good intentions toward immigrants had succumbed to the malignities of the 100 percenters, so were his sympathies for labor largely swamped by the forces of reaction. Immigrants and laborers were to a great extent the same people, but the CPI directed special attention to them in their roles as workers crucial to war production. "In every publication of the Committee," observed the historians of the CPI, "in the appeal of its Four-Minute Men, its news stories, its posters, its movies, and its syndicate features, the effect on labor was carefully considered."<sup>52</sup>

The government was rightly uneasy about labor's behavior. European workers had chafed increasingly at their war-harness since 1914, and especially after the Bolshevik Revolution in late 1917 the governments of the Allies as well as the Central Powers held the loyalty of their working classes only with difficulty. Though American labor was neither so well organized nor so ideologically inclined as the European working class, it was nevertheless a restive body in the prewar years, and its fitful stirrings made it seem menacing in the minds of many businessmen. The head of General Motors, for example, had confided to presidential adviser Colonel Edward House just weeks before the American declaration of war his belief that "we are sitting on a volcano and that war might cause an eruption."<sup>53</sup>

51. *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1920, 7; see also Hartmann, *Movement To Americanize*, 230-33.

52. Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 231.

53. Edward M. House Diary, entry for Feb. 24, 1917, House Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

Many employers who shared that fear sought to enlist the government's aid in capping the volcano. They were resolved that the war should provide no opportunity for workers to improve their wages or working conditions or, worse still, to spread the blight of unionism.

To those predictable fears on the part of businessmen was added another anxiety, even more threatening in its implications for the government's war effort. Workers were the natural recruits for the pacifist appeals of the Socialist Party. The socialists charged that the war was a capitalists' quarrel, and that America was now fixing bayonets not to make the world safe for democracy, but to redeem the loans made to the Allies by Wall Street bankers. The popularity of those charges with workers seemed to be swelling in 1917. In November, Morris Hillquit, an openly anti-war socialist candidate for Mayor of New York (reviled as a "Hillquitter" and accused by Theodore Roosevelt of cowardly cringing before the Hun), received five times the usual socialist vote. Similar dramatic gains for socialist candidates were registered in local elections in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, apparently attributable to the party's emergence as the rallying point for opposition to the war.<sup>54</sup> In the West and in some New England mill towns, the less numerous but more militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWWs, or "Wobblies") took a similarly strong anti-war stand, which they embellished with calls for sabotage and wrathful denunciations of an alleged union-busting conspiracy between capitalists and the government.

These developments posed an immediate threat to the mobilization of industry. They also struck at the heart of the Wilson administration's campaign to define the war as a popular democratic struggle against German autocracy. But to many businessmen, the pacifism of the Wobblies and the socialists must have seemed a rare opportunity, since it allowed them to brand *all* labor agitation as disloyal and traitorous.

George Creel knew that employers were trying to bludgeon labor with the club of "patriotism," and he repeatedly condemned those efforts. Workers, he wrote, "are bitterly resentful of this sort of thing. They feel that if they are to surrender their demands in the matter of hours and overtime, that employers . . . should make like concessions in the matter of profits." While the government discouraged strikes, he noted, "it avoids very carefully any suggestion that it denies the right of labor to protest against conditions. . . . The most important task

<sup>54</sup> See James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage, 1969), chap. 3.

we have before us today in the fight for unity is that of convincing the great mass of workers that our interest in democracy and justice begins at home."<sup>55</sup> Thus Creel scrupulously distinguished between the issues of labor's welfare and labor's loyalty. He favored the former; but he could not leave the latter issue unattended. He must somehow combat the socialist appeal.

Creel had an eager ally in American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers. A British-born cigar-maker who had emigrated to the United States during the Civil War, Gompers was tough and short, his chunky body a small furnace of energy that perpetually propelled him in dogged, single-minded pursuit of his goals. He had early in life rejected European socialist doctrines as inappropriate to the American working class. He spent his career promoting "pure and simple" trade unionism, strictly divorced from ideology. For theory and for intellectuals he had the utmost contempt. Abundant jobs, better working conditions, more pay—that was Gompers's concrete program, and he worked tirelessly, often in close collaboration with big capital, to promote those aims and simultaneously insulate the American labor movement from the disrupting effects of doctrinaire socialism. He was animated not by dreams of broad-scale social reconstruction, nor by abstract principle, but by the relentless quest to seek and exploit opportunities for immediate gain. In that quest, his eternal foes were the socialists.

They now added to their villainy, in Gompers's eyes, by opposing the war. He had pledged labor's support for the war as early as 1916, and had rather high-handedly forced his vassals to solemnize the pledge at the Washington meeting of labor chieftains in March 1917. President Wilson duly rewarded him with a seat on the Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense, and from that height Gompers could happily see a new day dawning of advantageous cooperation among labor, capital, and government. Such was the dream Gompers headily entertained in early 1917. But the clamorings of his ancient socialist adversaries intruded upon that lofty vision, and threatened to knock Gompers from his perch. If the socialists could successfully ride the anti-war issue through labor's ranks, they would divide the working class, stiffen the enmity of capital, and call down the wrath of the state on the backs of labor. They would thus dissipate the hopes that Gompers had long held and that now seemed so close to realization.

Gompers accordingly undertook a massive campaign against the ac-

<sup>55</sup> Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 210-12.

tivities of the socialists, contending with them for the soul of the American working class. George Creel quickly rallied to his side with the formation of a Division of Industrial Relations at the CPI. Creel also encouraged the creation of a special propaganda arm of the Department of Labor, headed by Boston businessman Roger W. Babson. Together, Creel and Babson flooded the nation's factories with posters, speakers, and slogans calculated to defuse the radical charge that this was a capitalists' war in which the workingman had no stake. "This, therefore, is the message that has been carried by the Department of Labor from one end of the country to the other," said Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson. "Every mediator, every employment official, every field officer of the Department, in addition to a corps of trained speakers [the Four-Minute Men] has been carrying the message to the workers of America that this is their war."<sup>56</sup> The President, in an unprecedented move, carried the message in person to the annual meeting of the A.F. of L. in Buffalo in November 1917, denouncing peace talk in unmistakably threatening terms. "What I am opposed to," he said, "is not the feeling of the pacifists, but their stupidity. My heart is with them, but my mind has a contempt for them. I want peace, but I know how to get it, and they do not." As for the faithful Gompers, Wilson said: "I like to lay my mind alongside of a mind that knows how to pull in harness." Gompers, evidently, was a good dray-horse to bear the administration's goods to the working class. But, Wilson pointedly warned, "the horses that kick over the traces will have to be put in the corral."<sup>57</sup>

Creel also bankrolled the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy, nominally labor's spontaneous answer to the allegedly disloyal socialists, but in fact the creature of Creel's Committee, carefully placed in the hands of the compliant Gompers. "In most respects," say the official historians of the CPI, "the Alliance may be considered a field organization of the CPI charged with the special responsibility of keeping labor industrious, patriotic, and quiet."<sup>58</sup>

"Industrious, patriotic, and quiet"—those goals for labor differed hardly at all from the intentions of the most ruthlessly anti-union employers, and the fate of labor in the war revealed how difficult it was in practice to keep the issues of welfare and loyalty separate. Conservative

56. William B. Wilson, "The Efficiency of Labor," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 78 (1918), 66-74.

57. Shaw, ed., *Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, I, 439-40.

58. Mock and Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 190-91.

capitalists continued to crush legitimate labor demands with the charge of disloyalty, just as they would later cry "communism" in the face of similar demands. The government itself abetted these developments with a series of spectacular raids on IWW halls in September 1917, leading to the conviction of nearly two hundred persons in three mass trials in Illinois, California, and Oklahoma.

Such furies, once unleashed, could not be easily contained by officialdom. The issue of loyalty, bound up with festering resentments of the foreign-born, with the calculated desire of capital to stamp out unions, and with hatred for pacifists who could not make the conversion to war, fed the ugly fires of vigilantism across wartime America. German-born Robert Prager, hanged by Missouri patriots, was but one victim of that violence. In the early morning hours of August 1, 1917, several vigilantes in Butte, Montana, burst into the boarding-house room of Frank Little, an IWW official trying to organize in the Butte Copper mines. Pummelled into the street, Little was tied to the rear of an automobile and dragged through the streets until his kneecaps were scraped off, then hanged from the side of a railroad trestle. The *New York Times* was among many organs of "respectable" opinion that deplored the lynching while insisting that "the IWW agitators are in effect, and perhaps in fact, agents of Germany. The Federal authorities should make short work of these treasonable conspirators against the United States." A few weeks later a mob seized pacifist clergyman Herbert S. Bigelow as he was about to address a peace gathering near Cincinnati. Bound and gagged, Bigelow was taken to a clearing in the woods and stripped to the waist. A white-robed man with a blacksnake whip lashed Bigelow's back to ribbons "in the name of the poor women and children of Belgium."<sup>59</sup>

Cries for undiluted loyalty and full-blown Americanism came from many lips during the war, but they were most remarkable in the mouths of the cultivated classes, the elites supposedly inoculated by education against base emotional appeals. Their demeanor and institutions allegedly embodied the values of decorum and rationality that the progressives had hoped to quicken throughout the society. But the war revealed the brittleness of their vaunted "culture." Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler, for example, announced in June 1917 that though the University was the safest refuge for dissident views in time of peace, with the coming of war "conditions sharply

59. Peterson and Fite, *Opponents*, 57-60, 79.

changed. What had been tolerated became intolerable now. What had been wrongheadedness was now sedition. What had been folly was now treason." Accordingly, Butler soon dismissed Professor Henry W. L. Dana for working with various peace societies, and Professor James N. Cattell for having petitioned Congress not to send conscripts to Europe. Columbia had "done its duty," exulted the *New York Times*, "by expelling two members of the faculty who . . . fomented disloyalty."<sup>60</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, apoplectically angry at Robert La Follette's opposition to the armed-ship bill in early 1917, had seethed that the Wisconsin Senator "has shown himself to be an unhung traitor, and if the war should come, he ought to be hung."<sup>61</sup> At Brooklyn's Plymouth Congregational Church, the Reverend Newell Dwight Hillis offered Christian forgiveness to the German people "just as soon as they are all shot. If you would give me happiness," he intoned from his pulpit, "just give me the sight of the Kaiser, von Tirpitz, and von Hindenburg hanging by a rope."<sup>62</sup>

When the nation's centers of higher learning had grown suddenly rigid with intolerance, when even an ex-President and the clergy were so given to bloody rhetorical excess, it was small wonder that popular passions exploded so frequently into violence in the wake of American belligerency. That violence grotesquely mocked the hopeful pieties about reason and education with which once-pacifistic progressives had so hesitantly enlisted on the side of war. But perhaps, in the final analysis, it was but a short step for a people who had listened for a generation to the progressive summons to fight corruption with direct democracy, now to cross a slender line and take the law into their own hands. There were frightful ironies here that ran deep, the full implications of which might have struck terror into the progressive mind, had it summoned the courage to confront them. Creel and Wilson and countless progressives repeatedly condemned vigilantism, but none of them could admit his own contribution to the cultural atmosphere in which the flames of hysteria were kindled. Much wartime violence was struck from the flint and steel of American tradition—especially from the hal-

60. Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 498ff; Peterson and Fite, *Opponents*, 103.

61. Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, Feb. 20, 1917, in Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), VIII, 1157.

62. *New York Times*, Mar. 26, 1917, 3.

lowed principles that shared convictions were the cement of society, and that persuasion was preferable to law as an instrument of governance. Those beliefs underlay American democratic culture at all times, but they had been especially operative in the movement for progressive reform, with its reliance on publicity and the appeal to conscience as the tools of social change. Now, under the stress of war, those practices could perversely sanction the most noxious kinds of oppression, both unofficial and official, inflicted in the name of popular sovereignty and often connived at by officials sworn to uphold the law. Against that awful tide neither George Creel's ebullient goodwill nor Woodrow Wilson's stiff propriety could effectively stand. The very basis of the society in freely given individual consent, it seemed, along with the consequent abhorrence for formal authority, could consume the body politic itself in the moment of crisis.

If Creel may be taken as both the agent and the symbol of a usually benign democratic impulse somehow run amok under the strain of war, it must also be noted that the government contained other souls more forthrightly malevolent than Creel, more contemptuous of man's capacity for reason and the sanctity of consent. They were less interested in propagandizing the people, and more disposed to direct methods of extinguishing dissent, by fair means or foul.

The foremost official enemy of dissidents was without doubt Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burleson. A Texan, a follower of William Jennings Bryan, a protector of small businessmen and farmers, Burleson hated, as only a certain species of white Southern Populist could, all of his fellow citizens who did not fall into one of those categories. Narrow, intolerant, so self-consciously pompous that Wilson called him "the Cardinal," Burleson, says a biographer, "acted the part he spoke, complete with black coat, wing collar, [and] rolled umbrella."<sup>63</sup> Colonel Edward House remarked with some consternation in 1918 that Burleson "is in a belligerent mood against the Germans, against labor, against the pacifists, etc. He is now the most belligerent member of the cabinet."<sup>64</sup>

The Espionage Act of June 1917 authorized the Postmaster General to ban from the mails any material violating the Act, or advocating treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the United

63. John Morton Blum, "Albert Sidney Burleson," in *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Two* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 74-75.

64. House Dairy, entry for Feb. 11, 1918, House Papers.



States. Though the zealous Burleson had begun to withdraw mailing privileges from various journals even before the Act became law, in the summer of 1917 he revealed the full dimensions of his campaign against radicals, pacifists, and the foreign-born. With the cooperation of Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory, and over Wilson's rare and timid objections, Burleson began ruthlessly to strip second-class mailing privileges from journals that dared, as he said in October, "to impugn the motives of the government and thus encourage insubordination." More specifically, Burleson added, he would deal severely with publications claiming "that the government is controlled by Wall Street or munition manufacturers, or any other special interests," or papers criticizing "improperly our Allies."<sup>65</sup>

Burleson, according to socialist Norman Thomas, "didn't know socialism from rheumatism," and the Postmaster General officially declared that he would not bar socialist publications from the mails—unless they contained treasonable or seditious matter.<sup>66</sup> But, he added, "the trouble is that most Socialist papers do contain such matter."<sup>67</sup> That was but a sample of the casuistic logic Burleson turned on his enemies. On another occasion, he banned from the mails a single issue of the *Masses* (a genteel anti-establishment publication that mixed political radicalism with literary and artistic avant-gardism) because it allegedly contained offensive matter. When the publisher proposed to avoid such matter in the future, Burleson still refused to restore the magazine's second-class mailing permit, on the ground that it had skipped an issue—no matter the reason—and was thus ineligible for such privileges as a regularly issued "periodical"! That high-handed action drew outraged, and ineffectual, protests from many quarters. *New Republic* editor Herbert Croly complained directly to the President, as did prominent reformer Amos Pinchot. Muckraking novelist Upton Sinclair wrote Wilson that "your Postmaster-General reveals himself a person of such pitiful and childish ignorance concerning modern movements that it is simply a calamity that [in] this crisis he should be the person to decide what may or may not be uttered by our radical press."<sup>68</sup>

Burleson was not the lone villain. By the autumn of 1917 Congress

65. O. A. Hilton, "Freedom of the Press in Wartime, 1917-1919," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 28 (1948), 348-49.

66. Norman Thomas Memoir, Columbia University Oral History Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University, N.Y. (hereafter CUOHC).

67. Hilton, "Freedom of the Press," 349.

68. Upton Sinclair to Wilson, Oct. 22, 1917, WWP.

knew full well the harshness with which the Postmaster General was administering the censorship laws; yet in October it considerably extended his powers in the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act. That Act required foreign-language newspapers to submit to the Post Office Department, in advance of publication, English translations of all articles or editorials referring to the government, to any of the belligerent powers, or to the conduct of the war. The procedure was costly and forced crippling delays in publication—though exemptions might be issued in cases of demonstrably "loyal" publications. Burleson wielded this new authority with the same unremitting fierceness that he had shown to the radical press, with the result that the country's many foreign-language publications either converted to an unqualified and even overblown support for the government or simply shut up shop, many never to reopen.<sup>69</sup>

Wilson only feebly opposed the rampages of his Postmaster General. In late 1917, the President gently suggested to Burleson that "I am sure you will agree with me that we must act with the utmost caution and liberality in all our censorship."<sup>70</sup> Burleson did not agree, nor was he persuaded. A week later Wilson questioned the suppression of the socialist *Milwaukee Leader*, and inquired hesitantly ("I am afraid you will be shocked . . ." he timidly addressed Burleson) if the paper might be given another chance.<sup>71</sup> Burleson remained unperturbed, and the President showed no inclination to force the issue. When Wilson counseled leniency in the *Masses* case, Burleson threatened to resign. At that, Wilson reportedly laughed and said, "Well, go ahead and do your duty."<sup>72</sup> Burleson proceeded to do his duty with a vengeance. He suppressed one journal for proposing that the war be financed by higher taxes and less borrowing. He censored others for reprinting Thomas Jefferson's opinion that Ireland should be a republic, and others still for expressing doubt that Britain would keep its promise to make Palestine an independent Jewish state. In one notorious example of bureaucratic contrariness, he banned from the mails Thorstein Veblen's *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, which Creel's

69. See Harry N. Scheiber, *The Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties, 1917-21* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 20, and Carl Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War* (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), 135.

70. Wilson to Burleson, Oct. 11, 1917, RSB, VII, 301.

71. Wilson to Burleson, Oct. 18, 1917, RSB, VII, 313.

72. RSB, VII, 165n.

CPI at the same time was trying to disseminate as a telling attack on the character of German society. He suspended the mailing privileges of the liberal *Nation* in September 1918, apparently because it had criticized Samuel Gompers; in this single instance, and at this late date in the war, Wilson intervened directly to overrule his Postmaster General.

A close second behind Burleson in hostility to civil liberties was Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory. A Texan like his colleague, he had made a distinguished career as an anti-trust lawyer, but had no extensive prior experience that suited him to deal sensitively with issues like freedom of speech and conscience. "May God have mercy on them," he said of war opponents, "for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging government."<sup>73</sup> He favored broad construction and vigorous application of the Espionage Act of June 1917, on one occasion publicly chastising a federal judge for instructing a jury to acquit a man who had called the President a Wall Street tool. The judge ruled that such statements, however distasteful, did not directly obstruct the army, the navy, or the Selective Service System, and hence did not violate the Espionage Act. The ruling was arguably quite consonant with the spirit of the legislation, and the spirit of the First Amendment, but it called forth incredulous disgust from the Attorney General. Gregory also professed his admiration for the Illinois State Bar Association when they condemned as "unpatriotic" and "unprofessional" an attorney who would take a draft resister as a client. Refusing counsel, in the eyes of the nation's highest law-enforcement officer, was a praiseworthy way to ensure justice in wartime.<sup>74</sup>

Despite their seeming extremity, such attitudes were not unfamiliar in the legal community at the time. Herbert L. Packer once distinguished between "due process" and "crime control" approaches to criminal justice. The former attends scrupulously to questions of justice and legal correctness, while the latter subordinates those values in its relentless drive to crush out criminality. Most early twentieth-century American lawyers and jurists, including the most eminent, were inclined to take the crime-control approach.<sup>75</sup> They came, mostly, from an older, established elite class that felt particularly menaced by ap-

73. Peterson and Fite, *Opponents*, 14.

74. Thomas W. Gregory, *Speech to Executive Committee of American Bar Association*, Apr. 16, 1918, in *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 2nd sess., Vol. 56, Part 6 (May 9, 1918), 6233-35.

75. Herbert L. Packer, *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).

parently increasing levels of criminal unrest and political agitation. They were thus quite prepared to sweep aside the obstacles that careful attention to due process put in the way of aggressive crime control. Efficient prosecution of criminals, said leading lawyers from countless forums, was the only way to safeguard the public order. Social peace itself was threatened by a too meticulous regard for procedural refinements that effectively favored the guilty. That sentiment, with which later generations would also be familiar, fostered in this period a sympathetic attitude toward vigilantism and even lynching. Many legal writers noted the close connection between vigilantism and the concept of self-government, seeing in lynch law simply the extension of the sovereign people's will into realms where formal writ, for whatever reason, did not run. The distinguished lawyer Charles J. Bonaparte, for example, himself to be a future United States Attorney General, had said in 1890 that "Judge Lynch may make mistakes . . . but if the number of failures of justice in his court could be compared with those in our more regular tribunals, I am not sure that he need fear the result. I believe that very few innocent men are lynched, and, of those who have not committed the past offense for which they suffer, a still smaller proportion are decent members of society. It is, of course, an evil that the law should be occasionally enforced by lawless means, but it is, in my opinion, a greater evil that it should be habitually duped and evaded by means formally lawful." The underlying purpose of vigilantism, said Bonaparte, "is not to violate, but to vindicate, the law."<sup>76</sup> Mob violence, in this view, was strangely transformed into the visible sign of a healthy society, vigorously rooting out criminal—or at least less than "decent"—elements from its midst.

Attorney General Gregory revealed his sympathy with such sentiments in his attitude toward the wartime censorship laws. The courts construed the law broadly, convicting persons, for example, for even discussing the constitutionality of conscription, or, as happened in New Hampshire, for claiming "this was a Morgan war and not a war of the people" (a remark that earned its author a three-year prison sentence). But the administration remained uneasy about the legal basis for such sweeping application of the espionage statute.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Gregory

76. See Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 144-79.

77. Zechariah Chafee, Jr., *Free Speech in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941), 74-75.

sought an amendment that would allow him to prosecute "disloyal utterances." Legislation to that end was introduced in Congress in March 1918, in the form of amendments to the Espionage Act, proposing to prohibit, among other new offenses, "any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution of the United States, or the flag of the United States, or the uniform of the Army or Navy," or any language that might bring those institutions "into contempt, scorn, contumely, or disrepute." Commonly known as the Sedition Act, this legislation became the law of the land on May 16.

Hiram Johnson was not alone in regarding the new law "a villainous measure," and commentators ever since have rightly viewed it as a landmark of repression in American history.<sup>78</sup> But the Sedition Act warrants scrutiny as well as condemnation, for it reveals a great deal about the popular temper at the midpoint of American belligerency, and about the Wilson administration's relation to civil liberties issues.

Despite its harshness, Wilson and Gregory regarded the Sedition bill as something of a compromise. They depended on it to head off congressional passage of a constitutionally dubious "court-martial bill" that would have transferred counter-espionage responsibility from the Justice Department to the War Department, and greatly extended the authority of courts-martial in questions of "disloyalty." The press pictured the bill as part of a mounting attack on the government's alleged inability to cope with "spies" and "traitors," and anticipated that Congress would use the hearings on the bill to cause political embarrassment to the President. Like the Overman executive reorganization bill making its way through Congress at about the same time, the Sedition bill represented Wilson's counter-stroke against congressional critics of his mobilization policies. In both cases, but especially in the latter, he ceded considerable ground to his conservative foes.

Gregory, as the President's chief spear-carrier in this affair, was obliged simultaneously to defend his Department against charges of weakness in the pursuit of disloyalty and to justify his request for additional legislation to strengthen the Department's hand. To resolve those apparently conflicting requirements, Gregory offered ingenious arguments, typical to his time and caste. On the one hand, he asserted, "I do not believe there is today any country which is being more capably

78. Hiram Johnson to C. K. McClatchey, Apr. 11, 1918, Johnson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

policed than is the United States."<sup>79</sup> "Scores of thousands of men also under constant observation throughout the country," Gregory assured a friend.<sup>80</sup> But on the other hand, he explained, the Espionage Act as it stood "did not reach the individual casual or impulsive disloyal utterances. These individual disloyal utterances, however, occurring with considerable frequency throughout the country, naturally irritated and angered the communities in which they occurred." Gregory made much of the recent and heavily publicized lynching of Robert Prager near St. Louis as a prime example of the harmful lengths to which popular excitement over disloyalty could run. "Consequently," he said, "there was a popular demand for such an amendment as would cover these cases."<sup>81</sup>

Gregory in effect argued that the government had the real problems of enemy espionage under control—but that it needed new statutory instruments to deal with the quick-tempered vigilantism of the loyal citizenry, to stay their hands from tar-bucket, torch, and rope as expressions of their patriotic impatience with the disloyal. In a remarkable revelation of the crime-control mentality, with its favorable regard for night-riders and lynch law, Gregory proposed not to prosecute the mobs but to pre-empt them, to replace crude vigilantes with trained government agents armed with the new sedition statute! Here was an inventiveness in the art of subverting free speech that rivaled the considerable accomplishments of Burleson.

The Attorney General himself was already intimately acquainted with the excesses of a quasi-vigilante organization called the American Protective League (APL), a band of amateur sleuths and loyalty enforcers which had managed to enter into an official relationship with Gregory's Department. It had begun in the spring of 1917, when Albert M. Briggs, a Chicago advertising executive, had proposed to the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation (later the FBI) that he be allowed to form a citizens' auxiliary to the Bureau, to aid in monitoring the activities of enemy aliens. Bureau Chief A. Bruce Bielaski, short of funds and manpower but long on anxiety about national security in time of war, accepted the offer. Gregory requested that Wilson make a supplemental budget allotment of \$275,000 from the President's \$100 million war

79. Gregory, Speech to Executive Committee of American Bar Association, 6234.

80. Thomas W. Gregory to T. U. Taylor, Apr. 10, 1918, Gregory Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

81. *Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Year 1918* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 18.

emergency fund, apparently to finance the citizens' auxiliary. "I . . . request that . . . it be made in such form as will permit me wide latitude in its use," Gregory secretly suggested; "that is to say, that the approval of the Attorney General on a voucher for payment out of this fund be final and conclusive. The necessity for this I will explain to you in person."<sup>82</sup>

Soon Gregory was boasting that "I have today several hundred thousand private citizens—some as individuals, most of them as members of patriotic bodies, engaged in . . . assisting the heavily overworked Federal authorities in keeping an eye on disloyal individuals and making reports of disloyal utterances."<sup>83</sup> Thus there came into existence a nationwide network of "agents," their authority proclaimed by official-looking badges that read "American Protective League—Secret Service." By war's end they numbered 250,000. They spied on neighbors, fellow workers, office-mates, and suspicious characters of any type.

Though Gregory admiringly called the APL a "powerful patriotic organization," and claimed that it was "well-managed," the League in fact constituted a rambunctious, unruly *posse comitatus* on an unprecedented national scale. Its "agents" bugged, burglarized, slandered, and illegally arrested other Americans. They opened mail, intercepted telegrams, served as *agents provocateurs*, and were the chief commandos in a series of extralegal and often violent "slacker raids" against supposed draft evaders in 1918. They always operated behind a cloak of stealth and deception, frequently promoting reactionary social and economic views under the guise of patriotism. The League sometimes counseled its members to commit outright physical assault on dissenters. It was, in one authority's summary view, "a force for outrageous vigilantism blessed with the seal and sanction of the federal government."<sup>84</sup>

That an organization such as the APL was allowed to exist at all testifies to the unusual state of American society in World War I, when fear corrupted usually sober minds, and residual suspicions of strong government disposed public officials to a dangerous reliance on private means. Through the APL volunteers, the government sought to effect drastic measures without itself assuming the full formal authority to do so—a fatal reluctance in the face of supposed necessity, leading directly

82. Gregory to Woodrow Wilson, Apr. 23, 1917, Gregory Papers.

83. Gregory to Francis H. Weston, Aug. 10, 1917, *ibid.*

84. The authority is Harold Hyman, quoted in Joan M. Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 309.

to a kind of officially blessed vigilantism. Wilson recognized the perils that lurked in this policy. On hearing of the American Protective League, he wrote to Gregory "that it would be very dangerous to have such an organization operating in the United States, and I wonder if there is any way in which we could stop it?"<sup>85</sup> But Wilson had acquiesced in Burleson's brazen disregard of presidential cautions; so now did he fail to push Gregory about the APL. Beyond that initial inquiry, the record shows few instances of Wilson's attempts to curb the citizen-watchdogs of the League. They went their meddling and noxious way, unmolested and even supported by the administration.

At lower administrative and judicial levels, many United States Attorneys and Federal District Judges seemed bent on outdoing both Burleson and Gregory in their aggressive enforcement of the Espionage Act. As one Justice Department official commented, "It has been quite unnecessary to urge upon the United States Attorneys the importance of prosecuting vigorously, and there has been little difficulty in securing convictions from juries."<sup>86</sup> Especially after the sedition amendments of May 1918, local federal attorneys had wide discretionary authority about whom they might prosecute. One observer noted that now every U.S. Attorney became "an angel of life and death clothed with the power to walk up and down in his district, saying, 'This one will I spare, and that one will I smite.'"<sup>87</sup> Not until the last weeks of the war were Federal District Judges instructed to refrain from prosecuting alleged Espionage Act offenders without the explicit approval of the Attorney General. This decentralization encouraged a wildly arbitrary application of justice. Anti-war speakers were indicted in one jurisdiction for repeating remarks made without objection in another. Socialist Kate Richards O'Hare, for example, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for a speech in North Dakota that she had many times given elsewhere with impunity. At war's end, the lopsided record revealed that nearly half the prosecutions under the Espionage and Sedition acts had taken place in thirteen of the eighty-seven federal districts. Not surprisingly, those thirteen districts were to be found primarily in the Western states, especially where the IWW was most active.<sup>88</sup>

85. Wilson to Gregory, June 4, 1917, quoted in Peterson and Fite, *Opponents*, 19.

86. John Lord O'Brian, assistant to the Attorney General, quoted in Chafee, *Free Speech*, 67.

87. *Ibid.*, 69.

88. Scheiber, *Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties*, 46-49.

The Supreme Court did not review any Espionage Act cases until after the Armistice. By then, of course, the damage was done. Given Gregory's swift movement and the war's sudden end, the nine Justices, observed one commentator, could "only lock the doors after the Liberty Bell [was] stolen."<sup>89</sup> Even then, the high bench showed little inclination to undo the harm the war had inflicted on the tradition of free speech. In fairness, it must be noted that the Court in 1919 was abruptly confronted with one of the touchiest and most complex of constitutional issues. There had been virtually no judicial interpretation in this area for over one hundred years. In the brief and extraordinary period of a few months in 1919, a period still echoing with the cries of battle, the Supreme Court was forced to erect the very foundations of American case law concerning freedom of speech.

One promising precedent had been offered by Federal District Judge Learned Hand in 1917, barely six weeks after the passage of the Espionage Act. In *Masses Publishing Co. v. Patten*, Hand had issued a temporary restraining order to prevent Postmaster General Burleson from banning the radical publication, *Masses*, from the mails. Hand noted the magazine's "political agitation" against the war, but insisted that agitation could not be equated with "direct incitement to violent resistance." Only the most straightforward language urging violation of the law, Hand argued, fell outside the constitutional protections of free speech. The government, he declared, must "point with exactness to just that conduct which violates the law. It is difficult and often impossible to meet the charge that one's general ethos is treasonable."<sup>90</sup> Hand's ruling was quickly reversed by the Circuit Court of Appeals and, unfortunately for the cause of free speech, his formulation of First Amendment doctrine also failed to persuade the Justices of the United States Supreme Court.

In March 1919 three Espionage Act cases came before the Court.<sup>91</sup> In each of them, the conviction reached by the lower tribunals was unanimously upheld. In the first of those cases, *Schenck v. United States*, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., articulated the theory that "when a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured."

89. Chafee, *Free Speech*, 80.

90. *Masses Publishing Co. v. Patten*, 244 Fed. 535 (So. Dist., N.Y., 1917).

91. The three cases were *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919); *Frohwerk v. United States*, 249 U.S. 204 (1919); and *Debs v. United States*, 249 U.S. 211 (1919).

Accordingly, he affirmed Schenck's guilt for having mailed pamphlets urging potential army inductees to resist conscription. "The question," Holmes declared, "is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent."<sup>92</sup>

Schenck had clearly counseled illegal action, and thus would have been convicted even under Judge Hand's definition of illicit utterances. But Holmes's famous "clear and present danger" test, despite his effort, like that of Hand, to distinguish legitimate agitation from illegitimate incitement, significantly reduced the range of protected speech that Hand had tried to encompass. To Hand's simple test of the explicitness of the language itself, Holmes added the criterion of *circumstances*, thus leaving wide latitude for judicial guesswork about the mood of an audience, the intention of the speaker, and the *probable* consequences of specific utterances.<sup>93</sup>

Worse still, Holmes's colleagues on the Court—and Holmes himself in some instances—violated even the "clear and present danger" standard in their subsequent decisions about free speech. In *Frohwerk v. United States*, decided shortly after *Schenck*, Holmes upheld the guilt of a Missouri German-American who had published articles questioning the constitutionality of the draft and the purposes of the war. Though the clarity and the proximity of the danger to military operations were difficult to discern in this case, Holmes nevertheless conjectured that "it is impossible to say that it might not have been found that the circulation of the paper was in quarters where a little breath would be enough to kindle a flame and that the fact was known and relied on by those who sent that paper out."<sup>94</sup> In the third case, *Debs v. United States*, Holmes upheld the conviction of socialist leader Eugene Victor Debs for an anti-war speech given before a convention of socialists in Canton, Ohio. Most of the speech had rehearsed standard socialist views on the evils of capitalism and the economic causes of the war. Debs had neither spoken exclusively to potential draftees, nor had he explicitly urged violation of the draft laws. Yet Holmes ruled that though most of the speech fell within the bounds of First Amendment

92. *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

93. See Gerald Gunther, "Learned Hand and the Origins of the Modern First Amendment Doctrine: Some Fragments of History," *Stanford Law Review* 27 (1975), 719-73; see also Chafee, *Free Speech*, chap. 2.

94. *Frohwerk v. United States*, 249 U.S. 204 (1919).

protections, "if a part of the manifest intent of the more general utterances was to encourage those present to obstruct the recruiting service . . . the immunity of the general theme may not be enough to protect the speech."<sup>95</sup> Debs was packed off to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, a martyred hero to the opponents of war, who helped give him nearly one million votes for President in the election of 1920, even while he languished in his cell.

Only in *Abrams v. United States*, later in 1919, did Holmes himself use the "clear and present danger" test to condemn a wartime conviction under the Sedition Act. Russian immigrant Jacob Abrams and four associates had printed pamphlets denouncing the American military intervention in Russia. Holmes, with his colleague Louis Brandeis, found that this action did not sufficiently threaten the American war against Germany. Whatever imaginable menace that Abrams's "poor and puny anonymities" might have posed, said Holmes in his dissenting opinion, lacked the requisite proximity and immediacy to be constitutionally punishable. Unfortunately, the majority of the Court held that the tests of proximity and immediacy were beside the point. It was enough, the Court declared, if Abrams's publications merely *tended* to encourage disruption of the American military effort.<sup>96</sup>

The decisions of March 1919, wrote noted First Amendment scholar Zechariah Chafee, Jr., "came as a great shock to forward-looking men and women, who had consoled themselves through the wartime trials with the hope that the Espionage Act would be invalidated when it reached the Supreme Court. They were especially grieved that the opinions which dashed this hope were written by the Justice [Holmes] who for their eyes had long taken on heroic dimensions."<sup>97</sup> Holmes's opinion in the *Abrams* case may have helped to redeem his reputation, but the fact remained that the nation's highest tribunal had overwhelmingly endorsed the most aggressive wartime assaults on dissenting opinion. Moreover, the effect of these decisions was to weave into the legal fabric of the nation restrictions on freedom of speech that had been unknown before 1917.

The stamp of Supreme Court approval on both the Espionage and the Sedition acts in 1919 surely seemed to have taken the attack against

95. *Debs v. United States*, 249 U.S. 211 (1919).

96. *Abrams v. United States*, 250 U.S. 616 (1919).

97. Chafee, *Free Speech*, 86.

dissent far enough to satisfy even the most fierce advocates of repression. But Woodrow Wilson, for one, was not content. In his campaign to secure American approval of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations, he repeatedly churned the cauldron of anti-radical and anti-alien sentiment that the war had heated. America, he declared, was not immune from the revolutionary upheavals of Europe, as "the poison of disorder, the poison of revolt, the poison of chaos," had entered "into the veins of this free people." Without a stable Europe, he warned, America might succumb to those toxins. As for the opponents of the League, he equated them with "the same sources . . . which threatened this country . . . with disloyalty. . . . Any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic."<sup>98</sup> In December 1919 Wilson called for a peacetime sedition act to replace the wartime amendment, scheduled to expire in 1921.<sup>99</sup>

These postwar spasms of Wilson's hostility to dissent were consonant with his general regard for civil liberties during the war. True, he had publicly denounced lynching, and had opposed the court-martial bill.<sup>100</sup> And, in his annual message to Congress in 1917, he struck a Jeffersonian stance toward the "voices of dissent," proposing that "they may be safely left to strut their uneasy hour and be forgotten," noisy testimonials to the futility of opposing "the calm, indomitable power of the nation."<sup>101</sup>

But in practice Wilson was usually neither calm nor indifferent. He had hesitated to restrain Burleson and protested only weakly against the semi-vigilantism of the American Protective League. A friend of free speech in theory, he was its foe in fact. He surely preferred that Burleson and Gregory should go too far, rather than not far enough, in

98. Quoted in Scheiber, *Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties*, 55-56.

99. Congress refused the request, and the legislation died quietly in 1921. The Alien Registration Act of 1940 was the first modern American peacetime anti-sedition statute.

100. The bill was in any case clearly unconstitutional, according to the doctrine set down in *ex parte Milligan* (4 Wallace 2, 1866), which said that neither Congress nor the President had the authority to declare the civil courts incompetent. Wilson was familiar with the precedent, and alluded to it in discouraging the bill's supporters. See, for example, Wilson to Sen. Robert L. Owen, Feb. 1, 1918, RSB, VII, 517.

101. Shaw, ed., *Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, I, 444. Jefferson had said in his first inaugural address: "If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments to the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

the war against dissent. He persistently ignored pleas to speak out against attacks on German-Americans.<sup>102</sup> He personally approved the high-handed scheme to raid IWW halls in September 1917, breaking the back of the nation's largest industrial union by mass trials and imprisonment of its leadership.<sup>103</sup> Like Gregory, he chafed at the imperfections in the Espionage Act before the amendments of May 1918, lamenting that the Act did not strictly permit prosecuting opponents of the conscription law unless they "stand in the way of the administration of it by any overt acts or improper influences."<sup>104</sup> On one occasion, he told his cabinet that a man who had been overheard wishing for Secretary of War Newton D. Baker's premature demise "ought to be punished if seditious and otherwise should be brought here by the Attorney General and given the 33rd degree and then the story of his comment given to the public so he would be forever damned by the people."<sup>105</sup>

Even before the Armistice, many progressives were showing signs of disenchantment with Wilson and with the war, and the administration's shabby record in the area of civil liberties was among the most powerful factors that began the process of their disillusionment. The government's policy of repressing dissent, the *New Republic's* Herbert Croly wrote to Wilson in late 1917, was "dividing the body of public opinion into two irreconcilable classes" of war opponents and war enthusiasts. That development, Croly explained, "makes the situation of papers which occupy an intermediate position, such as the *New Republic* does, extremely difficult. We are constantly being crowded between two extremes."<sup>106</sup>

"An intermediate position"—there was the heart of the matter. The progressives had rallied to Wilson on the promise that he would make the center hold, that his mobilization policies would preserve reform gains at home and that his diplomacy would introduce liberal American moderation into the settlement of the conflict in Europe. Now all those aspirations were overshadowed by Wilson's determination to extinguish dissent. To speak up for immigrants or to defend the rights of

102. See, for example, Wilson to L. C. Dyer, Aug. 1, 1917, RSB, VII, 201.

103. See William D. Stephens to Wilson, July 9, 1917, and Gregory to Wilson, Aug. 21, 1917, WWP.

104. Wilson to Joseph Tumulty, July 26, 1917, RSB, VII, 196-97.

105. E. David Cronon, ed., *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 299; entry for Apr. 15, 1918.

106. Herbert Croly to Wilson, Oct. 19, 1917, WWP.

labor was to risk being persecuted for disloyalty. And to criticize the course of the war, or to question American or Allied peace aims, was to risk outright prosecution for treason. In this atmosphere, the hopes of the progressives in 1917 that they might temper and guide Wilson's war policies were revealed as extravagant fantasies. "Wilson does not energetically enough strive to maintain liberalism," *New Republic* editor Walter Weyl confided to his diary in July 1918. "He allows liberalism to go by default . . . [while] the liberals . . . do nothing to embarrass him." By the time of the Armistice, Weyl despaired: "Liberalism is crumbling about our ears, and we are doing little or nothing."<sup>107</sup>

By that time, there was little or nothing that people of Weyl's persuasion could do. Wilson, Amos Pinchot wryly noted, had put "his enemies in office and his friends in jail." George Creel advised the President in late 1918, explaining the Democratic Party's congressional losses in the November elections: "All the radical or liberal friends of your anti-imperialist war policy were either silenced or intimidated. The Department of Justice and the Post-Office [Department] were allowed to silence or intimidate them. There was no voice left to argue for your sort of peace. When we came to this election the reactionary Republicans had a clean record of anti-Hun imperialistic patriotism. Their opponents, your friends, were often either besmirched or obscured."<sup>108</sup>

Thus the progressives and Wilson, thrust into cautious embrace in 1917, went down in defeat together at war's end. As the Paris peace negotiations loomed, the dimensions of their shared tragedy grew more apparent. "The more is the pity," reflected Wilson's erstwhile supporter, Oswald Garrison Villard, "that Wilson has made the great blunder of allowing his dull and narrow Postmaster General, his narrow Attorney General, all the other agencies under his control to suppress adequate discussion of the peace aims. . . . At the very moment of his extremest trial our liberal forces are by his own act scattered, silenced, disorganized, some in prison. If he loses his great fight for humanity, it will be because he was deliberately silent when freedom of speech and the right of conscience were struck down in America."<sup>109</sup>

That prospect galled the progressives who had with such trepidation

107. Quoted in Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 284, 288.

108. Quoted in Scheiber, *Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties*, 40.

109. Quoted in Michael Wreszin, *Oswald Garrison Villard: Pacifist at War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 101.

fallen in line behind Wilson in 1917. Their gamble on Wilson's leadership had failed. They were forced to recognize the hollowness of their hopes in that first spring of war. Now, in the final days, John Dewey acknowledged that the war had encouraged a "cult of irrationality" fed by "an insidious and skilled effort . . . to detach the volume of passionate energy from its original end"—that end being the progressive dream that Dewey had helped to conjure in 1917. Instead, popular passions had been grotesquely attached to reactionary purposes, fulfilling Randolph Bourne's direst predictions. For Dewey, the conscientious warrior who had so expansively endorsed the war only nineteen months earlier, the sting of disappointment was sharp. "These reactionaries, these constitutional disbelievers in the people," he raged, had in fact gained the upper hand, blasting his liberal ideals to mist. They were now "egging on the intolerance of the people," putting "a stigma upon all whose liberalizing influence in domestic policies they dread."<sup>110</sup>

Disillusion with Wilson and disappointment at their own failure to protect the reform cause were not the only wounds the war inflicted on progressives. The cruelest damage was visited on their very social philosophy, their most cherished assumptions about the reasonableness of mankind, the malleability of society, and the value of education and publicity as the tools of progress. The events of the war years had mauled John Dewey's central premise that the world, even a world at war, was a plastic place that an enlightened public might shape to progressive ends. Both on the domestic and international fronts, the conflict had revealed forces loose in the world that terribly twisted the fragile hopes of men of goodwill.

Even less tenable in the aftermath of wartime hysteria was the presumption that the public at large was rational and decent. Increasingly, that benign appraisal of human nature succumbed to a more cynical assessment, and the idea of "the people," good and educable, gave way to a concept of "the masses," brutish and volatile. Publicity, in which the prewar progressives had placed so much political hope, became in the postwar decade little more than an adjunct to the new economy of consumerism, as the fledgling industry of advertising adopted the propagandists' techniques of mass communication and persuasion. George Creel, with unwitting irony, titled his postwar memoir of the CPI's activities *How We Advertised America*, and bragged that the war "gave

110. John Dewey, "The Cult of Irrationality," in Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events*, II, 587-91.

me the opportunity . . . for recognition of advertising as a real profession."<sup>111</sup> When John Dos Passos wrote *USA*, his bitterly disillusioned account of American life in the World War I era, he made "public relations" expert J. Ward Morehouse among the most contemptible of characters, a man who blithely urged the marketing of a worthless "health food" cereal under the banner of "selfservice, independence, individualism. . . . This is going to be more than a publicity campaign," Morehouse is made to say in grotesque mockery of the rhetorical crimes of the war, "it's going to be a campaign for Americanism."<sup>112</sup>

Walter Lippmann perhaps best expressed the dimensions of the disenchantment the progressives felt as they contemplated the fruits of the war for the American mind in 1917-18. Lippmann had been among the initial architects of the Committee on Public Information. In July 1918 he accepted a commission as captain in the army, joining a unit that sent a barrage of propaganda about Wilson's peace terms into the German trenches. He studied propaganda techniques both in the United States and in the Allied countries, and in 1922 published his conclusions in a trenchant essay, *Public Opinion*. He wrote, he later recalled, "as the result of my experience in psychological warfare and in seeing the war."<sup>113</sup> The book constituted a learned polemic against the idea that the public might ever know or act rationally in the modern world. Contemporary society had grown "too big, too complex, and too fleeting" for mankind's puny powers of comprehension, Lippmann wrote.<sup>114</sup> The citizens of mass societies never saw reality, only "stereotypes," or "pictures in their heads," pictures that were invariably too simple and thus distorting. The crude passions cultivated by skilled propagandists during the war had dramatically demonstrated this sobering truth. Politics, especially, was "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind," for most citizens, many of whom "are mentally children or barbarians, people whose lives are a morass of entanglements, people whose vitality is exhausted, shut-in people, and people whose experience has comprehended no factor in the problem under discussion. The stream of public opinion is stopped by them in little eddies of misunderstanding, where it is discolored with prejudices and far-fetched analogy."<sup>115</sup> Democratic

111. Creel, *How We Advertised*, 157.

112. John Dos Passos, *USA: The Big Money* (New York: New American Library, 1969), 494-95.

113. Walter Lippmann Memoir, CUOHC, 88.

114. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 11.

115. *Ibid.*, 48.



theory, premised on the enlightenment and civic interest of the citizen, Lippmann declared to be built on a foundation of sand. There could be no common will, no spontaneous consensus, no such thing as an intelligently made mass decision. The solution, concluded Lippmann, was to create an "intelligence bureau," to pursue "the common interests [that] very largely elude public opinion . . . managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality."<sup>116</sup>

In the prewar years progressives had held in productive equilibrium the ancient tension between the political ideals of self-government on the one hand and efficient government on the other. Faith in man's reason, and reliance on the techniques of education and publicity, had sustained that equilibrium. But the war had cast dark clouds of doubt over that faith, and had shown the perverse effects that could result from abuse of those techniques. Lippmann now announced that "self-determination is only one of the many interests of a human personality," and he openly urged that democratic self-rule be subordinated to "order," "rights," and "prosperity."<sup>117</sup>

From reflections like this may be dated the rise of a substantial nagging fear of the people among modern liberals, a fear sharply at odds with traditional liberal purposes and one that threatened mortally to divide the liberal spirit against itself. One of the casualties of the war for the American mind thus seemed to have been the progressive soul, and the spiritual bloodletting very nearly drained the last reserves of utopianism from American social thought. The next reforming generation, after a decade of desuetude, would hearken not to the buoyant optimism of John Dewey but to the sober voice of Reinhold Niebuhr, preaching in Augustinian accents the doctrine of human imperfection and the necessity of diminished hopes. The war had killed something precious and perhaps irretrievable in the hearts of thinking men and women.

116. *Ibid.*, 195.

117. *Ibid.*, 195-96.

## 2

### *The Political Economy of War: The Home Front*

When America at last entered the stalemated war, the beleaguered Allies quickly dispatched missions of supplication across the Atlantic. Before the end of April 1917, high-level French and British delegations had arrived in Washington, seeking manpower, matériel, and, above all, money. The money was at first easily forthcoming, as Congress opened wide the doors to the United States Treasury. And the booming American economy was already supplying much of the Allied demand for munitions and foodstuffs. But manpower was another matter. Washington instantly recoiled from the request of the Europeans that American soldiers be amalgamated into the Allied armies. Instead, the War Department mounted preparations to field a force of one million Americans in France by the spring of 1918. They would not be commingled with foreign units, but would fight as an independent army. That army, officially called the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), was to be assigned its own sector of the front and supported by a distinctly American supply operation.

This plan stunned many Americans. When a prominent Senator declared in mid-April that "Congress will not permit American soldiers to be sent to Europe," no member of the administration troubled to refute him.<sup>1</sup> At the War Department, no plans existed for training a

1. Edward M. Coffman, *The War To End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 8.