Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s

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In approaching that seamy side of the national character which periodically displays broad-scale intolerance, prejudice, nativism, and xenophobia, many American historians have sought in recent years to draw upon the findings of scholars in related disciplines in their attempts at meaningful analysis. Especially suggestive in this area has been recent work in sociology, social psychology, cultural anthropology, and American studies.\(^1\) Differences exist, however, as to how such findings can actually aid the historian and the degree of reliance he can confidently place upon them. Given the fact that the average historian must work in a past context in which precise empirical research is impossible, particularly as it applies to a broad spectrum of public attitudes, and given the fact that modern social science studies draw the great body of their evidence from current materials, a question of relevance is raised. How safe is it for the historian to project such modern findings backwards in an attempt better to understand and grasp the tensions and pressures of a prior era? Are modern social science techniques reliable in the analysis of imprecise historical materials?

Some members of the historical guild feel that such borrowing of either materials or techniques is too dangerous to be acceptable. Others at times have relied too heavily upon such interdisciplinary aids in order to validate general presumptions otherwise difficult of documentation. Still others have used such materials cautiously and carefully, so cautiously and so carefully that they have come to differ among themselves concerning their applicability. In the study of past intolerance, for example, there have been

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\(^1\) Particularly suggestive in this regard are the works of Gordon Allport, Bruno Bettelheim, Kenneth B. Clark, Allison Davis, E. Franklin Frazier, Marie Jahoda, Morris Janowitz, Clyde Kluckhohn, Kurt Lewin, Herbert Muller, Gunnar Myrdal, Arnold Rose, Gerhart Saenger, Edward A. Shils, James Vander Zanden, Robin Williams, and J. Milton Yinger.
those who drew heavily upon a sociologically oriented emphasis on status rivalries and who have emphasized ongoing tensions ever present in the slow process of ethnic integration in our dynamic society. Yet such persons have subsequently been challenged to explain the plausibility of the cyclical nature of waves of intolerance and its frequently differing character as unique situations have produced unique expressions geared to immediate needs. Others who have made careful use of stereotyping or who have placed reliance upon ideological factors have been questioned. So too have those who have focused upon the concrete facts of the immediate situation, especially upon the influence of men of passion with ability to create or nurture moods of alarm by exploiting irrational myths. This has forced such persons to de-emphasize the constant factor of human irrationality in normal times even though it is always basic in assessing causation in all historical events.

In many ways the study of intolerance in the 1920s raises in exaggerated form both a question of the applicability of related materials and of proper permissible use of such materials. That decade, despite its surface prosperity and supposed gaiety and exuberance, was characterized by waves of public intolerance seldom felt in the American experience. Much of this intolerance was merely an outbreak of familiar subsurface prejudices with antecedents in earlier expressed antipathies toward radicals, Catholics, Jews, Negroes, Orientals, and other minority groups. Yet such intolerance was not traditional. Fostered frequently, although seldom led directly by an apprehensive business community or aggravated by men seeking gratuities as brokers for that community or as brokers for men of property, it quickly gained its sanctions from that national consensus so clumsily branded "normalcy" and involved many Americans previously immune to its toxicity. As such it was an integral part of the 1920s, participated in consciously or unconsciously by the great majority of Americans. That it took on a changing character as the decade advanced is apt testimony to its virulence. That it either disappeared or took on different forms with the depression seems to reveal that it was specially suited to the peculiar culture and society of the jazz age.

The historian would be delighted if by merely adding the materials and utilizing the techniques of the social scientists he could say precise and sci-

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2 For example, John Higham, "Another Look at Nativism," Catholic Historical Review, XLIV (July 1958), 150, in denigrating an ideological approach, argues: "Except on the subject of race (and in related forms anti-Semitism), the kind of accusations which nativists leveled against foreign elements remained relatively constant. . . . For the history of nativism, therefore, emotional intensity provided the significant measure of change."

Scientific things both about the roots, nature, and manifestations of intolerance at this time. Yet, despite the siren’s call of being able through empirical social research to reach quantitative answers, he is tempted to concentrate on the imprecise approaches of history, relying upon interdisciplinary tools as analytical devices only when they seem to have an obvious relation to known and documentable reality.

Clearly the sources of the intolerance of the 1920s can be traced to at least the late Progressive period, with obvious roots in the immediately preceding years. Clearly such intolerance had a relation to growing Progressive apprehensions over alarming developments which did not seem to be responding to normal controls. The IWW, the first effectively organized movement of militant workingmen to challenge the whole American economic system, sent chills through the hearts and outrage through the souls of upper and middle class Americans. Here in the early years of the century was a group with the effrontery to make demands no decent citizen could honor and employ techniques no moral American could tolerate. But worse than this, these people and their Socialist “cousins” rejected the premises upon which the American system rested, namely that rights and privileges were open in a free society to anyone who was willing to work up patiently within the system. Or if the individual was incapable of utilizing this technique he would eventually be taken care of in a spirit of paternalism by the affluent class, as long as he stood with his hat in his hand and patiently waited. The alarming fact was that the IWWs and Socialists were no longer willing to wait. They were unwilling to accept the fact that only after one had gained a stake in society was he warranted in becoming a critic or a reformer. As one Progressive editor wrote during the Lawrence textile strike of 1912 (at the point which Paul Brissenden called “the high tide of the I.W.W. activity”):

On all sides people are asking, Is this a new thing in the industrial world? . . . Are we to see another serious, perhaps successful, attempt to organize labor by whole industrial groups instead of by trades? Are we to expect that instead of playing the game respectfully, or else frankly breaking out into lawless riot which we know well enough how to deal with, the laborers are to listen to a subtle anarchistic philosophy which challenges the fundamental ideas of law and order, inculcating such strange doctrines as those of “direct action,” “sabotage,” “syndicalism,” “the general strike,” and “violence”? . . . We think that our whole current morality as to the sacredness of property and even of life is involved in it.4

Also involved in it was the IWW practice of utilizing the rhetoric of American democracy as a device for obtaining their ends. The "free-speech fight" which assumed national proportions after 1910 was distressingly successful at times and was painfully difficult to counteract. For while many Americans could argue that utilizing free speech to gain personal economic ends was an abuse of American ideals, the alternative of arbitrary suppression hardly preserved them.

For those in this dilemma World War I afforded a satisfying rationalization for suppression. Woodrow Wilson's prediction, "once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance," was clairvoyant, as the government quickly set out to turn the President's words into official policy that succeeded frighteningly well. Every element of American public opinion was mobilized behind "my country, right or wrong," dissent was virtually forbidden, democracy at home was drastically curtailed so that it could be made safe abroad, while impressionable children were either "educated" in Hun atrocities, or their time was employed in liberty loan, Red Cross, war saving stamp, or YMCA campaigns. It was not difficult then to channel an aroused nation's wrath against earlier boatrockers—a development made easier by the fact that many IWWs and Socialists stood out boldly against the war from the start. The Espionage Act of 1917, while ostensibly a measure to strike at illegal interference with the war effort, was so worded that it could be, and was, used to stamp out radical criticism of the war. Its subsequent 1918 amendment, the Sedition Act, was a less subtle device. Passed by the pressure of western senators, and modeled after a Montana IWW statute, its purpose was to undercut both the performance and advocacy of undesirable activity. There was a clear implication that people who utilized speech as a means of gaining improper ends had to be restricted. And with the subsequent federal prosecution of 184 members of the IWW in 1918 and 1919, to say nothing of a crackdown on Socialists, German-Americans, conscientious objectors, and Non-Partisan Leaguers, the intent of the federal legislative and administrative program became crystal clear.

With peace and the end of conservative labor's wartime honeymoon,

9 Zechariah Chafee, Jr., Free Speech in the United States (Cambridge, 1941), 39-41.
there was renewed fear on the part of the reinvigorated business community that an unholy union of dissident malcontents and elements of more orthodox labor, now feeling callously betrayed, was not only possible but probable. The strikes of the immediate postwar period could only be rationalized by business in these terms. And to create further alarm, not only was Bolshevism a reality in Russia, but American workers and even some influential leaders were studying its economic and political implications with interest if not with admiration. Catholics, when under fire in the past, had consistently denied their allegiance to the Vatican, but some of these Bolshevik admirers even proclaimed proudly and openly their allegiance to a new order functioning from the Kremlin.8

Fear led to irrationality and business found it impossible to analyze the meaning and implications of these developments or to understand what Gutzon Borglum called in 1919 the "real labor problem," which was labor's dependent condition. In response to a speech by Nicholas Murray Butler, rebuking labor for its lack of "reasonableness,"9 Borglum wrote:

Labor's recent political activity is due to a deep consciousness of the necessity of self-reliance to secure any and all improvement in its condition. And further, the political color that has recently appeared in its methods, is forced because of the utter faithlessness and failure of partisan government to give it relief.10

But to conservative leaders, protection was more important than understanding. With the wartime legislation now generally inapplicable, they sought to get onto the statute books peacetime sedition and criminal syndicalism laws to take its place. To accomplish this, business was frequently able to transfer its own fears of Bolshevism both to a broader public and to state legislators who served that public. The result was that such propagandizing, plus added apprehensions triggered by frequently specious bomb scares, produced wide demand for restriction. Thus, although much of the new legislation was enacted in a sincere desire to control agitators and dangerous seditionists, other more responsive legislators took care to be sure that resultant laws were carefully worded and did not appear to be


9 Nicholas Murray Butler, The Real Labor Problem (n.p., [1919]), an address delivered before the Institute of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, October 13, 1919, and published as a pamphlet.

class legislation. By 1920 thirty-five states had enacted some form of restrictive, precautionary legislation enabling the rapid crackdown on speech that might by its expression produce unlawful actions geared toward stimulating improper political or economic change. Such legislation was couched in terms which in Connecticut permitted punishment of “disloyal, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States,” and in Colorado, “advocacy by word or in print of forcible resistance to constituted government either as a general principle, or in particular instances as a means of affecting governmental, industrial, social or economic conditions.”

That there was no legal need or justification for such legislation (the criminal codes of the states adequately covered conspiracy and libel) further underlined the fact that its purpose was devious. It constituted intimidating legislation by which business subtly sought to institutionalize forms of prior curtailment and thereby free itself from the necessity of having personally to restrict those it considered a threat to the existing order. Henceforth such restriction and subtle regimentation could be left to the discretion of administrative officials who could develop standards to fit immediate and local needs, and who, as the decade progressed, were to add the injunction as a further precautionary weapon.

Although this legislation was quickly implemented in 1919 in a number of states, it did not quiet all malcontents. Prompted by a multiplication of strikes and labor discontent, the more hysterical began to fear that local sanctions were not enough and proceeded to advocate a form of federal “direct action.” Powerful federal activity such as the Palmer raids, the army-conducted deportation of 249 “dangerous Reds” aboard the “Soviet Ark” Buford, the contemporaneous effort of representatives and senators to rush through a federal peacetime sedition act, while a product of and response to excessive public hysteria should also be understood as the partial culmination of an increasingly more pressing apprehensiveness


12 “Criminal Syndicalism,” Columbia University Law Review, XX (Feb. 1920), 232. The point was made regularly by liberals in the 1920s. See, for example, Brandeis’ famous concurring opinion in the Whitney case (1927), 274 U.S. 357, 372 ff.

which had obsessed conservatives for well over a decade. And the fact that many Americans were at the time able to rationalize and condone the most disgraceful, wholesale departure from fundamental guarantees of basic liberty and due process of law in American history further underscores the extent of their fears.\textsuperscript{14}

Yet the Red scare of the 1920s introduced a new permanent dimension of intolerance. This was the aspiring, self-seeking individual or special interest group which sought to exploit the hysteria and intolerance of the moment for personal advantage. Such individuals and groups were not new in American history.\textsuperscript{15} But the breadth of their operations was more sweeping in the 1920s, and the ambitiousness of their calculations was greater, as was the number of Americans they sought to affect. For aggressive politicians like A. Mitchell Palmer, Leonard Wood, or Albert S. Burleson, the ability to project themselves into the role of master defender of the endangered order could mean nomination to high office, hopefully the presidency. To an Anthony Caminetti, the first person of Italian extraction to be elected to Congress and by then Commissioner of Immigration, this was an opportunity to demonstrate that he, as well as others of his national origin, were fully 100 percent American. To an aggressive bureaucrat like William J. Flynn, head of the Bureau of Investigation, or J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Bureau's newly created General Intelligence (antiradical) Division, here was a chance to enhance the power of the Bureau, and his own power and domain simultaneously.\textsuperscript{16} To Flynn's successor, William J. Burns, the ability to guide public fears and even create fears where only apprehensions had existed was also an opportunity to stimulate a brisk private business for the Burns International Detective Agency until an increasingly more hostile public forced a curtailment and a housecleaning in the Department of Justice.\textsuperscript{17}

At the group level motivations were equally divergent. The American Legion epitomized the service-oriented organizations, obligated to deliver


\textsuperscript{15} One is immediately reminded of the careful attempt of the Adams Federalists to exploit the half-war with France in 1798, Know-Nothingism in various periods of American History, bloody-shirt waving in the post-Civil War years, among other things. See James M. Smith, \textit{Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties} (Ithaca, 1956).

\textsuperscript{16} Max Lowenthal, \textit{The Federal Bureau of Investigation} (New York, 1950), 71-72, 90, 298 ff.

a variety of specific benefits to its wide membership. To do this entailed sufficient flattering and assisting of those in power to convince them that the organization deserved favors. But to write the Legion off as "apple-polishing, flag-wavers of patriotism" is to miss the fact that most legionnaires received great satisfaction from ousting "Reds" and Americanizing everyone completely. Such patriotteering afforded an opportunity for members to demonstrate and articulate their faith and allegiance to basic ideals and institutions and thereby to gain acceptance and status with those who felt a similar need. Thus in this and similar organizations there was a natural tie between aiding the "establishment" and crusading to save America. The professional patriots, on the other hand, had simpler and even less commendable motives. Primarily propaganda organizations, and the mouthpieces of single leaders or small cabals, their purpose was to ingratiate themselves with large private or corporate donors and thereby insure their continuation. This meant showing results, not only in broad distribution of literature but in providing speakers to help in mobilizing large elements of the general public against all manner of enemies of "the American way." Thus Harry A. Jung of the powerful National Clay Products Industries Association and later the American Vigilant Intelligence Federation could write to a potential subscriber:

We cooperate with over 30 distinctly civic and patriotic organizations. . . . It would take me too long to relate how I "put over" this part of our activities, namely, "trailing the Reds." Should you ever be in Chicago, drop in and see me and I will explain. That it has been a paying proposition for our organization goes without saying. . . .

And again, Fred R. Marvin, head of the Keymen of America, could for six dollars per annum supply potential private radical hunters with his Daily Data Sheets which conveyed the doings of the Bolsheviks and parlor pinks to nervous and apprehensive individuals. It was Marvin's aim to inspire the leadership of such a group as the DAR to draw up and enforce a national "black-list" of undesirable speakers that included such public disturbers of the peace as Jane Addams, Sherwood Eddy, James Harvey Robinson, and William Allen White. In all, over thirty such ultra-

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19 Jung to Henry E. Niles, March 23, 1926, American Civil Liberties Union Collection, Microfilm Reel 353 (New York Public Library). The ACLU files are filled with material concerning the various professional patriot groups.
20 There is a complete run of the Daily Data Sheets in the ACLU Collection, Microfilm Reel 352.
patriotic organizations came and went in the 1920s, all to a greater or lesser degree dependent upon the success with which they could mobilize and direct public intolerance and intemperance.22

In this context the Ku Klux Klan played a unique role. Although it was geared to financial gain, especially as the decade progressed and its leadership fell more and more into the hands of those who sought to utilize it solely for personal profit, it was content to draw its money and support largely from private citizens in small towns and rural communities, a fact which set it apart from most other intolerance purveyors in the 1920s. This also meant, however, that it operated upon poorly underpinned grounds, a fact graphically illustrated by its rapid collapse well before the onset of the economic crisis of the depression years.

The success which all these individuals and groups achieved would still not have been possible if great segments of the American public had not been highly susceptible to the various types of appeal which they made. The source of this susceptibility was neither simple, nor always rational. It stemmed from the turbulence of the decade as value patterns underwent modification from the impact both of external pressures and internal conflict. When the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies delineated in his 1926 volume23 between what he called Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft social structure, he inadvertently suggested the root of one of the sources of the chronic distress of the American middle class mind. Tönnies' Gemeinschaft structure well described that segment of American society which was basically rural or rural oriented, homogeneous in its ethnic and religious structure and values, a society which functioned through traditional status arrangements and which was characterized by low mobility. The members of such a society had always in America fought off what they considered the deleterious effect of foreign values endemic in a Gesellschaft structure with its urban orientation, secular focus, heterogeneous ethnic makeup, its preference for ordering social and economic relations through contract, and its tradition of high mobility which too often seemed

22 Norman Hapgood, ed., Professional Patriots (New York, 1927), concentrates on twenty-five or so of the major ones, although Fred R. Marvin, Our Government and Its Enemies (New York, 1932), by adding a variety of local auxiliaries, lists fifty-four organizations as making up the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies at the height of the movement.

to operate on questionable standards. In fact, the decade had opened on the crest of a successful counterattack of superimposed Gemeinschaft values in the "noble experiment," prohibition. But such a victory was a nervous one as open defiance and hostility grew and as erosion seemed to be occurring elsewhere with the nation succumbing to the excitement and immediacy of a new, generally urban dispersed popular culture. Formerly insulated value orientations now were subjected to the lure of new behavioral patterns suggested by the radio, the movies, romance magazines, and national service clubs. Moreover, the automobile, and in time the airplane, were affording the physical mobility which inevitably speeded up actual social contact with those whose values may earlier have only been slightly known. This does not suggest that either form of social organization was bound to prevail. What it does suggest is that with the pressures to standardize, elements of formerly isolated groups were being subjected to a new challenge to modify the intensity with which they held to their own unique ways as the only acceptable ones.

Those who were thus disturbed accepted dominant American values. However, they found that their interpretation of these values or the techniques that they found acceptable in attaining them frequently had to undergo more modification than they found comfortable. Yet "normalcy," incorporating as it did a multitude of simple virtues along with carefully contrived selfish ends, proved an acceptable home for most rural Victorians and Babbitts alike. Their concern, and often it was held with equal intensity by each, was not the system, but the deviator, who for one reason or another was unwilling to accept the system with its fairly rigid formulae as to how to succeed and who might succeed. Here two types of troublemakers invariably stood out. The one was made up of those who sought unjustifiably to reach the pinnacle of full attainment of the success symbols which the system held out. The other consisted of those whose hierarchy of values and, of necessity, methods for attaining them were totally at odds with the standards of the day. In the former group one inevitably found the targets of Klan antipathy, for example: the ambitious immigrant, non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Protestant, whose frequent tendency to "overachieve" led to actions to "keep him in his place." But the quiet "consensus" of the 1920s backed up the Klan's overt censuring with a type of silent coercion which was often far more effective, especially if a Jew wanted admission to the local country club, or a Catholic wanted the presidency of the nation. Al-

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24 A perceptive contemporary understanding of this development was given by Judge Learned Hand in 1930; see Irving Dilliard, The Spirit of Liberty: Papers and Addresses of Learned Hand (New York, 1960), 66-83.
though Americans may never be fully ready for "the functionally strategic convergence of the standards by which conduct is evaluated," to use Robin Williams' phrase, they were not ready in the 1920s even to consider such a possibility as a desirable national objective. The deviators, although small in number, were even more of a threat. Radicals, militant labor leaders, other loud and unreasonable critics of the system, and the honest and misguided average citizens whom they seemed to be perverting, had to be clamped into place even more quickly and thoroughly and by virtually any means possible. In this many welcomed the aid of any and all self-proclaimed champions of 100 percent Americanism.

This position constituted an interesting modification of an earlier confidence in progress through broad public participation and discussion, a process long boasted as inherent in American institutions. In 1931 Roger Baldwin attributed this to the manifestly declining postwar faith in democracy. Others attributed it to the general insecurity of all Americans and especially the chronic dissatisfaction with what many had been led to believe would be the glorious life of a postwar world. Regardless of the cause, the effect was to undercut one of the potentially important sources which might have brought significant relief. Having convinced themselves that deviators from the status quo were potential Bolsheviks, many Americans found it a simple step to renounce the mildest type of reformer or reform program, a view in which they had the most thorough encouragement from the self-seeking patriots of the decade. An organization like the American Civil Liberties Union, the Federal Council of Churches, various social justice elements within specific religious groups, explicit social reform organizations like the American Birth Control League, the Consumer's League, the National Child Labor Committee, although in reality

25 Williams, American Society, 557. In this regard see John P. Roche, The Quest for the Dream (New York, 1963), 261 ff.
26 Such champions sometimes used aggressive campaigns of "Americanization" geared especially toward education. See "Program for Promoting American Ideals," American Bar Association Journal, VIII (Sept. 1922), 587. See also Bessie L. Pierce, Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States (New York, 1926), and the same author's Citizens' Organizations and the Civic Training of Youth (New York, 1933).
29 The Methodist Federation for Social Service, Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice, Church League for Industrial Democracy (Episcopal), National Catholic Welfare Council, and Central Conference of American Rabbis are leading examples.
seeking to strengthen the system by eliminating its many defects, found basic communication difficult with a public conditioned to look askance at any but practitioners of normalcy.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite the general similarity through the decade of the sources of broad scale intolerance, its public manifestations took a variety of changing forms. The early fears of Bolshevism could not be exploited indefinitely especially when the sins committed in the name of its suppression were revealed and its purveyors were shown to be using it as a device for unscrupulous personal gain. Public indignation toward the excesses of the Palmer raids, for example, came quickly following the issuance by the National Popular Government League of the devastating report on the \textit{Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice} in late May 1920.\textsuperscript{31} Such indignation was sufficient to drive those who might have sought to extend similar techniques to adopt far more subtle and clandestine modes of approach, and also to turn hysteria-making over to the private professional patriot organizations. Thus, William J. Burns, for example, after carefully instituting the Bridgeman raids of August 1922 turned to Ralph Easley of the National Civic Federation, Richard M. Whitney of the American Defense Society, and Joseph T. Cashman of the National Security League to arouse the public to a fever pitch over their implications.\textsuperscript{32}

Yet even Burns's string ran out in 1923-1924 as the misrule of the Department of Justice could no longer be ignored\textsuperscript{33} and as antiradicalism (labor by this time having been quite thoroughly tamed) was becoming a tiresome broken record. This is not to say, as Sidney Howard wrote bitterly at the time, that certain business interests might not find it useful to tar their critics by turning to the "services of radicalism in almost any one of their patriotic clashes with social liberalism or rambunctious unions, or, even, child labor reformers."\textsuperscript{34} But for the moment different targets were needed.

\textsuperscript{31} See National Popular Government League, \textit{To the American People}.
\textsuperscript{32} Burns's dealings with Easley are revealed in some detail in the files of the National Civic Federation. See Easley to Howard E. Coffin, Oct. 9 and 19, 1922, National Civic Federation Collection (New York Public Library). See also Richard M. Whitney, \textit{The Reds in America} (New York, 1923), and Joseph T. Cashman, \textit{America Asleep: The Menace of Radicalism} (New York, 1923).
\textsuperscript{33} American Civil Liberties Union, \textit{The Nation-Wide Spy System Centering in the Department of Justice} (New York, 1924); Mason, \textit{Harlan Fiske Stone}; Whitehead, \textit{P.B.I. Story}.
For those distressed with the growing disruption of their Gemeinschaft society, the Ku Klux Klan offered avenues for assaulting those most surely responsible. And while all Americans might not have agreed with C. Lewis Fowler, editor of the American Standard, that a heinous conspiracy to destroy America was afoot between Roman Catholicism and anti-Christian Jewry, the irrational myths and stereotyping surrounding these groups were sufficient to convince many they needed surveillance, if not repression. The Klan also impressed many with its pious objectives of uplifting the nation's morality through attacking its immoral desecrators. Atypical of the conservative, service-and-fellowship oriented organizations, or the professional patriot groups, stemming primarily from outside the urban business community, the Klan, nonetheless, for three or four years in the mid-1920s successfully attacked and insidiously exploited the shattering of old moral standards. Thereby the Klan could resort to direct action against progenitors of public immorality, as it did in the case of Judge Ben "Companionate Marriage" Lindsey in Denver. Indirectly, it could also inspire others to heed the clarion call to expose the evil forces which had to be behind the callous disregard of traditional ways, a call answered by Calvin Coolidge, for example, in his public exposé of "Reds" in our women's colleges, or by Texas representative Thomas L. Blanton's public assault on the ACLU which he branded the "UnAmerican Criminal License Union."

For those patriots seeking essentially to play a broker's role for powerful interests, intriguing new opportunities were opening up in antipacifism and the baiting of antimilitarists. The official demise of Burns left the tradition of his office to the War Department. By that time the department was growing more apprehensive over the potential threat to its authority from antiwar sentiments that were increasingly prevalent as disillusion with the war experience intensified. As early as 1923, General Amos Fries, head of the Chemical Warfare Service, had publicly committed the government to support Preparedness Day, and by inference the continuation of an

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86 Ben B. Lindsey and Rube Borough, The Dangerous Life (New York, 1931), 388 ff.

87 Calvin Coolidge, "Enemies of the Republic: Are the 'Reds' Stalking Our College Women?" The Delineator, XCVIII (June 1921), 4 ff.

88 Cong. Record, LXVII, Pt. 2, 1217 ff. (Dec. 19, 1925). The story of the assault was widely reprinted. Harry A. Jung wrote to 600 trade secretaries urging support for Blanton in his fight against the ACLU. ACLU Collection, Microfilm Reel 333.
expanded military establishment. Fries had also encouraged Mrs. Lucia R. Maxwell, librarian of the Service, to prepare and circulate the famed "Spider Web Chart," which purported to study women's peace organizations in the United States and show, by ramification and association, that they were all Bolshevik inspired or at least deep pink. Although the War Department eventually ordered retraction, and directed Fries to inform persons to whom the chart had been circulated that its information was erroneous, the retraction fell on few careful ears. The chart was still being used by the Legion and the DAR in the early 1930s as an authentic exposé of the enemies of America. Such sentiments were also purveyed by such a professional militarist as General John J. Pershing, who in a series of lectures for the American Defense Society warned that "our situation is seriously complicated by the teachings of numerous pacifist organizations..."40

The concern with pacifism does not imply, however, that earlier hostility toward radicals, social reformers, and other public disrupters had ended. On the contrary, the development of pacifism as a term of opprobrium was merely adding another liability to the large series of undesirable personality traits that these enemies of America were supposed to possess, one which could be stressed more strongly when public apprehensions of radicalism were relatively deflated. Certainly as explosive public episodes developed—the Passaic Textile Strike,41 the furor over New York City's Stuyvesant High School, and by implication the use of any public building as a public forum even for liberals,42 the Colorado Mine War of late 1927,43 and above all the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti,44—the "Reds" and their dupes were held largely to blame, both for the episodes and for

40 Howard, "Our Professional Patriots," 94. Howard quotes Fries as referring to "the insidious pacifist, who is more to be feared than the man with the torch, gun or sword." 41 ACLU Collection, Microfilm Reel 331, contains pamphlet reprints of a number of Pershing's public addresses.

42 The material on Passaic is voluminous. See especially Albert Weisbord, Passaic (Chicago, 1926); Mary Heaton Vorse, The Passaic Textile Strike (New York, 1927); Joseph Freeman, An American Testament (New York, 1936), 392 ff.; American Labor Year Book, 1927 (New York, 1927), 105 ff., 156.

43 The Annual Report of the American Civil Liberties Union for 1927, Free Speech, 1926 (New York, 1927), referred to the ACLU's struggle with the New York City School Board in the Stuyvesant case as the "most important 'free speech fight' of the year." This struggle revealed the existence of a "blacklist" against individuals whose opinions did not conform to those of board members.


any number of people taking a remotely liberal view on the questions they raised. However, the dangers of such people could be brought home to a far more diversified audience if one talked of the “whole Pacifist-Radical-Communist movement in America [which] is foreign in its conception, if not actually under foreign influence, direction and control,” or referred to such a leader as Roger Baldwin as a “slacker, radical, draft evader, and Leavenworth ex-convict.”

And the most effective agents of intolerance came more and more to have this focus. By 1925, the heyday of the Klan was over. The enactment of the National Origins Act in 1924, internal strife (endemic in the order from its beginnings), and burgeoning prosperity, all undercut prior strength. In its annual report for 1927, the American Civil Liberties Union announced that the principal purveyors of intolerance in the country were the War Department, the American Legion, and professional patriot societies. It declared that the American Legion had by then “replaced the Klan as the most active agency of intolerance and repression in the country.” The report was editorially criticized by Joseph Pulitzer’s liberal New York World for such a value judgment, stating: “With scores of different organizations seeking to curtail liberty in scores of different ways, it is a wise man who can say that one is more active than any of the others.” To which Forrest Bailey, Director of the ACLU, responded by merely pointing out that this was the consensus of all the state units reporting to national headquarters for the year.

It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt to explain the effect of the depression upon what had become fairly standard patterns of intolerance and intolerance-making. Nonetheless, certain clear developments can be recognized. On one hand, the professional patriots quickly found their traditional sources of income drying up. The National Civic Federation, for example, previously one of the bellwethers of such groups, was reduced to such belt-tightening by 1930 and the years following that its activities had to be cut to virtual ineffectiveness. Other comparable groups collapsed

Fred R. Marvin, quoted in Marcus Duffield, King Legion (New York, 1931), 177-78.
46 Free Speech, 1926, p. 2.
48 Letters column, ibid., May 18, 1927, p. 12.
49 Prior to 1929 the organization’s subversive activities program was lavishly supported.
completely. Faced with similar problems the American Legion and the DAR found it expedient to do some of their cutting back in the area of antiradical activity. Pacifist-baiting no longer seemed a highly meaningful or relevant response to public problems.

On the other hand, vast evidence suggests that many businesses stepped up their antiradical activity. Deserting the intolerance purveyors who had formerly performed the function of subtly undermining and discrediting their critics, they now preferred to spend their money for direct action in the form of company guards, labor spies, strike breakers, and arms. Thus the American Civil Liberties Union could report a vast increase in the number of cases it received in the early depression years and generally the greatest suppression of individual liberties in the country since the days of the Red scare. Similarly, the number of instances of police brutality and flagrant abuse of local governmental power were well known.\(^5^1\)

If one is to talk in terms of meaningful and internally consistent cycles of public intolerance, an era ends in 1929-1930. By this time, to defend the status quo as unassailable was to make oneself ludicrous, since a casual glance revealed the magnitude of its defects. Significantly, when Representative Hamilton Fish auspiciously launched a series of congressional investigations in 1930 in an attempt to throw the blame for the depression on domestic “Reds,”\(^5^2\) the results of his crusade were to produce either large-scale public apathy or large-scale public antipathy.

The imperfect public record of the 1920s then would seem to reveal that many interwoven factors produced a concatenation of syndromes which made the country a peculiarly fertile seedbed both for intolerance and its shrewd manipulation. These undoubtedly included the tensions of economic dynamism, grossly unequal distribution of wealth, enhanced urbanization with the dislocation it produced both in the urban area and in its rural recruitment grounds, virulent disillusionment with democracy, and the confusing and contradictory assumptions concerning the increasingly unpopular war experience.

In that year the only contribution so earmarked was $1,000 from John Hays Hammond. In 1930 the only contribution was $5,000 from Samuel Insull. By 1931 the amount had been reduced to $138, and in 1932, 1933, and 1934 there were no entries of money received for that purpose. National Civic Federation Receipt Book, National Civic Federation Collection.

\(^5^1\) See the popular summarization of the findings of the Wickersham Commission, Ernest J. Hopkins, Our Lawless Police: A Study of the Unlawful Enforcement of the Law (New York, 1931).

\(^5^2\) See footnote 13. The Hearings of the so-called Fish committee were published in nineteen volumes. The hearings were responsible for a large “Deport the Reds,” rally in Carnegie Hall on Jan. 10, 1931. A good cross section of national newspaper opinion on the rally (which was primarily-hostile) is in the ACLU Collection, Microfilm Reel 464.
A moot question still exists as to whether more precise results could not have been reached by placing heavier reliance on social science. Undoubtedly if public opinion poll information were available or if scientific attempts had been made at the time to quantify a variety of public attitudes, the record would be more approachable. Certainly steeping ourselves in a more sophisticated analysis of present and future events enhances the understanding of social and human processes in general and affords a more precise appreciation of human behavior in a past context. Certainly the types of questions which the empirical social researcher is currently asking can be asked of that decade and the historian is derelict if he fails to ask them. Yet the basic problem is still how to gain essential information now lacking and difficult or impossible to obtain. The social science researcher is not much help here. In fact, he operates on the assumption that unless sufficient information in available to permit arrival at quantitative answers, little of value can be produced and one’s energies are wasted in the effort.

The historian, proceeding on the assumption that almost all important questions are important precisely because of their subtle implications and overtones, their complexities, ambiguities, and ambivalences—because in other words, they are not susceptible to quantitative answers—then must plod on his dogged and imperfect way. He must approach incomplete materials not only semi-analytically, but impressionistically and eclectically, even at times attempting to devise his own ways to evaluate a great divergence of data which the social scientist scarcely feels worth considering due to its impreciseness and unsuitability to quantitative analysis. But the historian likes to feel that only if serious attempt is made to assess all the data, regardless of its nature or its incompleteness, can anything resembling past reality possibly be attained. And as a humanist viewing essentially human phenomena, even if in so imprecise a fashion, the historian also likes to feel that he may, as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has suggested, “yield truths about both individual and social experience which quantitative social research by itself could never reach.”