

## **Chapter 15**

### **Emma Goldman, petroleuse ou pionniere ?**

#### **(Traditional Constraints on Women as Agents for Social Change in the U.S.A.: Remembering Emma Goldman, A Woman Who “Defied Laws and Convention”)**

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*Emma Goldman (1869-1940), the Russian Jewish immigrant to the United States became one of the world's great exponents of anarchism and of women's freedom. Patriarchy was a term she never used, but it was a concept she addressed throughout her life.*

#### **Emma Goldman -- Citizen of the World --an overview.**

Emma Goldman dedicated her life to the creation of a radically new social order rooted in absolute freedom, universal justice unconfined by national boundaries, a passionate advocate of free speech, women's independence, birth control, and worker's rights—unswerving in her commitment to her anarchist ideals and to “everybody's right to beautiful radiant things.” She was a speaker and a lecturer, an editor of an anarchist cultural and political magazine *Mother Earth* whose eloquence attracted thousands to her lectures. Most dramatic of the many episodes throughout her life of being dragged to police headquarters, was her arrest and imprisonment for speaking out for the rights of the unemployed in 1893, for access to birth control information in 1916, and against conscription into the First World War in 1917. Considered among the most dangerous anarchists in America by the young J. Edgar Hoover, the first director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the government eventually succeeded in deporting Goldman in 1919 to Bolshevik Russia.

There she witnessed harrowing contradictions, and agonized: “Was this the Revolution I had believed in all my life, yearned for and strove to interest others in, or was it a caricature—a hideous monster which had come to jeer and mock me? ... Its manifestations were so completely at variance with what I had conceived and propagated as revolution that I did not know any more which was right.” A warning about Emma Goldman was sent to the country's leader—this time, V.I. Lenin—fearful that her opposition to his policy of denying free expression ‘might cause him some political trouble.’ After two years, Goldman's disillusionment with the suppression of dissent was topped by the brutal massacre of the Kronstadt sailors—she literally ran away.

In exile in England, France, and Canada—she alerted the world to what she had seen in Russia from 1920 to 1921, after which she tried her hand at publishing articles and books. Her volume, *My Disillusionment with Russia*, was published and caused a stir on both the left and the right. Most of her other writings on topics including under-recognized creative women and Russian drama remained unpublished. In 1927, at the urging of many comrades and friends, she began to write her autobiography. Her intensely personal two-volume memoir tracked not only of Goldman's life but recorded the movement and events that propelled her life. Published in 1931, it was considered a literary success but a financial failure. Eleanor Roosevelt was among those who read the book and loved it. It may have influenced her in her support for Goldman's brief 90 day readmission to the US in 1934 while many other valiant attempts by powerful people to petition President Roosevelt on Goldman's behalf had failed before. She was welcomed back to United States, on a brief whirlwind but somewhat muzzled tour that deepened the sorrow of her exile. At the time, newspapers reported that the “noted anarchist looked tame and grandmotherly” in comparison to the image with which she left the country. Canada was a respite to which to return—where she could speak more freely about the rise of fascism, Stalinism, and, Hitler. Her return to France was filled with the sadness of weathering the loss of her greatest ‘chum of a lifetime’—Alexander Berkman.

Only political action could revive her. From 1936 until 1938 she served as the English language propagandist for the CNT-FAI struggle of Spanish anarchists of the civil war. In Barcelona, young women looked to her as a “grandmother of the revolution”—and she too admired “the epic greatness of the Spanish people.” Goldman believed that her work there “while bringing but meager results for them, has meant the greatest experience of my public life.”

She ended her days in Canada, raising money for the Spanish Women and Children Refugees of the Spanish civil war—and, in 1940 as the ominous cloud of the impending Second World War covered the horizon, organizing support for the anti-war radicals, the new victims of repression in Canada.

At the Emma Goldman Papers based at the University of California, Berkeley, we have searched the globe and found evidence everywhere of Goldman’s internationalism and of her impact on those who may never had the opportunity to meet her. From China, Ba Jin, leader of the Union of Chinese Writers, called Emma his “spiritual mother.” In Japan, Ito Noe, the 1920s Japanese feminist, even named her daughters, Emma 1 and Emma 2!

She was a citizen of the world—by choice and by circumstance—and, coming back to the theme of this conference on comparative patriarchy, she had ample opportunity to compare attitudes towards women, first hand. Goldman performed her own study on the topic, and drew strength from great revolutionary heroes and heroines—in politics and art—wherever they might be.

### **Louise Michel—Emma Goldman’s mentor from afar.**

Among the women Emma Goldman admired the most was Louise Michel. In 1893, Goldman, modeling herself after Louise Michel, who, in 1883, was arrested for urging the poor to take bread if they could not afford it—spent a year in Blackwell’s Island prison for the same offense.

She was excited to share the platform with Michel in 1895 at an Anarchist public meeting in London at which many international speakers compared “Political Justice in England and America.” Goldman spoke in English, Michel in French (mostly about French transgressions of political justice that rippled into British territories); neither understood the others’ languages very well. The young Goldman found it inspiring to meet a woman who was an esteemed world-renowned revolutionary.<sup>1</sup>

She admired Michel as an example of a person whose “social instinct developed to the extreme... ‘Mother Louise,’ as she was called by every child of the gutter. Her love for man and beast knew no bounds. It mattered not whether it was a forlorn kitten or a homeless dog, or a shelter less human being—she gave to all, even the last crust of bread.”

But Goldman worried about Michel, concerned that “to satisfy her great soul she was compelled to deny her individual instinct to the extent of living in great and constant poverty, of exposing herself to many dangers, to imprisonment, and to the heat of New Caledonia, whither she had been sent with many other political prisoners after the Paris Commune of ’71.”

Protesting the harsh conditions of Michel’s life, Goldman asserted “Anarchists insist that conditions must be radically wrong if human instincts develop to such extremes at the expense of each other.”<sup>2</sup>

Louise Michel died in 1905—revered as a revolutionary icon. Her tremendous strength of character, the ways in which she seemed to rise above the fray, continued to spark discussion and speculation—including questions about her sexual orientation. In 1923, an article appeared in German suggesting that Michel’s aestheticism, boyish appearance, and manner of dress signaled that she was a lesbian. Goldman was indignant and objected to the conventional stereotype: “It is a tragedy, I feel that people of a different sexual type are caught in a world which shows so little understanding for homosexuals, is so crassly indifferent to the various gradations and variation of gender and their great significance in life... [although] I am the last person to whom it would occur to “protect” Louise Michel,

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<sup>1</sup> “Emma Goldman in London,” article in *Liberty*, October 1895. in *Made for America (1890-1901)*, p.226.

<sup>2</sup> “Reds’ Leader Flays Police, Emma Goldman Explains Anarchy in Written Address Shipley Refuses to Let Her Deliver,” article in the *Chicago Daily Journal*, 17 March 1908. in *Making Speech Free (1902-1909)*, p.292.

my great teacher and comrade, from the charge of homosexuality. Louise Michel's service to humanity and her great work of social liberation are such that they can be neither enlarged nor reduced, whatever her sexual habits were."<sup>3</sup> A woman ahead of her time, especially on issues of sex and gender, Goldman lamented the limitation of people's capacities to understand the trajectory of sexual difference, lectured on 'the Intermediate Sex' when open discussion of the subject was considered taboo. To Goldman, Michel was a rare example of selfless devotion to the Cause—a multifaceted beacon of light, who remained a heroic symbol of the French Revolution.

### **Goldman in France.**

Accustomed to supporting herself, she recognized early on that economic independence for women was determined in part by where they lived. Although in 1907, Goldman tended to agree with her German comrade about "Europe being 50 years ahead of America" she did note that in "one respect is fact far behind it. The economic struggle is after all not so terribly tense, especially for women, in America. When I think, that I should have to earn my living in England or France, I shudder"<sup>4</sup>—a fate she faced in the 1920's and 1930's during her exile years when the conditions for women were much improved though far from perfect.

Still, Goldman loved France, especially Paris, in spite of constant surveillance. In 1900, government agents stalked her every move—following her through the streets of Paris, going through her mail, figuring out who was sleeping in whose room together in their hotel, and even describing the details of the red silk lining of her coat in their official report. And yet they seemed to have slipped up in 1901 when the government had gathered enough information to issue an order for her extradition; they actually lost track of her whereabouts. The German anti-anarchist surveillance team, more precise in their efforts, reported to their lackadaisical French colleagues that by the time of her extradition order, Goldman had already left the country!

She did return, and in 1927 lived not too far from Savoie—in St. Tropez—in a little house given to her by her friend Peggy Guggenheim, the American philanthropist and art collector. She called her hide-away on the hill "Bon Esprit" and it was there that she wrote her autobiography, *Living My Life*. Steeped in the process of trying to remember and document her past—she worked steadily for more than three years until her two volume memoir was published. During that time, she lamented to a friend in a letter—"To me one of the great delusions is the notion that writing is a joy...in fact, some of the greatest writers have suffered agony of the spirit during the process. I may not have the greatness in common with them, but by Jesus, I've got the agony."

Visited by friends from far and wide, she was also a fixture in the cafes and dance spots in the area...and spent a good deal of time with her "chum of a lifetime," the anarchist Alexander Berkman then in exile in Nice. Sometimes when his "official papers" were questioned by French authorities, he would ride the trains up and down the French countryside, day and night --wondering whether the only place left for him was "up or "down"!

Neither Goldman nor Berkman ever harbored illusions about the openness of the French government, and although Goldman loved Paris—"the city of revolution, the history of which has been written with the blood of its people, the sons and daughter of which have stood on the barricades, days, nights, weeks, fighting and dying for Liberty" she noted that "the only city that ruled by a 'radical' government and Socialistic minister" had been quick to ban the 1900 Anarchist Congress.<sup>5</sup>

### **Stepping Up to the Podium—Vignettes of Goldman's Public Life in America.**

That said, I am very glad that *this* conference on comparative patriarchy was not banned (although perhaps the cold wave of public opinion against most things American these days, and the general

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to article by Herr von Levetzow in Magnus Hirschfeld's periodical. Goldman's response came in a letter EG to Magnus Hirschfeld, March 1923.

<sup>4</sup> EG to Max Nettlau, 17 October 1907—in *Making Speech Free (1902-1909)*, p. 250 volume two of the four volume series *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years (1890-1919)*

<sup>5</sup> See "The Paris Congress," Letter to *Free Society*, 25 September 1900.

obliviousness of the crudest of Americans to the life and ideas of others has dampened the enthusiasm that might otherwise have attracted a larger audience to this gathering). Still, I am grateful to the many organizers of this event for trying to create a space for enlightened discourse and opportunity for us to learn from each other. I am especially grateful for the gracious invitation from Francis Feeley —the man who dared to take this on!

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Also thank you – Francis -- for your kind introduction. However, I must caution those who might wish they were welcoming Emma Goldman herself, that she often scolded her male hosts—especially if she found their remarks in any way, politically incorrect:

For example: At a meeting in Detroit in 1919, Emma Goldman was introduced by a male auto union official with the following words, and I quote: “Because she is such a good talker and because she speaks so eloquently, the first syllable of her name is “Gold” and because she speaks so vehemently, because she speaks with such authority, the last part of her name is “man.” I want to introduce Emma Goldman.”

Goldman stepped up to the podium and addressed the crowd: “Friends: By the introduction of our good chairman, I can see that he is a man. The conceit of the male that when you think deeply and express yourself with intensity, you must be manly and not womanly! I want to tell him that I know any amount of men who neither think nor express themselves in any shape or form!”

It was this kind of feisty irreverence that attracted audiences sometimes numbering thousands to her lectures. At a time when police and government intervened routinely in labor union organization and women lacked even the right to vote, it took tremendous courage to speak out as Goldman did (imagine what she would have said about the Sarkozy vote in process in France this week!). She voiced her doubts about whether the solution to political and economic problems ever could be solved by a government embedded in the capitalist system.

Emma Goldman was an anarchist who believed that revolution and social harmony were within reach—and took her message to the people wherever they might be, crossing class and language barriers to reach them. She delivered her lectures in large university halls like this one—as well as from open cars in crowded squares, and even in the backs of barrooms. It was not uncommon for her to deliver the same lecture on the social significance of modern drama to an exclusive women’s drama club one night (incidentally a venue rarely stalked by the police), and to coal miners on lunch break in a mineshaft the next day.) She moved easily from lecturing and writing on labor issues, labeling workers as the modern day slaves to industrial capitalism and the wage system,—to issues of women’s sexual and reproductive freedom, the education of children, religious moralism, war, and the economy.

At the turn of the century in the U.S., relatively few women shared the radical spotlight; among them were birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, labor leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and socialist peace activist Crystal Eastman. Goldman’s anarchist stance separated her from those who linked their activism to specific issues. She chose to associate with women like Kate Austin of Kansas and Voltairine de Cleyre of Philadelphia, who shared her desire to bring anarchism to the attention of the country.

## **Women and Revolution –transnational perspectives.**

Goldman foresaw women’s potential for spreading revolution, as early as 1901, especially citing American middle class women as the vanguard. She predicted that even though at that time “the average working man’s wife in [the U.S.]...has little feeling. It isn’t her fault. It is the fault of her training...I insist that the American woman will help on the cause greatly. The movement will come from the middle class, but it will spread.” She compared (and dismissed) entire cultures with a sweep of her pen—in each instance using anarchism as her barometer of progress. “There are few women Anarchists in Germany, and those few are Anarchists because their husbands are. Of course there are exceptions. In the ranks of women doctors, journalists and lawyers of Germany there are Anarchists, but not in the working class. The Italian women are rebels by nature, but too ignorant for intelligent anarchy.”

Her analysis of French women was a caricature of the emphasis on the primacy of sexuality with trace elements of truth: “The French women are winning their freedom but it’s an uphill fight. It is a matter of course for the American woman to be free, but the French woman must tear herself free. And then she works under one frightful disadvantage. The Frenchman sees the woman first and the worker afterward. It is always so—among radicals as among all other French classes. The French women workers themselves

admit it and it is a frightful handicap.” On the other hand, she criticized their prudish sisters in the U.K.: “The English women are slow to take up advanced thought. It is their awful English prudence that holds them back. Modesty is a good thing in woman, but the English woman has an overdose. Still she is taking a place in social work.”

Thus she surmised that “...it is the American woman who has the opportunity for freedom—for anarchy. She hasn’t so much idealism as the Russian, but the Russian woman is hampered by despotism. The American woman has liberty—home, public, social, educational, religious. She is bound to forward our case.”

In an interesting twist, Goldman attributed much of her influence and power to being a woman: “A woman can do so much for anarchy, if she goes at it right. I believe I owe my success to my being a woman. The audience, in this country, will grant woman a hearing because she is a woman. Then she must hold them. She must not talk to them as a woman, but as a comrade. This is not France. I can be a worker first, a woman afterward here, as I could in Russia.”

Her technique however was beating the men at their own logic game and separating herself from the separatist or essentialist women, who, she believed, diluted the ultimate goal of creating social harmony. “I have never been made to feel before any American man, however rough, that my sex impressed him before my argument. I do not make the mistake that most of your strong-minded women make. I do not want to topple men off their pedestal in order to take it. I am contented to share it. The women’s suffragists get up and rave against man and exalt woman. That is nonsense. I wish to be fair. I do not talk against man as a sex. I criticize my own sex quite as freely as I criticize the other.” Goldman then took her position to an extreme about ‘sex having no place in a movement toward truth’ that she actually did not adhere to in her life work, and especially not on the speaker’s platform: “The question of sex has no place... save as women accomplished certain forms of work better than men, and visa versa. When men find a woman does not abuse them and howl for her rights and theirs too; when she meets them on logical ground, is rational and fair, and able, they welcome her generously. I have always found it so, and I have worked more among men than among women, because there are more men to work among.”<sup>6</sup>

Goldman addressed a broad logic, and never limited her political analysis to class conflict or to the inequality of the sexes, believing strongly that each individual ultimately also faces the challenge of freeing themselves from internalized tyrants. Goldman’s interest in the psychological impact of living in adversarial and divided conditions, and to women’s experience within it was especially evident in the series of lectures in which she linked the longing for love to the desire for community and a sense of belonging.

In a sexually repressive era, Goldman was part of a vocal contingent that dared to speak about intimacy in a political context—raising issues in the 1890s and early 1900s that would become battle cries of feminists in the 1960s and the 1970s to this day.

Riding the wave of women’s awakenings, Goldman distinguished herself from the bourgeois New Woman and the growing suffrage movement whom she often caricatured and Puritanical and humorless. She reiterated her goal: “to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds.” Women’s freedom, to Goldman, would never be found within the bounds of marriage nor achieved through enfranchisement: “true emancipation” she said, “begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in woman’s soul.”

### **Free Love—and a woman’s soul.**

Her ideas on free love and independence from the shackles of monogamy and marriage were regarded as revolutionary. And yet, even this bold opponent of conventional guarantees of safe personal havens, struggled with the very same issues she espoused. I know this aspect of her intimate life because of a serendipitous discovery, years ago when I was in my twenties, of a shoebox full of old, yellowed letters addressed to her lover and road manager, Ben L. Reitman, Chicago’s hobo activist and red-light district gynecologist, which revealed Goldman, the woman—who was as passionate in her personal life as in her political life, who grappled with the common demons of jealousy, and longed for the security of an enduring romantic relationship.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview in *New York Sun*, 6 January 1901, p.5—vol. 2. p. 423-431

Her romance with Ben Reitman was the most intense (and frustrating) of her life; compulsively he would scan her lecture halls for a willing one-night stand as Goldman addressed the audience with talks entitled “Misconceptions of Free Love,” “Jealousy, Its Cause and Possible Cure” or “Variety or Monogamy, Which?” – lectures intended not only to clear free love of any association with promiscuity or lack of commitment, but also to chastise and educate her wayward lover to reform his behavior. Raging with a feeling of jealousy and fury as Ben left the hall, arm-in-arm with his next amorous companion, Goldman would continue to give her impassioned address, feeling the futility and the contradictions of her celebration of free love. After the crowds filed out of the auditorium and Ben sheepishly returned to her side. She agonized about whether she had the “right to bring a message of freedom to the people, when [she herself] had become an abject slave to ... love.”

She ruminated on just how many people flocked to listen to her voice the usually unspeakable contention that marriage and love were incompatible:

“Yes, love is free; it gives of itself unreservedly, abundantly, completely.  
... If the world is ever to give birth to true companionship and oneness,  
not marriage, but love will be the parent.”

To Goldman’s handsome and politically essential road manager, Ben Reitman, the inspiration of much of her lecture series, she wrote:

“My lecture on marriage and love is hateful to me, hateful because my faith  
in the power of love has been shattered. I used to think it could perform miracles,  
poor fool that I was...”

You came into my life with such a terrific force, you gripped my soul, my nerves, my thought, my flesh, until all was blotted out, all else was silenced. Theories, considerations, principles, consistency, friends, nay even pride and self-respect. Only one thing remained—a terrible hunger for your love, an insatiable thirst for it. That explains my clinging, my holding on to you, I, who never clung to anyone.”

She worried about having put such thoughts in print during her lifetime—the vulnerability and weakness she feared would be misunderstood and mocked:

“If ever our correspondence should be published,” she wrote to Ben, “the world  
would stand aghast that I, Emma Goldman, the strong revolutionist, the daredevil,  
the one who has defied laws and convention, should have been as helpless as  
a shipwrecked crew on a foaming ocean.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Birth Control and the Theatrics of Free Expression.**

It was the fear of free love, and of unharnessed sexuality that heightened other’s reactions to her anarchist politics. Many anarchists who preceded her, like Moses Harmon and the Lucifer group, went to jail for such beliefs, while others within the same circle did not subscribe to the practice of free love. Goldman’s vision of family—of child rearing and intimacy outside the bonds of marriage was ahead of its time and out of reach for ordinary people.

Still, thousands crowded her lecture halls, subscribed to her magazine *Mother Earth*, and enjoyed hearing her audacious critique of not only of marriage and love, but of electoral politics as well—and were endlessly amused by her clever interchanges with the police.

The US Supreme Court in Goldman’s time did not enforce first amendment law. Instead the regulation of free speech was determined by state and local governments. Local police and local courts responded as they pleased, leaving Goldman uncertain about when or how the authorities would suppress her talks. Undaunted, she refused to be thwarted claiming “they might as well attempt to direct the course of the stars as to direct the course of my life’s work. They can not do it; at least not while I live”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*

<sup>8</sup> See “Our Friends, The Enemy,” Report in *Mother Earth*, June 1909, in volume two: *Making Speech Free (1902-1909)*.

With great theatrical flair, Goldman once dramatized the impact of the suppression of free speech by stuffing a handkerchief in her mouth and sitting gagged before the audience on the stage during an evening lecture in which she was barred from speaking.

But very often, under orders from city officials her lecture halls were shut down by the police even before she got through the door to ascend the platform. Incensed crowds were turned away from their evening's political entertainment. With every lock that appeared on the door of a hall slated for an Emma Goldman talk, a free speech club formed, to affirm the right of free speech. Liberals and radicals joined forces to support Goldman's right to speak freely, even if they didn't agree with her (particularly about issues of sexuality). Emma Goldman was so accustomed to being banned from speaking, that she always carried a book to her lectures, lest she spend a long night in jail without something to read.

Emma Goldman's lectures were varied and always put issues of personal life on a par with war and the economy. No topic was taboo. She discussed "The Place of the Church in the Economic Struggle," on the same bill with her counter-spin to Freudian heralding of repression - "Sex, the Great Element in Creative Work".

Goldman was among the first birth control pioneers in the United States—

She acted as a mentor to Margaret Sanger particularly in the early days before Sanger decided to limit her argument to the issue of birth control and to pragmatically drop much of the social critique that fueled Sanger's initial commitment to poor women.

Goldman dared to advocate and lecture on Birth Control, and the Intermediate Sex (a phrase used to describe homosexuality), and "Why and How Small Families are Desirable" – a lecture often delivered with the more provocative title "Why the Poor Should Not Have Children." And in the spirit of the present debate over when life technically begins, she delivered a talk entitled, "The Child's Right Not to be Born."

In 1916, Goldman addressed a sea of hats in Union Square in New York City on the issue of birth control (from the many newspaper accounts and letters about this open-air speech, it seems that the women were at the outskirts of the crowd, scrambling for birth control literature):

"From whatever angle, the question of Birth Control may be considered, it is the most dominant issue of modern times and as such it cannot be driven back by persecution, imprisonment or a conspiracy of silence.... I demand the independence of woman, her right to support herself; to live for herself; to love whomever she pleases, or as many as she pleases. I demand freedom for both sexes, freedom of action, freedom in love and freedom in motherhood."

She asserted:

"Every woman should have the right to say whether she shall have a child or not. Motherhood should be a voluntary act; not the act of a slave."

Helen Keller, American socialist, pacifist, and crusader for the blind wrote to the editors of the *New York Call* to protest Emma Goldman's arrest and strip search:

"The attempt to imprison a woman who is teaching the mothers of the working class what they so pitifully need to know is an outrage... The ruffianly search was an insult to her womanhood of all of us, ---what did the police expect to find? A bomb? ...It should arouse everyone that believes in free speech and in a woman's right to rule her own body."

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Once, in Portland, Oregon Goldman gave a lecture on birth control. Two days later, after the local authorities caught wind of her illegal act of distributing birth control leaflets, they showed up at her next lecture, waiting to catch her in the act. Just as she began her lecture on Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Intellectual Storm Center of Europe," she was carried off the stage.

After one too many such events, an apocryphal story circulated about Goldman coming up with the idea of chaining herself to the platform. In a 1909 Philadelphia lecture series, Goldman acquired a strong, heavy lock and chain, wound it around herself, the podium, and then threw it out the window as her comrades attached it to a pole outside, hoping that it would take the police so long to release her that they

couldn't possibly interrupt her lecture. According to reports in the Yiddish press, on this one occasion, the police never showed up!

Her playful defiance countered the intimidation tactics of the police—and assuaged her fear that the anarchist experience was the beginning of a downward cycle—an ominous “precedent [that would soon]...be followed up by other States, the next victims will be the Socialists, the Single-Taxers, the Mormons, the Prohibitionists, and any and all minority movements that may stand in the way of plutocracy and respectable vice.” Arguing for unified action, she asserted that “piece-meal the enemy can cut us into mince-meat, but working together we are invincible”<sup>9</sup>

### **Political Violence and the Anarchist Challenge to Free Speech.**

Many anarchists objected to Goldman's emphasis on free speech, claiming it as a natural right, not something the government had the authority to grant or deny, fearing that free speech fights obscured the vicious battle between labor and capital, the violence on the streets and in the factories. Envisaging a time when the people themselves would be more directly responsible to each other, anarchists never placed their trust in the law as a fair arbiter of grievances. Goldman became a go-between liberals and anarchists—a mediating force to translate the intentions of her comrades, to gather support for their often misunderstood efforts, and affirm their rights without assuming public agreement with their actions or ideas. Especially after the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, when fear fueled the passage of Anti-Anarchist Laws and national hysteria accentuated xenophobia and suspicion of foreigners, Emma Goldman was pivotal in the creation of a coalition of free speech advocates, most of whom, in challenging the law, found themselves defending ethnic racial groups with which they may never have had contact before. And, inadvertently, many anarchists, who otherwise shunned the legal system, would take their place among America's most fervent advocates of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Goldman emphasized the points of commonality between her political ideas and the American ideal of liberty. To dispel the prevalent misconceptions of anarchism as synonymous with chaos and violence, she assured American liberals and progressives that anarchism was “the direct foe of violence,” and a political philosophy predicated on the belief in the possibility of peace and harmony. To deflect the notion that violence was something foreign to the United States, she cited Thomas Jefferson and the tradition of deposing tyrants. Certain that intolerable conditions were the root cause of the use of force, she believed that anarchists—often caricatured as bomb throwers, impractical dreamers, or self-defeating activists vulnerable to the force of the government—were in fact unsettling realists.

To counter the tide of repressive anti-immigrant, anti-Anarchist, and anti-labor laws, she emphasized the centrality of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In her early writings, directed primarily to the German and Eastern European Jewish anarchist enclave in New York City's Lower East Side—much of which is now available in translation in the first of the Emma Goldman Papers' four-volume series, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years (1890-1919)*, reveals a much more militant Goldman than previously imagined by women historians initially drawn to her remarkably prescient perspective on gender in the struggle for liberation revealed.

This misconception was promoted occasionally by Emma Goldman herself. To her English-speaking audience, she often articulated the more peaceful aspects of her anarchist vision, softening the impact of her searing expose of the layers of injustice embedded in the capitalist system...claiming that “the first tendency of anarchism is to make good the dignity of the individual human being by freeing him from every kind of arbitrary restraint—economic, political, social.”<sup>10</sup>

In the wake of U.S. entry into the war in Europe—a torrent of reaction would overtake the country. In 1915, she warned the public—“In the face of this approaching disaster, it behooves men and women not yet overcome by war madness to raise their voice of protest, to call the attention of the people to the crime and outrage which are about to be perpetrated on them.” Xenophobia, anti-German sentiment, as well as anti-radical and anti-immigrant hysteria, was the motivating force behind new links between intelligence-gathering agencies into a gradual consolidated centralized bureau of investigation. Goldman

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<sup>9</sup> Dear Friend, A Circular, 26 January 1909

<sup>10</sup> See “Reds Leader Flays Police” in the *Chicago Daily Journal*, 17 March 1908.



became a test case to see how much suppression of individual rights would be tolerated by the public as the United States' merged the concepts of loyalty and patriotism with acquiescence to war.

In 1916, Goldman's sudden arrest in Cleveland and sustained jail sentence for the same birth control lecture she had delivered for the last several years signaled the escalation of repression and foreshadowed her 1917 arrest for speaking out against the involuntary drafting of young men into the military.

### **Trial, Imprisonment, and Deportation.**

Her resulting prison sentence for anti-war work lasted almost two years and ended with her deportation to Soviet Russia.

“May each one of you give the best that is in them...”

Sadly, in our current frightening times, it is not hard to imagine how easily a nation can become divided when loyalty to one's country is linked too closely to intolerance of dissent.

On trial for her beliefs in 1917—she warned the jury especially as the country was engaged in a war abroad that the world will judge whether we have secured democracy at home. Without a lawyer and in her own defense, Goldman addressed the court in her anti-conscription trial—first by challenging those who accused her of disloyalty:

“...we love America ...But that must not make us blind to the social faults of America. That cannot make us deaf to the discords of America. That cannot compel us to be inarticulate to the terrible wrongs committed in the name of patriotism and in the name of the country.”

Goldman believed that there was a social war raging at home...

“It is organized violence on top, which created individual violence at the bottom. It is accumulated indignation against organized wrong, organized crime, organized injustice, which drives the political offender to his act. To condemn him means to be blind to the causes that make him. You and I and all of us who remain indifferent to the crimes of poverty, of war, of human degradation, are equally responsible for the act committed by the political offender... We say if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America.”

At that time, most radical offices were raided, and periodicals suppressed. Much of Emma Goldman's material was confiscated for the trial, and lost or destroyed. Some say J. Edgar Hoover used the confiscated material to educate himself on the radical left, before he became the director of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Goldman went to prison for 18 months for her anti-conscription work and the letters she sent during her confinement are the most poignant in the collection, if not the hardest to read. They document the horrors of the experience—and foreshadowed the pain and separation from the people and the activity she loved.

At dawn on December 21, 1919, Emma and hundreds of other radicals were rushed to the deportation ship. Goldman's deportation photo was sent to all ports of entry in the US, Canada, and Europe, lest she attempt to return. Just the night before she had written a message to the people she would leave behind:

Dear Friends—These are trying but wonderful times. ... There is great work to do. May each one of you give the best that is in them to the great ... last struggle between liberty and bondage, between well-being and poverty, between beauty and ugliness. Be of good cheer, beloved comrades. Our enemies are fighting a losing battle. They are of the dying past. We are of the glowing future.”

### **Lifting the Veil of Indifference.**

The governmental decision to deport Emma Goldman in 1919 was not just about the war—it was also the threat represented by the vision of universal justice overriding national boundaries. Many of the ideas she espoused are chillingly relevant today —challenging, among other things, not only religious dogmatism but also the systematic suppression of women, and the erosion of civil liberties. As we attempt to lift the veil of indifference and disinformation that shrouds our ability to see, Goldman’s prescient fear that “the most violent element in society is ignorance” has a melancholy resonance.

### **Homage.**

Goldman's official return to the U.S was granted only upon her death in 1940, at which time international government surveillance agents finally considered her case closed. A citizen of the world and yet nowhere at home, her body was allowed reentry, finally laid to rest and buried next to the Haymarket martyrs, who had inspired her devotion to the cause of freedom.

Emma Goldman will be remembered as a grand expositor, a woman who spoke her truth to the powerful who tried to censor her and to the powerless who longed for the better world she articulated so eloquently.

We live in an unsettling time in history when we need sustenance from those who like Emma Goldman, maintained not only a vision of justice, but a sense of optimism, as well. Her lifelong friend and attorney, Harry Weinberger, lamented her death and evoked her spirit at the funeral services:

“Emma Goldman is gone, gone to join that army of men and women of the past to whom liberty was more important than life itself. She spoke out in this country against war and conscription, and went to jail. She spoke out for political prisoners, and was deported. She spoke out against Naziism and the combination of Naziism and communism, and there was hardly a place where she could live. .... Emma Goldman, we welcome you back to America, where you wanted to end your days with friends and comrades. We had hoped to welcome you back in life. You will live forever in the hearts of your friends and the story of your life will live as long as the stories are told of women and men of courage and idealism.”

In her time and in our own, it takes courage to stand up against injustice, to challenge laws and convention. Emma Goldman reached beneath the surface of politics, touched the feelings, the longings, and the desire for freedom, common to us all. She was also haunted by the internal tyrants of conventional womanhood, often the hardest to overthrow. Her insights into the crushing long term impact of unequal power extended the parameters of our discussion here today on comparative forms patriarchy and domination—and continue to resonate with those who long for social justice across the globe.