

“WITH A FIRM HAND OF STERN REPRESSION:” FEDERAL ENFORCEMENT OF
THE DRAFT LAW, 1917-1918

by

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(Under the Direction of John H. Morrow, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

This Thesis examines Woodrow Wilson Administration’s handling of alleged draft evaders (or “slackers”) and those who inspired evasion during the First World War. This study argues that the federal government pursued slackers – mostly emanating from the poorest classes of society – as a means of combating an incorrectly perceived rise in radicalism and anti-war dissent in backcountry rural areas and northern industrial cities with large foreign-born populations. The federal government ordered “slacker raids” that targeted specific cities and rural locales that exhibited strong support for socialist politicians and anti-war and anti-Administration firebrands. The first chapter shows that before and during the war, the federal government suppressed lower class dissent by employing unlawful raids and federal troops. The second and third chapters – an example of a rural raid in north Georgia and an urban raid in New York City – reveal that the same strategies were used against suspected slackers and dissenters.

INDEX WORDS: Thomas W. Gregory, Woodrow Wilson, Tom Watson, Enoch H. Crowder, Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Investigation (BI), Provost Marshal General’s Office (PMGO), Socialist Party of America (SPA), Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), sedition, radicalism, conscription, Espionage Act, Sedition Act, Bolsheviks

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INTRODUCTION: “A Spirit of Ruthless Brutality”

In an interview in June 1923, Frank Cobb, editor of the *New York World*, quoted his close friend Woodrow Wilson on the eve of the president’s address to Congress on April 2, 1917:

“Once lead this people into war and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fibre of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.”¹

The implication of the statement, if actually uttered, is that the president felt he would not be able to control the actions of his subordinates and the American public. Perhaps Wilson was aware of what was at stake if he dragged America into the Great War in Europe. The United States in April 1917 was a nation with a rapidly expanding economy but a tiny army. It was a nation that liked to brag that all its citizens enjoyed equal protection under the law while Jim Crow reigned supreme in the South. Most importantly, it was a nation overcome by ethnic and class conflict, which stemmed from, among other things, low wages, oppressive working conditions, and the massive influx of southern and eastern European immigrants since the end of the Civil War. Wilson may have foreseen that these powder kegs, along with other domestic problems that are too numerous to mention, could explode simultaneously under the stress of total war. For the sake of the war effort, then, a “spirit of ruthless brutality” was a necessary evil.

¹ Arthur S. Link. “That Cobb Interview,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 72, no. 1 (June 1985), p. 11.

Yet, despite Wilson's perceived lack of control and influence over his countrymen, suppressive activity during the First World War was both inspired and undertaken by the U.S. government. Spurred along by the Wilson Administration's anti-immigrant and anti-socialist rhetoric and calls for "100 percent Americanism," federal and local suppression primarily targeted radical organizations that represented (or claimed to) the poorest and most culturally and geographically isolated people. Before and after the war declaration, a strong anti-war sentiment permeated the lower-classes of American society. During the war, radical and socialist rhetoric found an attentive audience in America's immigrant and unskilled laborers. Few were willing to sacrifice their lives for what they saw as a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight" to benefit their long-time domestic and ideological opponents.

Many in the lower classes expressed their attitude toward the war not with their voices but with their feet. Draft evasion was their method of choice. During wartime nothing better exhibited an individual's negative attitude toward war and his or her government than the refusal to serve. This study examines how the Wilson Administration responded to draft evasion and anti-draft rhetoric during the First World War. By focusing on a small-scale rural "slacker raid" in Cobb and Cherokee Counties, Georgia and a massive drive in New York City, this study will show that the enforcement of the Selective Service Law was not an attempt to bring the cowardly or unpatriotic into the military. Instead, federal, state, and local officials worked together to intimidate the young, lower class men who were the targets of anti-war and anti-draft speeches and publications. In other words, the Wilson Administration used the enforcement of the Selective Service Law as an excuse to suppress the targets of radical

anti-war dissent. The Wilson Administration's stern response to draft evasion was the result of a longstanding and irrational fear of radicalism, the foreign-born, and working-class insurrection.

Scholars of late nineteenth and early twentieth century radicalism in the U.S. have shown that the so-called "radical" organizations of the time were not uniformly to the "Left." Many leading members of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), such as Victor Berger (Right) and Eugene Debs (Left), strongly disagreed on many issues, leaving the party without a cohesive platform. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was the most consistently radical in practice before and during the war, but its leadership did not take an official anti-war stand as the less radical SPA had done. At the same time, while middle-class "progressives" hijacked the most important aspects of Populist ideology, agrarian radicals were also steadfastly pro-labor and shared many goals with the SPA. Only a few individual members or followers of these groups called for social revolution. Despite the Administration's misconception that radicalism was a looming threat, popular uprising was not a part of any of these organizations' official platforms.²

² Works focusing on the SPA include David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (Chicago: MacMillan, 1955); James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Monthly Review, 1967) and Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957). The definitive work on the IWW is Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969). While Norman Pollack, *The Populist Mind* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) focuses on Populist ideology, C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1951) places the movement in the context of the sweeping changes the South faced after Reconstruction. The third chapter of Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1999) lays out the ideologies of the Populist movement, Knights of Labor, and the AFL and analyzes their effectiveness in attracting agrarian, unskilled, and skilled industrial laborers. The transformation of the rank-and-file Populist in the Southwest into a supporter of socialism is the subject of James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1945* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1978). John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1985) asserts that most European immigrants did not subscribe to radical ideologies. The most complete history of the

Draft evasion itself was a more serious issue in the U.S. during World War I than many historians have previously argued. Historian John W. Chambers claims that between 2.4 and 3.6 million men avoided registering for the draft. If anywhere near correct, these figures suggest that more men evaded registration, not counting the number of registrants who did not report when their number was called, than were drafted into the army (2.8 million). Chambers also asserts that the vast majority of men who skirted the draft were poor laborers who were “isolated and alienated from the larger society or the national war effort because of geographical location or their economic, ethnic, or racial status.”³

The Department of Justice (DOJ) and Provost Marshal General’s Office (PMGO), however, left it to local authorities to enforce the federal draft law during 1917. Although the Administration inextricably linked slackers with radicals and socialists, evasion did not evoke the same apprehension within the Administration as it would in the spring of 1918. Following the spike in war and class hysteria that stemmed from the Bolshevik Revolution and Allied military setbacks, the DOJ – teamed with state and local authorities and vigilante organizations such as the American Protective League (APL) – began a series of searches for draft evaders and members of anti-draft organizations. Beginning in March 1918, slacker raids took place throughout the country in industrial cities with large immigrant populations and backcountry rural areas.

motivations for and significance of government repression in the U.S. is Robert Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America, 1870-1976* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001).

³ John Whiteclay Chambers II. *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), p. 211-212.

Together federal, state, and local authorities conducted two types of slacker raids. In industrialized urban centers the DOJ, with the assistance of the APL and in some instances federal troops, Bureau of Investigation (BI) agents would go into theaters, shops, restaurants, pool halls, and other such locations and demand to see the registration or classification cards of every man who appeared to be within the draft age.⁴ Those who could not furnish their cards were taken to a central detention center and forced to await word from their local boards of their draft status. The waiting game often lasted days, sometimes weeks. The vast majority of those apprehended were soon set free. In backwoods areas a second method of slacker raiding was employed. A general canvass of large and relatively isolated areas was not practical and, when facing armed resistance, dangerous. After interrogating the families and neighbors of suspected slackers, small bands of local law enforcement officers and, on several occasions, federal or National Guard troops led by a BI agent would scour the area.

Most historians of American society during the First World War have considered the slacker raids the Wilson Administration's desperate attempt to catch and induct draft evaders in order to meet Allied manpower demands. What they fail to realize, though, is that this was only a secondary motivation. The "work or fight" order (May 1918) and the expansion of the draft age (August 1918)⁵ sufficiently widened the pool of draft-eligible men. The driving motivation behind the raids was to suppress and intimidate the potential working-class and poor followers of dissenting opinions and radical ideologies

⁴ The original Selective Service Act, passed in May 1917, set the ages of eligibility at 21 to 31. In late summer 1918, as the pool of men in this age range without exemption dried up, the range was expanded to 18 to 45. The new age range did not take effect until the last registration date of the war, September 12, 1918. David A. Lockmiller, *Enoch H. Crowder: Soldier, Lawyer, and Statesman* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1955), p. 173.

⁵ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 194-196, 198.

throughout the country. Of the tens of thousands apprehended in slacker raids nationwide, only a small percentage ended up in the army. While most were roughed up or merely inconvenienced, many found themselves detained without due process, for weeks or months. At times, as was the case in Cobb and Cherokee counties in north Georgia, authorities used the slacker raid as a means of suppressing anti-draft rhetoric. In these instances, apprehending draft evaders was of secondary importance. While the DOJ had used the Espionage and Sedition Acts to quiet radical and socialist leaders, little had been done to deal with their individual followers. The strategies employed in the slacker raids mirrored those used against strikers, the Socialist Party of America (SPA), Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and affiliated groups before and during the war.

Federal wartime repression during the World War I era, scholars argue, had its roots in the ethnic and class conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Progressive era, Robert Goldstein argues, was just as much a period of repression as of reform. Although the position of unionized labor improved dramatically during the first decades of the twentieth century, this was true only in the case of moderate business unions, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), willing to take on a subordinate position in the economy. At the same time, the federal government continually repressed radical anti-capitalist unions and political organizations. The social upheavals of the 1870s to 1890s, brought on by national economic downturns, continued to haunt the middle and upper classes in the 1910s. Because of this, Goldstein asserts, Progressive reforms against reactionary capitalists were the results of a fear that employers' intransigence would "provoke the lower classes into greater extremism." Eliminating the notion of class-based strife from the nation's consciousness was the chief aim of the

Progressive period. The “renewal of labor upheavals of the past” would expose rather than obscure the class struggle. In other words, the prospect of social revolution from below encouraged reform from above.⁶

William Preston also views the Progressive era as a period of socially sanctioned repression. Preston’s focus, however, is on the perception within the federal government and society that a link existed between alienage and radicalism instead of class. Preston emphasizes the nativist sentiment that permeated the nation during the late nineteenth century and Progressive era and argues that the war emergency became an opportunity to release internal tensions against the perceived foreign enemy within. The study primarily argues that federal attempts to squash the IWW were a precursor to the postwar deportations of aliens during the January 1920 “Palmer raids.” The IWW had a sizable alien following and was the most radical labor organization of the Progressive era. Due to a revival of nativism in the second decade of the century, it was also the most feared. The methods of protest the IWW employed – massive strikes, industrial sabotage, and calls for social revolution – did more than threaten to rekindle past class disturbances. Preston claims that nativism exaggerated the IWW threat, leading middle and upper class Americans to imagine an underlying foreign element working to overthrow the social order. Before the war, but more so during, immigrants dealt with a double burden: foreign birth and fabricated charges of radicalism.⁷

The definitive work on wartime repression of anti-war groups and individuals is *Opponents of War* by H.C. Peterson and Gilbert Fite. Unlike Goldstein and Preston, Peterson and Fite do not trace the origins of wartime suppression. By and large,

⁶ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, pp. 63-65.

⁷ William Preston. *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994), *passim*.

Opponents of War is merely a chronicle of federal wartime suppression without an academic argument. Its value lies in its portrayal of American society during the war and how wartime hysteria manifested itself into repression of radicals, aliens, and lower-class dissent. If Peterson and Fite prove anything, it is that the repression of dissent in the U.S. during the First World War was more common and widespread than most historians admit. The book also discusses draft evasion and the New York City slacker drive, but not in the context of suppressing radicalism or dissent. In fact, Peterson and Fite claim that “it is not easy to tell” whether a stern enforcement of the Selective Service Act “was used as an excuse to quiet dissident groups.”⁸ Using the same framework as Goldstein and Preston, the present study challenges Peterson and Fite’s assertion by placing the Wilson Administration’s suppression of anti-draft activity in the context of the hysteric wartime culture.

The present study differs from that of John W. Chambers in several ways. In the definitive work on the draft in modern America, *To Raise an Army*, Chambers portrays federal policy makers as “hesitant state-builders” who preferred to foster enthusiasm for the draft without using coercion.⁹ This was definitely the case in terms of the PMGO and the man in charge of the Selective Service, Major General Enoch H. Crowder. Yet Chambers overlooks the other departments within the Wilson Administration – such as the DOJ – that played a significant role in enforcing the draft law and keeping the system functioning. The DOJ, evident by its participation in the suppression of the IWW, SPA, and other war opponents, found coercion to be a useful tool against slackers and anti-draft seditionaries. Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory and BI Chief A. Bruce

⁸ H.C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite. *Opponents of War, 1917-1918* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1957), p. 24.

⁹ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 180, 184.

Bielaski did not hesitate to use the enhanced powers of the state that Congress had granted the executive branch in the opening months of the war.¹⁰

The present study is broken into three chapters. The purpose of Chapter 1 is to explain the national circumstances that led to the employment of slacker raids. Like Goldstein and Preston, I will trace the origins of class and ethnic strains and explain how mere tensions became an open class conflict after the April 6, 1917 declaration of war on Germany. The four decades preceding the war are replete with instances of federal repression of lower-class dissent in times of economic crisis. From the 1870s through the Progressive era, many in the middle and upper classes viewed strikes and political radicalism as signs of a coming social revolution. The prewar preparedness campaign and wartime Espionage, Sabotage, and Sedition acts indicated that this fear remained strong. The draft was also used against the lower classes. The Selective Service Law included ways in which federal, state, and local officials could subtly subdue the targets of the anti-draft rhetoric and publications of war opponents. The classist elements of the Act are evident in the provisions of the law, its organization, chain of command, and enforcement. The manner in which the draft machinery was organized and local prejudices often played as significant a role in determining classification and exemption statuses as did federal actions. The chapter will end with a brief discussion of how federal, state, and local authorities handled cases of draft evasion in 1917 and how events in Europe brought realistic prospects of defeat and an increased intolerance of dissent in 1918.

¹⁰ The wartime powers of the Wilson Administration reached its zenith in May 1918, with the passing of the Sedition Act (May 16) and the Overman Act (May 20). David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford, 1980), pp. 80, 125-126.

The June 1918 slacker raid into rural Cobb and Cherokee Counties in north Georgia is the topic of Chapter 2. Two BI agents, a U.S. Marshal, four revenue officers, an APL member as a guide, and fifty fully armed U.S. soldiers rode into the hills of north Georgia as part of an expedition to root out suspected draft evaders and squash an underground anti-draft group allegedly instigated by populist politician Tom Watson. The chapter discusses the regional appeal of and Department of Justice's response to Watson's newspaper, the *Jeffersonian*, and his crusade to challenge the constitutionality of conscription in the courts. Anti-draft groups organized throughout the South, from Louisville, Kentucky to San Antonio, Texas to south Georgia, in order to raise money for Watson's legal challenge to conscription and to induce local men to skirt the draft. The chapter begins and ends with a description of the raid and its dramatic conclusion over the Etowah River. The region-wide appeal of Watson's words and deeds suggests that during the First World War the South was not as militarized as some argue. Despite the suppression of the *Jeffersonian* under the Espionage Act in August 1917, its anti-war message persisted. The heavy-handed reaction to the Cobb County anti-draft group reveals that the Wilson Administration believed that the problem of draft evasion and anti-war dissent in the South had reached a dangerous level and to a large degree Tom Watson was responsible.

Chapter 3 focuses on the largest and most well-known slacker raid. In the New York City raids, which took place September 3-6, 1918, over 60,000 men were detained but only 1,500 were found to be delinquent. Of this number, only 500 were inducted into the army. Since March, the DOJ and APL had been perfecting the urban slacker raids, with similar results, in large industrial centers with large working-class and alien

populations as well as strong political support for socialist candidates. Some early examples which appear briefly in the chapter occurred in Pittsburgh in March 1918, Cleveland in both July and September, and Chicago in July. Deemed a “slacker’s paradise” by one historian,¹¹ New York City was home to the most diverse immigrant population in the U.S. The chapter reveals how this diversity, both of ethnicity and political persuasion, made New York City and northern New Jersey prime targets for such an enormous canvass for draft evaders. Evidence suggests that the majority of the 60,000 rounded up in the three days of raiding were poor and non-English speaking residents. Although many of these men, because of their alien status, were not eligible for military service, hundreds found themselves in military training camps.

The slacker raids of 1918, which epitomized the pre-war fears Cobb attributed to the president, were attempts by the Administration to control those who could potentially be attracted to politically radical and anti-draft rhetoric. The targets of such rhetoric were the sort that most often evaded conscription – the unwelcome immigrant, the alienated nonwhite, and the poor unskilled laborer. The raid in north Georgia and the New York City dragnet reveal that the Wilson Administration considered the suppression of anti-war dissent and the enforcement of the draft synonymous in terms of both rural and urban opposition to the war and conscription.

¹¹ Joan Jensen. *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), p. 196.

CHAPTER 1 – Perilous Perceptions: The Cultural Origins of Wartime Repression

“It is in no sense conscription of the unwilling; it is a selection from a nation which has volunteered in mass.” – Woodrow Wilson, May 18, 1917¹²

“The patience of the Government and the country has snapped. Prosecution and stern punishment await the guilty.” – *New York Times* editorial on “disloyal” aliens, Nov. 22, 1917¹³

The atmosphere in which the slacker raids took place had its roots in the late nineteenth century and Progressive era. In the decades leading to World War I, the United States was transitioning from an agricultural to a primarily manufacturing-based economy. The U.S.’s newfound prosperity, however, did not belong to many. Few of the benefits of American economic strength trickled down to those who toiled under the physical stress and danger of turn-of-the-century industrial labor. These massive economic and demographic changes resulted in the intense class and ethnic conflicts that shaped the Progressive era. Because of the changes in the economy, cities grew at an almost uncontrollable rate. Poor farm laborers, southern blacks, and an increasing number of southern and eastern European immigrants crammed into northern industrial centers seeking to benefit from the U.S.’s rapidly expanding industrial economy. By 1900, roughly 80 percent of the populations of New York, Chicago, and Detroit were

¹² Draft of Proclamation, May 1, 1917, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton: Princeton University, 1980), Vol. 35, p. 181. Wilson read this draft on May 18, 1917, after signing the Selective Service Act into law.

¹³ “Disloyalists and Aliens,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1917, p. 12.

either foreign born or second generation Americans.¹⁴ The economic and social changes also affected farmers. Miffed that interest rates and transportation facilities – controlled by the new industrial and financial elites – siphoned off a large portion of agricultural profits and, thus, lowered wages, poor and unemployed farmers and their laborers formed farmers’ alliances. These alliances eventually coalesced into the Populist movement, which initiated future reforms of the Progressive era.¹⁵

Radical socialist ideologies began gaining popularity among agricultural and industrial workers throughout most of the country in the late nineteenth century. Moderate unions and labor radicals before and during the Progressive era pined for improved working conditions and wages, workers’ control of capital, and working-class solidarity against employers. The last of these caused the most concern among political and economic leaders. In the first decades of the twentieth century, progressive politicians tried to undercut radical ideologies through labor-friendly federal reforms and anti-trust legislation. Before, blanket arrests and the use of federal and National Guard troops against strikes were strategies.¹⁶ The economic changes that began in the 1870s “stimulated a new wave of nativism” and “revived the latent fear of radicalism” that historian William Preston traces back to the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts. Although the causal connection made between aliens and the growth of radicalism during this time was tenuous at best, perceptions that the two were inseparable grew in the 1880s and climaxed in the mid 1890s.¹⁷

¹⁴ Neil A. Wynn. *From Progressivism to Prosperity: World War I and American Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), p. 4.

¹⁵ Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, pp. 23-101.

¹⁷ Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, p. 23.

The great railroad strike of July 1877, triggered by wage cuts and complaints over working conditions, was one of the first significant examples of working-class unity against the capitalist class. The strikes directly affected over 75,000 miles of track. Crowds supportive of the strikers' cause "blocked tracks, seized railroad facilities and disabled railroad cars" in many places across the country. Approximately 45,000 militiamen and 2,000 federal troops were sent to seven states to break up the strikes and public interference with the railroads. The deployment of troops was needed in many areas, but there was little reason to send some units to Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis where practically no strike activity had occurred. There is no evidence that radical elements in these cities had any connection with the strikes. The long-term result of the railroad strike was that it crystallized in the minds of American elites that working-class movements were violent, subversive, and dangerous. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* framed the strikes as a legitimate "red scare." The strikes, it said, were the "nearest approach we have yet had to Communism in America" and government authorities needed to save the U.S. from "the darker horrors of that system."¹⁸

The "red scare" of the late 1870s became intertwined with a growing distrust of aliens in the 1880s. The Chicago Haymarket riot of 1886 was a "historical watershed that sent anarchism into oblivion and raised nativism to new heights."¹⁹ On May 3, after strikers at the McCormick reaper works attacked replacement workers, city police opened fire, killing or wounding six men. Radicals and anarchists responded by urging supporters to arm themselves and come to a rally in Haymarket Square the next evening. As policemen tried to disperse the small crowd a bomb was thrown at the officers,

¹⁸ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, p. 30-32.

¹⁹ Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, p. 25.

leading to a lethal shootout. The nation responded with convulsions of fear and blind rage aimed at anarchists, strikers, and labor unions. Consequently, in the 1880s the “respectable classes” identified most immigrants and unskilled laborers with radicalism and social revolution.²⁰

The Homestead and Pullman strikes of the 1890s further solidified the middle and upper class attitude toward aliens, radicals, and the working-class. In June 1892 at the Carnegie steel plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, strikers overwhelmed Carnegie’s security forces and took over the facility. After National Guard troops peacefully took over the plant from the workers, an anarchist of Russian birth tried to assassinate the man Carnegie had put in charge of the plant. Even though the strike’s organizers publicly denounced the assassination attempt, to the federal government and middle class the incident reinforced the link between radicalism, immigrants, and union activity.²¹

The Pullman railroad strike in the summer of 1894, backed by Eugene Debs’s American Railway Union (ARU), had the same effect. In contrast to the 1877 railroad strike, the sympathy many felt for the Pullman work stoppage resulted in peaceful boycotts that closed rail lines from coast to coast. Despite the strike’s peaceful disposition, Attorney General Richard Olney deployed close to 16,000 federal troops to fight the strike. In Chicago, the presence of troops and U.S. Marshals facilitated riots that led to over \$340,000 in damage to railroad equipment. In some cities, such as Sacramento, California and Hammond, Indiana, troops used their bayonets or opened fire on citizens near railroad tracks. The strike finally ran out of steam in late July because of the use of troops and the arrest of the ARU’s leadership. The federal government’s gross

²⁰ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, pp. 34-44.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 44-46.

overreaction to the strike indicates the predominant perception of the nature of working-class upheavals against their employers. The press also mischaracterized the Pullman strikes, claiming that Debs, through the strike, had planned to make himself a “dictator” and that the dispute was an attempted revolution and not a strike. Conservatives, businessmen, and congressmen applauded President Grover Cleveland’s use of federal troops in response to the strike.²²

Each of these episodes indicates a growing anxiety within the federal government over the prospect of a radical uprising from the working class during the nineteenth century. Each time the lower classes organized behind an anti-capitalist cause, the federal government grossly overreacted to the threat. But this is not to say a revolution was imminent. On the contrary, anarchism was weakened severely after the Haymarket riot and radicalism in general did not draw nearly the number of native and foreign-born workers as America’s more privileged classes chose to believe.²³ The first one and a half decades of the twentieth century also saw its share of occasional lower-class unrest – mostly from the IWW – and the Wilson Administration suppressed these strikes in the same manner previous administrations had done in the past four decades.²⁴ As the First World War began in Europe in the summer of 1914, the U.S. had yet to come to terms with the social changes that accompanied industrialization. The American people and their government’s inability to manage new societal relationships effectively resulted in intensified ethnic and class-based tension.

²² Ibid, pp. 52-57.

²³ Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, pp.

²⁴ See Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, for a complete description of the activity of the IWW before and during the war and Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, for the tactics the Wilson Administration used to suppress the organization during the war.

In the years immediately preceding belligerency, some elite members of American society looked to “Americanize” recalcitrants and aliens through compulsory military training. From the late summer of 1914 to April 1917, several politicians, retired generals, and organized groups of elite citizens united under the banner of Progressive reform – the ideals of national efficiency and individual responsibility – to begin preparing the U.S. for the eventual foreign and domestic conflicts that would arise at the conclusion of the war in Europe. Starting as a movement to restructure the army, the preparedness movement became “a device to make over American society.” This was done through spreading fear of an impending German attack. “The danger of an attack upon our country,” Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollette explained in 1916, “has been made to appear very real and very imminent.” Many Americans bought into the belief that the only way to stave off this inevitable disaster was to arm the nation under a firmly “disciplined Americanism.”²⁵

Despite the wrangling of populists and socialists who would oppose preparedness and, later, the war, preparedness was not the creation of industrial magnates and munitions makers. The vast majority of those in favor of preparedness were from the middle and upper classes in all parts of the country. Many social elites were strong supporters of universal military training. “Soldiering could be uplifting” while military training for all “could regenerate and homogenize America as well as defend it.” Rich and poor would train and perhaps fight side by side in the name of equality and democracy. To many, then, the preparedness movement was a means of social

²⁵ John Patrick Finnegan. *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974), *passim*. Quotes from pp. 3, 91, 106.

engineering, of directing the nation's energies away from class conflict and toward an expression of patriotism and national vigor.²⁶

For social reforms to take hold, especially through the use of military preparedness, demands for loyalty and uniformity from on high were necessary. At the same time, linking external and internal enemies was also necessary if the preparedness movement was to catch on more thoroughly. Despite publicly giving only minimal support to the preparedness movement, Woodrow Wilson, his subordinates, and his supporters spoke out publicly against disloyalty and warned of the consequences of not towing the prescribed patriotic line. During his Annual Address to Congress on December 7, 1915, the president called out those born in other nations "who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life" and threatened "to destroy our industries wherever they thought it effective for their vindictive purposes to strike at them, and to debase our politics to the uses of foreign intrigue." To combat the danger the nation's naturalized citizens and nondeclarant aliens posed, Wilson asked Congress to pass loyalty laws "by which we may be purged of their [dissenting aliens'] corrupt distempers." Wilson was referring to the threat of German espionage and the influences of radical political ideologies, which were perceived to be of foreign origin.²⁷ Administration officials spoke and newspapers printed statements such as these on a regular basis during the preparedness debates of 1915 to America's entry into the war.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 31, 68, 92, 110-112.

²⁷ Annual Address to Congress, Dec. 7, 1915, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 35, pp. 306-307. Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Univ., 1974), p. 146. Luebke argues a similar point but emphasizes how Wilson's words further widened the social and cultural gulf between "hyphenated" Americans and native-born citizens.

²⁸ H.C. Peterson's *Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1968) and the much more recent *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War, 1914-1918* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996) by Stanley Ross are the only general studies of the anti-German and pro-war propaganda of the preparedness period. To

The United States continued to experience the same ethnic, class, and political conflicts of the previous decades when President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany on April 2, 1917. Unfortunately for the federal government, the class of people it had clashed with for decades was the same group of people it had to rely on in time of war. Who else would extract the resources, produce the weapons and foodstuffs, or work the shipyards? The Wilson Administration could be assured of the loyalty and support of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the politically moderate amalgamation of labor unions that represented skilled labor.²⁹ At the same time, the working classes were expected to fill the army's ranks.³⁰ Left-wing organizations such as the SPA and IWW, the same groups that were the victims of repression in the late nineteenth century and Progressive era, represented non-white, alien, and unskilled industrial and agricultural workers. Yet complete loyalty of all Americans – and resident aliens – would be necessary and was expected. The Wilson Administration's warnings became more vociferous and common in the first months of belligerency.

As a staunch Presbyterian, Wilson expected men to be governed by moral law. His concept of morality finally pushed him into asking Congress for a declaration of war. "Our object now," he asserted in his War Message of April 2, 1917, "is to vindicate the

hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak, see George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1920). The title gives a clear indication of the angle taken in the book.

²⁹ In the late nineteenth century, the AFL was far more successful recruiting the skilled and semi-skilled trades than the Socialist Labor Party and Knights of Labor, leaving the SLP, KOL, and later the SPA and IWW only unskilled labor.

³⁰ On December 15, 1917, the War Department disallowed voluntary enlistments. The Administration feared that too many irreplaceable managers and skilled laborers would enlist in the military, severely hampering vital war industries. U.S. Provost Marshal General. *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to December 20, 1918* (Washington, DC), p. 6. Will be cited as *Second Report* in later notes.

principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power.” His faith and upbringing also influenced his perception of opposing views on the war. Wilson proclaimed that disloyalty would “be dealt with with a firm hand of stern repression” and would befall “a lawless and malignant few” who dared stand in the nation’s way. Germany “has filled our unsuspecting communities and even our offices of government with spies” setting “criminal intrigues everywhere afoot” against the nation’s industry, commerce, and unity.³¹ The forces of autocracy were everywhere. Only pro-German and un-American men would oppose a war against such a malicious government.

Two weeks later, the White House issued a proclamation reminding “[a]ll persons in the United States, citizens as well as aliens,” the penalties for treason and conspiracy to commit treason. The president defined treason as acts that could, in some way, supply aid or comfort to the enemy. This included publishing seditious statements, use or disposal of property that will assist the enemy, use of violence against the government or military, or the planning of any of the above acts.³² The message was clear. War demanded absolute loyalty to the federal government and its just cause. No more would socialists and “pro-Germans” be allowed to obstruct the march of liberty and sow the seeds of discontent and pacifism.

Equally as relevant as Wilson’s opinions on disloyalty are those of his Attorney General, Thomas W. Gregory. Although the Department of Justice did not have the manpower to quiet dissenting voices on its own, Gregory bragged of the “several hundred thousand private citizens” working with his department who were “engaged in upholding the Government.” This entailed spying on allegedly disloyal citizens, “making reports of

³¹ An Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 41, p. 526.

³² A Proclamation, April 16, 1917, *ibid*, Vol. 42, pp. 77-79.

disloyal utterances, and seeing that the people of the country are not deceived” by radicals and “pro-Germans.” Yet, Gregory expressed a wish to take the suppression of disloyalty and anti-war activity to the extreme. “It would be better for one-half of the people of the United States to be killed,” Gregory stated, “and one-half of the taxable property of this country destroyed, in overwhelming this menace to popular government [disloyalty and dissent]” than to lose the war with Germany.³³ Gregory’s feelings on the subject were clear. During a speech in New York City on November 20, 1917, Gregory publicly warned the “5 percent of disloyal persons” that their actions would lead to prosecution and imprisonment. Addressing the disloyal as “moral and physical degenerates who believe nothing is worth fighting for,” the Attorney General hoped that God would “have mercy on them for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging Government.”³⁴

Some historians who study the first decades of the twentieth century argue that reformers of the time were motivated by their desire to bring a new political, economic, and social order to American society as a solution to the problems of the previous decades. The largest roadblock in the way of the new order was the social chaos that had overwhelmed the U.S. at the turn of the century. During the war, federal officials, judges, and leaders on the state level worked to overcome the obstacle through exploiting the growing belief that pluralism was somehow unnatural or unhealthy for a society. The relatively widespread influence of radicalism and the influx of immigrants from far-away lands were a sign of weakness. The political and social elite during the First World War, however, believed that internal division and disharmony could be suppressed and

³³ T.W. Gregory to F.H. Westin, Aug. 10, 1917, box 1, Thomas W. Gregory Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, DC).

³⁴ “All Disloyal Men Warned by Gregory,” *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1917, p. 3.

eradicated, to be replaced by the strength and unity of a truly American community.

Wilson, Gregory, Theodore Roosevelt, and others repeated these themes over and again during the preparedness campaign and during belligerency.³⁵

During World War I, the Wilson Administration put its words into practice and suppressed all groups and individuals – except opposition Republicans – who did not whole-heartedly support the Administration’s conduct of the war.³⁶ The Socialist Party was the only major American political party to oppose the war openly. Its rapid rise during the Progressive period, according to Robert Goldstein, “was the single most important factor in creating increasing unease among leading politicians and businessmen” until ascension of the IWW.³⁷ Although its party membership was in decline by 1917, the SPA’s message continued to attract hundreds of thousands of individuals.³⁸ This is evident from the SPA’s electoral success in almost every corner of the country. Building off presidential candidate Eugene Debs’s strong showing in the 1912 election (over 897,000 votes or six percent of the total electorate),³⁹ Socialist candidates had won thousands of municipal seats by 1917. A New York City congressional district had even elected a Socialist, Russian immigrant Meyer London, to Congress in 1914 and 1918.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ellis Hawley. *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1992); John F. McClymer. *War and Welfare: Social Engineering in America, 1890-1925* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980); Robert H. Wiebe. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

³⁶ Until autumn 1918, the Wilson Administration received bipartisan, but not unanimous, support for its activities to suppress dissent. The small group of congressmen who openly opposed the war and the Administration was also a mix of Democrats and Republicans. Congressional unity began to dissipate as the 1918 mid-term election campaigns kicked into high gear in the late summer.

³⁷ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, p. 81.

³⁸ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, pp. 27-28.

³⁹ Wynn, *From Progressivism to Prosperity*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, p. 9, 11-12.

By and large, the Socialist Party opposed military preparedness before the war. Only a small minority of conservative, yet well respected, Socialists endorsed preparedness. The majority followed Debs's lead. Debs feared preparedness would "transform the American nation into the most powerful and odious military despotism in the world." Military preparedness, most socialists believed, was a perilous threat to labor and a potential boon to the capitalist class. Socialists and other opponents utilized the common perception within the working-class that the movement was fueled by the avarice of the federal government and wealthy business men as a means to oppose preparedness.⁴¹ After the U.S. entered the First World War, the SPA opposed American military involvement on the same grounds it did preparedness.

On April 7, 1917, SPA leaders and members met in St. Louis to discuss the party's official stance on the war. The St. Louis Resolution may have sealed the party's fate. The resolution railed against the "predatory capitalists" whom they held responsible for America's entanglement in Europe's war. Worse yet, the resolution "brand[s] the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world...No greater dishonor has ever been forced upon a people than that which the capitalist class is forcing upon this nation against its will." Most importantly in terms of the continuation of class conflict, the convention delegation "emphatically reject[s] the proposal that in time of war the workers should suspend their struggle for better conditions. On the contrary, the acute situation created by war calls for an even more vigorous prosecution of the class struggle."⁴² Except for the small

⁴¹ Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, pp. 123, 125-126.

⁴² Majority Report of the St. Louis Convention, April 7, 1917, Reel 6, Socialist Party Papers.

number of moderate Socialists who left the party after the convention, nearly all members of the SPA followed the resolution and staunchly opposed the war.⁴³

The IWW, far more radical in practice than the SPA, also pledged to continue the struggle against the capitalist class. The difference in terms of the IWW, however, was that the “Wobblies” – as they were commonly referred – did not establish an official anti-war or anti-conscription program. Influential Wobblies such as William “Big Bill” Haywood tempered their comments toward the war and the Wilson Administration. The more militant Wobblies, however, wanted an official proclamation from the IWW general executive board publicly opposing conscription. The IWW leadership, not wanting to repeat its peacetime experiences with federal repression or lose whatever leverage it had in negotiations concerning several western copper and lumber strikes, rejected the idea. In the eyes of the Wilson Administration, though, the IWW’s continued push for workers’ rights and privileges was evidence of its disloyalty and the threat it posed to the war effort. Some of the more radical Wobblies boisterously opposed the draft independently of the IWW. Nonetheless, this further convinced the Administration of the need to quiet the organization.⁴⁴

Agrarian Populism was a form of radicalism that was distinctly American, “that even bitter opponents could not stigmatize as ‘foreign.’”⁴⁵ Arising from the discontent among tenant farmers and agricultural laborers from the 1870s to 1890s, the Populist Party questioned the justice of laissez-faire capitalism and demanded government

⁴³ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 127.

⁴⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp. 203-205. Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, p. 89-90.

⁴⁵ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p. 247.

regulation of banks, trusts, and the railroads.⁴⁶ Populists were staunchly pro-labor, regarding “the industrial worker...as a natural ally who was oppressed by the same economic forces and who shared the same goals of social justice and an equitable distribution of wealth.”⁴⁷ Although Populist ideas had not played a critical role in national politics for nearly two decades, they still persisted in many rural areas across the country in 1917. After the Populist Party’s demise in 1896, its former supporters began contributing heavily to the strength of rural socialist organizations in the Plains and Southwest. The defections of the rank-and-file Populists, it seems, were a natural consequence of political conditions and ideology. After the Populists’ crushing defeat in the 1896 Presidential election, the “seething mass of discontent had nowhere to go” and joined the next closest alternative – socialism.⁴⁸ Also, as C. Vann Woodward makes clear, despite qualms about the idea of eliminating private property, the Populist Party, like socialist groups, “formed the vanguard against the advancing capitalist plutocracy” during the Progressive era.⁴⁹ Even Tom Watson of Georgia, former Populist Party candidate for vice president, railed against the capitalist class along with such prominent socialists as Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger, and John Spargo at a convention in Noroton, Connecticut in 1906.⁵⁰

Before the war, the rural areas of the country exhibited the same displeasure with the preparedness movement as did socialists. In fact, the largest base of opposition to preparedness comprised farmers and farm laborers. Rural workers, mostly isolated from

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Sanders dedicates an entire chapter to explaining the similarity in ideologies of the SPA, Populist Party, and the Knights of Labor during the late nineteenth century in *Roots of Reform*, pp. 30-100.

⁴⁷ Pollack, *The Populist Mind*, p. 403.

⁴⁸ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 17n. In his citation, Weinstein quotes from Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken* (New York: Greenwood, 1940), p. 260.

⁴⁹ C. Vann Woodward. *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1973), p. 188.

⁵⁰ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 80.

mainstream public opinion and the pro-preparedness rhetoric in the big city press, “remained suspicious of great corporations and militarism” and were “concerned about taxes, and sturdily indifferent to the hue and cry over defense.” In short, rural presses did not cover the war in Europe with as much detail as metropolitan presses and did not print pro-preparedness rhetoric, meaning rural workers had not “lost their bearings” over alleged foreign threats to the U.S. In general, before the war rural Populists and Progressives pushed for government control of munitions plants and worked to make sure the increased tax burden fell at the feet of the wealthy. Believing, like most socialists, that the concept of preparedness was part of a money-making conspiracy, “these tactics had a certain logic to them.”⁵¹

In spring 1917 opposition to military preparedness turned into opposition to conscription. The Wilson Administration made the connection between radicalism and draft evasion by the first months of belligerency. Although neither the SPA nor the IWW organized a nationwide effort against the draft, their members vigorously opposed the draft law through publications, speeches, and demonstrations. In the months immediately following the May 1917 passage of the Selective Service Act, socialists in New York City and Philadelphia organized anti-conscription meetings only to have them broken up by soldiers and marines.⁵² On July 1, 1917 in Boston, several radical organizations united to stage a parade protesting the war and conscription. The parade consisted of roughly 8,000 demonstrators, many of foreign birth. As the demonstrators organized their lines, “enlisted men attacked in regular formation when an officer had given a

⁵¹ Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, pp. 124, 137.

⁵² Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, pp. 30-32.

command.”⁵³ The demonstrators fought back, causing an hour-long riot. After the dust had settled, Boston city police and agents from the Department of Justice had arrested hundreds of protesters involved in scuffles and fist fights with soldiers and “a number of persons who were alleged to have made unpatriotic remarks in the heat of the conflict.” No military personnel were arrested or punished for perpetuating violence against citizens.⁵⁴

At the same time, the federal government had armed itself with legal weapons to deploy against radicalism and anti-draft rhetoric with the passage of the Espionage Act. Signed into law on June 5, 1917, the Espionage Act gave Department of Justice agents the legal authority to apprehend anyone believed to be conspiring to interfere with the military in any way, including hampering the war effort through strikes and inciting young men to avoid conscription. Congressional supporters of the bill cited the SPA’s St. Louis Resolution and the “radical labor union activities” of the IWW as justification for passing the law.⁵⁵ The use of the postal service was stripped from those using it “for the dissemination of allegedly treasonable material” in order to hinder the flow of information among “ethnic communities, radical labor organizations, and minority political parties” that relied heavily on the mail to distribute news among its members.⁵⁶ For the federal government, the Espionage Act helped limit the amount of socialist anti-draft rhetoric that reached those most likely to be drafted – unskilled laborers.

Wartime suppression of IWW strikes, as well as the use of the Espionage Act to decapitate the SPA and IWW, foreshadowed what would occur during the slacker raids in

⁵³ Ibid, p. 46. The quote comes from the *Boston Evening Record*’s report of the parade and riot.

⁵⁴ “Boston ‘Peace’ Parade Mobbed,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1917, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Stephen M. Kohn. *American Political Prisoners: Prosecutions Under the Espionage and Sedition Acts* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Kennedy. *Over Here*, pp. 25-26.

1918. In July 1917 the Wilson Administration unleashed federal troops against IWW copper strikes in Arizona and Montana as well as lumber strikes in the Pacific Northwest. In the case of the IWW-led copper strikes in Jerome and Bisbee, Arizona, local vigilantes rounded up strikers and their families and forcefully deported them. When word of the deportations made its way to Washington, President Wilson was apparently incensed. Yet even though he commissioned a mediating committee to investigate the incident, Wilson did not push for those responsible for the deportations to be punished. The press and local officials in these areas blamed the strikes – in industries vital to the war effort – on “pro-German sympathies or domination of the IWW.”⁵⁷

Although the government never produced a shred of credible evidence linking the IWW or SPA with German money or influence, the Wilson Administration ordered federal troops to break strikes, arrest strikers under military authority without declaring martial law, and raid IWW and SPA headquarters across the country. The cross-country raids against IWW leadership, including Bill Haywood, on September 5, 1917, virtually destroyed the organization. At the same time, the Administration’s propaganda department – the Committee on Public Information – successfully linked the IWW “in the public mind with sabotage, pro-Germanism, radicalism, and disloyalty.”⁵⁸ On September 28 in Chicago, a federal grand jury indicted 166 Wobblies on the grounds that the strikes were part of an elaborate conspiracy on the part of the IWW to obstruct the war effort and interfere with the draft.⁵⁹ In short, the Wilson Administration “acted to prevent what they thought *might* be done by Wobblies active in the West.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, pp. 53-55.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Goldstein. *Political Repression*, pp. 115-117.

⁶⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p. 230.

As the lack of moral outrage against the repression of radicals shows, the American public was fully enveloped in the longstanding ethnic and class tensions that the war had brought to a fever pitch. Wilson's demands for complete loyalty had clearly taken root, so much so that mob killings in the name of "Liberty" occurred in several parts of the country during the war. For example, policemen and town officials shot and killed several men in Hickory and Tulsa, Oklahoma for allegedly making pro-German remarks. The most famous incident, however, was the hanging of Robert Prager, a registered enemy alien of German birth, for supposedly speaking to the miners about the "virtues of Socialism" in April 1918 in Collinsville, Illinois. No witnesses claimed that Prager made any seditious or anti-war comments.⁶¹ Yet perhaps the most brutal instance of mob violence against seditious rhetoric took place in Butte, Montana in August 1917. On July 19, Frank Little, a crippled IWW organizer, gave a speech attacking the capitalist class and lambasting the federal government for its use of troops against strikers. Almost two weeks later, before dawn on August 1, several townsmen pulled Little from his home and tied him to the rear bumper of their car. They proceeded to drag Little "through the streets until his kneecaps were scraped off." Arriving at the railroad trestle at the edge of town, the men hanged Little after pinning a note to his clothes saying: "Others take notice. First and last warning."⁶²

This indignation over sedition and radicalism also was directed toward the individual draft evader. Local elites resolved that the selective draft ensured "that the unskilled, the unacculturized, the 'loafers,' 'slackers,' and (some added) 'radicals' went

⁶¹ Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, pp. 200-202.

⁶² Ibid, pp. 57-58.

into the army.”⁶³ Editorial boards in major newspapers praised federal suppression of radicals in the name of the draft. A *New York Times* editorial from June 10, 1917, for example, praised government acts against anti-draft demonstrations: “Selective Draft act gives a long and sorely needed means of disciplining a certain insolent foreign element in this nation.” After having described the destructive attitudes of aliens toward American democracy, the writer claimed that “in demonstrations, manifestations, strikes, riots, persons of this sort are pre-eminent.” “We have been too easy with these recalcitrants,” he concluded, “they should be made to cool their heels in jail.”⁶⁴

The Selective Service Law, signed into law on May 18, 1917, did not include any provisions that explicitly targeted the lower class, aliens, or dissenters. Yet in practice the “selective” aspect of the draft was not as impartial as the law intended. The majority of the more than 24 million men who registered requested an exemption. Provost Marshal General Enoch H. Crowder, the head of the Selective Service System, ordered local boards to provide exemptions and deferments to skilled laborers employed in vital war industries as well as men whose families depended solely on their income. Local class and racial prejudices played a major role in determining placement in a deferred classification. Civilian members of local and district draft boards, governor-appointed community elites who had the final say on exemptions and deferments, often were more reluctant to provide exemptions to the poor, blacks, or foreign-born citizens than to the sons of their middle-class neighbors.⁶⁵ One of the most extreme examples of local

⁶³ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, p. 163.

⁶⁴ “Churlish Guests,” *New York Times*, June 10, 1917, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, p. 154.

prejudices influencing exemptions occurred in Fulton County, Georgia, where a local board exempted 526 of 815 white registrants but only 6 of 202 blacks.⁶⁶

Family dependency was by far the most common reason for requesting deferment. On the first registration date held June 5, 1917 – when nearly 10 million men peacefully registered for the draft – over 4 million married men applied for economic dependency deferments. Nearly one million, however, were denied. The reasons for this, according to K. Walter Hickel, revolved around local politics and the class considerations handed down in orders from Washington. As was often the case, the poorest married registrant was unlikely to be granted an exemption. Because of the low wages he earned, his wife likely was employed as well, meaning his family was not reliant solely on his income. This was especially true of African-American families. Often a man could earn more money in the army than in civilian life because the War Department would often supplement his military income by giving financial aid to the family. This motivated many wives to turn in slacker husbands or report them as neglectful of their families' needs. Most white middle-class wives would not have thought of exercising such power over their husbands. It was not necessary. With the value of their wives' labor less observable, husbands could easily claim to be indispensable to the family's continued well being.⁶⁷

While a middle-class white male could hide behind his wife's lack of productivity, the unskilled laborer had no safeguards against conscription other than luck.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Over Here*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ K. Walter Hickel. "'Justice and the Highest Kind of Equality Require Discrimination': Citizenship, Dependency, and Conscription in the South, 1917-1919," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 66, no. 4, (Nov. 2000), pp. 749-780. Because no study covers dependency claims in northern cities, Hickel's main points have been generalized to present what are believed to have been common trends throughout the country.

Although he often worked in a war industry or in agriculture, the nature of his job made him easily replaceable. A classification system was put in place in December 1917 with the stated purpose of more effectively allocating the nation's manpower resources. According to John W. Chambers, the new system was a means of mollifying "some powerful interest groups, and to keep some other skeptical groups in the wartime coalition."⁶⁸ Yet when placed in the context of Progressive era suppression and federal wartime actions against dissident groups, the classification system appeared to have another end – to place the burden of military service squarely on the shoulders of unskilled labor.

The new regulation left local draft boards, manned by middle and upper class locals appointed by the state's governor, to classify draft age men into five classes based on their individual importance to the various war industries and the maintenance of civil order. They based their decisions on self-report questionnaires filled out by registrants. Board members were responsible for investigating registrants whose answers on questionnaires seemed suspect. Class I, the only class from which men were drafted, included all men of draft age whose labor was not considered vital. Those placed in Class I, though, had prior exemption grants revoked. Boards only exempted men in Class I who could not pass the army's physical examination. In his postwar report on the Selective Service System, Crowder described the classification system as "representing the equitable order of liability for military service."⁶⁹ In other words, certain men were more useful to their country as cannon fodder than others.

⁶⁸ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, p. 201.

⁶⁹ *Second Report*, pp. 45-48.

Another measure was the “work or fight” order, enacted on May 17, 1918. Similar to the classification system, “work or fight” stripped every unskilled or semi-skilled worker of any draft deferments or dependency exemptions while protecting workers deemed vital to the war effort. The concept, barely an inch away from involuntary servitude, was self-explanatory. A man could either find employment in an essential war industry or find himself in a cantonment camp. For those with “non-essential” occupations and little job skills, there were few options. Without job training or an exemption, these were the men most likely to be conscripted or to evade service. In the end the “work or fight” order protected workers skilled in trades the AFL represented. “Duty to work and to work effectively,” Crowder remarked, “was the foundation of the measure...there was no alternative.”⁷⁰

Not only were American citizens expected to do their duty, but aliens were as well. The complex question of drafting aliens into military service had plagued the Administration and Congress before and after the passage of the draft law in May 1917. Public outcry against those who enjoyed the protection and benefits of living in the U.S. but refused to serve grew increasingly passionate during the war, especially in cities with large alien populations such as New York, Chicago, and Cleveland. Yet international treaties protected subjects of foreign governments from conscription. To circumvent the treaties, the draft law allowed only those aliens who wished to become American citizens to be drafted into the military. All aliens, though, had to register for the sake of labor classification. For draft boards, enemy and nondeclarant aliens caused the most confusion. With practically no coordination with naturalization courts, local boards were left to decide the exemption status of many who, because of their language or accent,

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 75

were clearly born outside the U.S. As a result, many nondeclarant and enemy aliens who correctly filed for exemption were wrongly drafted into the military despite the draft law's provisions against it.⁷¹

To the man considering draft evasion, the actions of the local boards seemed to validate the anti-war rhetoric that claimed the war was being fought to protect Wall Street interests. Inspired by their unenviable situation and the words of those with the gall to support them, many men did whatever it took to elude the draft. Evasion took many forms. Men often tried evasion at the point of registration. Some of the most popular forms were the bribing of medical examiners, feigning blindness or deafness, swallowing heart rate- and blood pressure-altering drugs, and pretending to have hemorrhoids. Others became narcotics addicts by taking morphine and heroin, while some chose prison by setting up mock burglaries.⁷²

Self-mutilation was also prevalent. Two examples from Georgia are particularly gruesome. J.H. Sherman, a farm hand from near Decatur, Georgia "committed suicide...by cutting the artery in his left arm with a safety razor blade and slowly bled to death." Authorities learned that Sherman's "brooding over the war and fear of conscription" led him to take his own life.⁷³ A month later, in August 1917, the Department of Justice warned Georgia dentists to be on the lookout for men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty asking to have their molars pulled. Selective Service regulations "require[d] that a man have a certain number of molar teeth." Boards gave

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 94-97. For more on how the Selective Service dealt with the problem of classifying aliens, see David A. Lockmiller, *Enoch H. Crowder*, pp.185-186.

⁷² Ronald Schaffer. *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford, 1991), p. 177.

⁷³ "Cutting Arm Artery, Man Seeks Slow Death," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 23, 1917, p. 7.

exemptions to men without the required number of molars “since his health would be impaired – molar teeth being necessary for the proper mastication of food.”⁷⁴

Young middle and upper class men rarely attempted to evade the draft, mostly because they were seldom denied a deferment. Those who tried to avoid conscription, however, often fled the country. Newspapers reported in May 1917, the month before the first draft registration, that fifteen to twenty men of draft age, “carrying plenty of money and apparently of good family,” crossed the Mexican border in an attempt to skirt mandatory service. At the same time, authorities in Florida were put on notice to watch for any man of draft age that might attempt to board a ship heading to Cuba.⁷⁵

Astonishingly, in September 1918, federal authorities arrested two slacker brothers as far away as Venezuela. They traveled there with their mother using fake passports issued in San Salvador.⁷⁶

Those in power sought to quell such displays of cowardice and disloyalty quickly. The class and ethnic friction evident in the federal government’s and American public’s attitude toward political dissidents and aliens before and during the first months of the war exploded even further at the end of 1917 and early 1918. The increased tensions resulted from political and military developments in Europe. The most important in terms of American apprehension toward radicalism was the Bolshevik takeover in Russia on November 7, 1917. To Allied political and military leaders, the Bolshevik Revolution and Brest-Litovsk Treaty, officially ending the war on the Eastern Front, were a

⁷⁴ “Men Sacrifice Teeth to Escape the Draft,” *ibid*, Aug. 22, 1917, p. 4.

⁷⁵ “Fleeing to Mexico to Escape Draft,” *ibid*, May 31, 1917, p. 1.

⁷⁶ “Slackers in Venezuela,” *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 6.

catastrophe.⁷⁷ On the American home front, however, left-wing political groups saw the Bolshevik Revolution as “glamorous” and with “a dazzling, dreamlike quality.”⁷⁸ Both pro-war and anti-war socialists spoke out in favor of the revolution. Influential right-wing socialist Louis Waldman claimed the Bolshevik takeover was an “awakening to freedom and to self-government.” At the same time, radical socialist Eugene Debs could not hold back his excitement, saying, “From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am a Bolshevik, and proud of it.”⁷⁹

The strikes and the lack of working-class support for the war that led to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had been evident in the United States before and during American intervention. Strikes were sparks that, in Russia, were fanned into revolution. The federal government and mainstream media, spurred on by this realization, almost immediately began publicly linking political radicals and “pro-German” activity to Russian Bolshevism. An example of the exaggerated reaction to the threat of Bolshevism in the U.S. was a front-page article printed in the *New York Times* in late December 1917. The article claimed that federal agents had uncovered a plot involving the IWW, Russian Bolsheviks, and Irish revolutionaries to “overthrow existing social orders” within the countries at war with Germany. The article warned of Wobblies smuggling “Bolshevist organizers” into the U.S. “to spread their doctrine of direct action for communal organizations.” The newspaper’s government sources also spoke of a mutinous Russian supply ship dropping off guns and munitions “intended for the Industrial Workers of the

⁷⁷ John H. Morrow, Jr. *The Great War: An Imperial History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 194-195, 254-255.

⁷⁸ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, p. 101.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 110.

World in this country” at an unnamed Pacific port.⁸⁰ No evidence exists to corroborate the story. The article exemplifies not only the alleged link between Bolshevism and American radicalism, but also the press and Wilson Administration’s mischaracterization of the threat of Bolshevism and social revolution in the U.S.

In terms of legal recourse against this old – yet perceived to be new – threat, Congress amended the 1917 Espionage Act. A small number of federal judges had ruled that the original Espionage Act required “a specific intent to commit specific crimes.” Simply speaking against the government or draft, these judges believed, did not violate the law unless prosecutors could prove that the speech directly interfered with the war effort.⁸¹ To Attorney General Gregory and like-minded congressmen, the Espionage Act as it stood in spring 1918 could not adequately control the more dangerous threat of disloyal “pro-Bolshevik” rhetoric. An amended version, known as the Sedition Act, was signed into law on May 16, 1918 and removed the aspect of motive. The most significant change was Section III, which punished those who attempted, among other things, to “incite insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall willfully obstruct...the recruitment or enlistment service of the United States.”⁸² Several influential radicals, most notably the proudly-Bolshevik Eugene Debs, were prosecuted under the Sedition Act.⁸³ The new act served to finish the decapitation of radical groups in the U.S. by punishing them for their anti-draft and pro-Bolshevik (i.e. pro-German) rhetoric.

⁸⁰ “See Worldwide Anarchist Plot,” *ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1917, p. 1.

⁸¹ Richard Polenberg. *Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 28.

⁸² Schaffer, *America in the Great War*, pp. 220-221.

⁸³ Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, pp. 113-114.

Allied military setbacks and manpower shortages in mid to late 1917 only further heightened the frenzied atmosphere. France's failed spring offensives and the ensuing mutiny, the British disaster near Ypres, and Italy's near collapse at Caporetto combined to make Allied defeat seem not only possible but likely.⁸⁴ By the time of the Allied military debacles, the American army had yet to see combat and would not until October.⁸⁵ The Allied call for American troops, however, picked up mightily following the massive German offensives of March 1918, which were fueled by the half million German troops freed from the Eastern Front because of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.⁸⁶ The German's attack and early success came as "a great shock to [Wilson] and necessitate[d] a readjustment of opinions and hopes to which he ha[d] stubbornly clung in spite of much advice to the contrary."⁸⁷ The Wilson Administration would have to send large numbers of troops whether it was prepared to or not.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George stressed this point to Wilson in his "Crisis Telegram," sent on March 28, 1918, a week after the first shots of the German offensive. Lloyd George claimed it was "impossible to exaggerate the importance of getting American reinforcements across the Atlantic in the shortest possible space of time." The formal British appeal to the U.S. came two days later: "120,000 infantry...should be embarked and sent to Europe per month between now and the end of July [1918]."⁸⁸ Through the remainder of 1918, Britain, France, and the commander of the American Expeditionary Force, General John J. Pershing, continued to ask for more

⁸⁴ Morrow, *The Great War*, pp. 183-186, 191-192, 196.

⁸⁵ Edward M. Coffman. *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford, 1968), p. 139.

⁸⁶ Morrow, *The Great War*, p. 255.

⁸⁷ Sir W. Wiseman to British Foreign Office, Mar. 28, 1918, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 47, p. 184.

⁸⁸ Daniel R. Beaver. *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort, 1917-1919* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1966), p. 134.

troops to be sent to France. Because of the relative success of the draft in 1917, however, Secretary of War Newton Baker was able to exceed expectations and ship as many as 300,000 men in both April and May 1918.⁸⁹ Yet as the War Department sent men to France, the pool of draft eligible men left in the U.S. began to dry up quickly. As Allied leaders and Wilson's generals in Europe made clear, the military situation necessitated the induction of every able-bodied draft-eligible male into the army.

Conscription, though, is only successful if it produces quality soldiers. While Allied governments panicked across the pond, the U.S. War Department struggled to properly equip and train the massive number of men the draft enlisted. Many inductees often waited weeks, if not months, for a uniform, wearing their civilian clothes and shoes during training exercises. For a time, artillery divisions trained with dummy guns. Hand grenades were in such short supply that only officers and noncoms who attended a special grenade school threw live bombs. Also, the typical American draftee during World War I had never fired a rifle before induction. Drilling with wooden broomsticks did not remedy the situation. Military historian Edward Coffman found two extreme cases of units that were still severely under-trained despite the increased availability of rifles in 1918. Because of the rush to ship divisions to fight in Europe, "perhaps as many as 40 per cent of the men in the Fourth Division and 45 per cent" of two complete infantry regiments of the 77th Division "had not fired a rifle in training" before arriving at the front.⁹⁰ Considering the difficulty the ill prepared War Department had in turning civilians into soldiers, it is difficult to believe that the Army could have even partially trained dissidents and non-English speaking aliens.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 148.

⁹⁰ Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, pp 64-66

The Bolshevik Revolution and Allied military setbacks in Europe caused the Department of Justice to play a more active role in squelching all dissent – including draft evasion. In 1917 the federal government as a whole showed little interest in combating anti-draft activity at the level of the evader. In rural southeast Oklahoma in August 1917, the Working Class Union (WCU), an agrarian socialist organization, arranged the only large-scale episode of coordinated, working-class draft resistance during the war. The “Green Corn Rebellion” consisted of a contingent of between 500 and 1000 white, black, and Native American tenant farmers armed with shotguns and pitchforks prepared to march on Washington in protest to the draft. The group planned “to arrest ‘the Big Slick’ (President Wilson) and end the war.” The “rebellion” was all talk. Before they could set out, though, the local sheriff and a posse of seventy local citizens quickly dispersed the crowd, eventually arresting close to 450.⁹¹

After the war, Crowder asserted that the reason for the uprising was not disloyalty or opposition to the draft per se, but against their dire economic situation. “The outstanding feature of this case,” Crowder claimed, “was the appalling ignorance of practically all of the men involved” outside of the handful of WCU leaders.⁹² As the second chapter of this study will make clear, this would not be the last time the “ignorance” of backcountry dissidents would have to be held in check. To facilitate the myth that the entire nation backed the war effort, the term “ignorant” often replaced the more accurate adjective “disloyal.” The charge of disloyalty was reserved for socialists, aliens, and seditionaries. Yet in terms of the early response to anti-draft activity, the Green Corn Rebellion represents the ease with which undermanned local authorities

⁹¹ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, pp. 357-361.

⁹² *Second Report*, pp. 208-209.

could squelch half-hearted, yet large-scale, attempts at radical-inspired draft evasion in the months immediately following U.S. entry into the war. Yet as the war raged on and perceptions of the dangers of radical groups such as the socialist WCU became more ingrained, many within the federal government identified draft evasion as becoming a more widespread and imminent threat.

Perhaps aroused by happenings in Oklahoma and elsewhere, Provost Marshal General Crowder and Attorney General Gregory decided to talk tough publicly. Later in August, they warned state governors and local draft boards of the harsh punishment those who failed to show up to exemption boards and cantonment camps would face. These men would be treated as deserters, thus subject to court-martial and summary execution. Crowder also asserted that he was prepared to send “armed forces” after these men to bring them into camp. Gregory seconded Crowder’s assertion when he stated that those that did not report to exemption boards would “waive thereby the right to such exemptions as they might have claimed.” The names of these men would be sent to the adjutant general’s office of their respective state, which would then mail a notice to the missing registrant to report to camp. If (or, more accurately, when) the man did not report to camp on the designated date he joined the rolls of deserters.⁹³

Apparently, these were empty threats. Had Crowder and Gregory been serious, the crackdown beginning in spring 1918 most likely would have occurred sooner. In the summer of 1917 authorities had arrested only 5,870 slackers, mostly in Appalachia, the Plains states, and the rural Midwest. Few more were detained in the fall and winter.⁹⁴ No evidence exists to suggest that the DOJ or military took part in any raids to round up

⁹³ “Uncle Sam to Hunt As Deserters Men Who Fail to Report,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 19, 1917, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 211-212.

slackers before 1918 or executed any draft evader. It is also unclear if these half-measures did anything except lead more men to flee to the hills or mountains, cross the Mexican border, or go wherever else they felt safe from capture. More important, however, is to consider that the government, both state and federal, perceived the problem of draft evasion as being linked with radicalism and organized dissent as the U.S. became more involved in the fighting in France.⁹⁵

The DOJ and Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO) began joint preparations to intensify the enforcement of the draft law as early as February 1918. Together both offices requested the aid of the American Protective League in cooperating with local draft boards "in locating and causing to present themselves to the proper authority delinquents under the Selective Service Act, including those classed as deserters."⁹⁶ The APL was a private, vigilante organization with local chapters in practically every town and city in the country. The DOJ commissioned it to increase the investigatory power of the undermanned Bureau of Investigations (BI). In practice, however, the APL acted as "a rambunctious, unruly *posse comitatus* on an unprecedented national scale." Throughout the war it spied on, burglarized, publicly smeared, and illegally arrested thousands of Americans and aliens suspected of disloyalty, sedition, and draft evasion. The mere existence of such an organization during the war, David Kennedy argues, "testifies to the unusual state of American society in World War I." Through the APL, he

⁹⁵ Charles Chatfield discusses how federal authorities lumped all pacifists – neutral, socialists, or conscientious objectors – with the anti-war dissent of radicals in "World War I and the Liberal Pacifist in the United States," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, no. 7 (Dec. 1970), pp. 1920-1937.

⁹⁶ A.B. Bielaski to all Special Agents, Special Employees, and Local Officers of the Bureau of Investigation, Feb. 6, 1918, and Crowder/Pullan to The Governor of (all States), Feb. 7, 1918, file 17-135, box 7, General File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

continues, the Wilson Administration “sought to effect drastic measures without itself assuming full formal authority” and, thus, formal responsibility.⁹⁷

At first, Wilson was lukewarm toward the APL. On June 2, 1917 his son-in-law and Treasury Secretary William McAdoo warned the president about the “very harmful possibilities” of an organization that posed as an official law enforcement arm of the DOJ. McAdoo equated the APL with the Revolutionary era Sons of Liberty “through which many injustices and abuses resulted.”⁹⁸ Two days later Wilson wrote to Gregory to express his reservations about the APL. “It seems to me that it would be very dangerous to have such an organization operating in the United States” Wilson stated, adding, “I wonder if there is any way in which we could stop it.”⁹⁹ Gregory responded that the APL was “a patriotic organization...organized with my approval and encouragement.” The Attorney General portrayed the all-volunteer APL as being indispensable to the BI’s work and noted that “not a single officer or member receives compensation” from the government.¹⁰⁰ Wilson, with the majority of his attention focused on foreign affairs, did not question the legitimacy of the APL again until after the national uproar over the New York City slacker raids in September 1918.

In February 1918, APL National Director Charles D. Frey urged caution in the instructions issued to his local chiefs on how to follow through on the DOJ and PMGO’s request. APL operatives were not to apprehend individual slackers. When a slacker was found and refused to report to his local draft board, “the operative will communicate at

⁹⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, pp. 81-82. For more on the birth and activities of the APL, see Emerson Hough, *The Webb* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1919), *passim*; Richard G. Powers, *Broken: The Troubled Past and Uncertain Future of the FBI* (New York: Free Press, 2004), pp. 86-90; and Jensen, *Price of Vigilance*, *passim*.

⁹⁸ W.G. McAdoo to W. Wilson, June 2, 1917, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 42, p. 440.

⁹⁹ W. Wilson to T.W. Gregory, June 4, 1917, *ibid*, p. 446.

¹⁰⁰ T.W. Gregory to W. Wilson, June 12, 1917, *ibid*, p. 510.

once with the proper State or Federal officer...so that the arrest may be effected in accordance with law.”¹⁰¹ Despite Frey’s instructions – which many APL operatives likely found unreasonable considering what Frey and the BI had let slide in the past – the deployment of the APL against draft evaders was meant as a form of intimidation. General Crowder, in a telegram to state governors, emphasized the “moral effect” of sending the APL to round up “slackers and wilful [sic.] evaders.” Willful deserters consciously knew that their evasion of service “result[ed] in the induction of another registrant” to take his place. “It is,” Crowder concluded, “most important that every possible effort be made to apprehend such delinquents.”¹⁰²

The Wilson Administration’s shift to a more active enforcement of the Selective Service Law was part of a long-running trend that preceded the war by several decades and would continue past the Armistice. During the war this trend of battling recalcitrant labor ideologies and ethnic minorities reached its climax. With the press and Administration officials inundating the nation with fears of foreign invasion, German espionage, radical insurgencies, and warnings against disloyal activity, the American people were left with no reasonable concept of reality. The result was widespread confusion. If the Allies lost, how long would the U.S. have to wait for the Germans to land on its beaches? Could immigrants be trusted? Would German propaganda give rise to a black insurrection in the South? When and where would Bolshevism emerge in the U.S.?

By raising these possibilities the Administration created an atmosphere in which disloyalty, pro-Germanism, and pro-Bolshevism were synonymous. Yet these

¹⁰¹ C. D. Frey to all Chiefs of the American Protective League, Bulletin No. 3, Feb. 6, 1918, file 17-135, box 7, General File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

¹⁰² Crowder/Pullan to the Governor of (all States), Feb. 26, 1918, Ibid.

possibilities also focused many Americans' perceptions of the threats facing the U.S. in 1917 and 1918, on the visible "enemies" at home. Such Administration appeals to people's anxieties explain America's willingness to connect the U.S.'s foreign and domestic enemies. The federal government also directed its charges at select groups of people – such as the IWW, SPA, and former Populists – allowing for old scores to be settled. The slacker raids of 1918, like other methods of wartime repression, exemplified the penchant of policy makers and the American people to lash out at the only enemies that were within their reach.

CHAPTER 2 – Where Populism Persists: Sedition, Evasion, and Tom Watson

“Where Morgan’s money went, your boy’s blood must go, ELSE MORGAN WILL LOSE HIS MONEY” – The Jeffersonian, Aug. 16, 1917¹⁰³

“The eyes of the union have been focused upon the Empire state of the South, and from every loyal sister state there comes the embarrassing query – a question our fellow patriots have a right to ask – ‘What’s wrong with Georgia?’” – Atlanta Constitution, Aug. 28, 1918¹⁰⁴

“One usually associates screaming of women and children...with extremely heart-rending scenes and descriptions of catastrophes,” wrote R.E. White of the *Atlanta Constitution* in a June 17, 1918 story of a collapsed bridge in Cherokee County, Georgia. The previous day, Steele’s Bridge, a wooden structure rising forty feet above the Etowah River, collapsed under the weight of a large truckload of 25 soldiers from Camp Gordon, located northeast of Atlanta. Instead of women and children, those present heard “the blood-curdling shrieks of the wounded and dying...and the appeals to the Almighty uttered by their strong, brave comrades in arms while working with superhuman strength at rescue.”¹⁰⁵

On the surface such a tragedy appears to have been due to the fragility of an old bridge that had long since seen its best days. This, however, was not the case. The Justice and War Departments, in conjunction with state authorities, sent federal

¹⁰³ “Kaiser Wilson’s Administration Shuts the Jeffersonian Out of the Mails,” *Jeffersonian*, Aug. 16, 1917, p. 6. All italics in this and future citations from the *Jeffersonian* are Watson’s.

¹⁰⁴ “Under Which Flag Shall We Serve,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 28, 1918, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ R.E. White, “Heartrending Scenes as Men Prayed Heaven for Strength,” *ibid*, July 17, 1918, p. 5.

investigators and fully armed U.S. soldiers into the hills of north Georgia as part of an expedition to root out suspected draft evaders in the area and investigate a local anti-draft group in Cobb County that populist politician Tom Watson allegedly instigated in summer 1917. State and federal officials presumed that slackers had been hiding in the region for weeks. Not only did the terrain hide the slackers, but evidence suggests that the local population protected them as well. In north Georgia, state and federal authorities sent troops to police the draft and the community.

The significance of the Cherokee County raid is its link to Tom Watson. This chapter argues that the region-wide appeal of Watson's fight against the Selective Service Act in 1917 led federal and state authorities to target the Watson-inspired anti-draft group and the slackers they allegedly harbored in June 1918. A handful of raids against armed slackers in the rural South – in east Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas – also involved federal or state troops. In these cases, local and state circumstances, and not an explicit connection between Watson and the evaders, explain the authorities' military response. At the same time, the largest reported collection of armed slackers was in Union County, Georgia, but authorities did not send an expedition to smoke them out. Again, the evidence does not suggest a link between the armed resisters in Union County and Tom Watson.

Historian Jeanette Keith covers the above mentioned raids in her general study of anti-war dissent in the rural South during the First World War. In *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight*, Keith explores how the "pre-modern traditions" of the agrarian South "affected war mobilization." This relationship can best be analyzed, she argues, through studying conscription. Rural Southerners, she contends, viewed the draft and the war in

general as an attack on their social class. Federal draft exemption standards and the local race and class prejudices of some draft boards turned many off from the idea of conscription. Most importantly, Keith maintains that a deep seated fear that Wall Street financiers and northern industrial magnates would unite to militarize the U.S., a mistrust which had persisted in the rural South since the Civil War, made rural white Southerners susceptible to the anti-war rhetoric of men like Watson.¹⁰⁶

The current study differs from Keith's on several levels. While Keith principally focuses on the perspective of the rural dissenter, the current study concentrates on the federal government's response to their dissension, especially of the anti-draft variety. Race does not play a significant role in this study. Most Southern deserters and slackers were African American while white slackers were seen as the most dangerous.¹⁰⁷ The Bureau of Investigation records, on which this chapter is primarily based, do not mention any African American presence in the anti-draft organizations Watson inspired and supported throughout the South. Also, none of the slackers in Union and Cherokee Counties were African American. Finally, this chapter analyzes the Cherokee County raids more carefully than Keith, who misinterprets the evidence and fails to notice the significance of the raid in terms of the national drive against draft evasion and anti-draft activity.

This chapter is similar to Keith's work in that it holds that class consciousness was an important factor in fomenting anti-war dissent in the rural South and the U.S. at

¹⁰⁶ Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), pp. 1-12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 4, 111-134. Keith claims that state officials in the South perceived black deserters and evaders as victims of their own ignorance who did not evade service, God forbid, because of politics. White slackers, however, should know better. The white slacker hiding in the forest, swamp, or mountains better understood the consequences of his disloyalty. That is why he hid in the first place. Sometimes state and local officials described white slackers as ignorant for the purpose of discounting claims that a certain town, county, or region of a state was inherently disloyal.

large. Because the South was still primarily agrarian in 1917 and 1918, the vast majority of its population lived in relative poverty on dirt farms or in backcountry areas where well-paying jobs were scarce. The people in these areas united under the banner of Populism and its anti-capitalist and pro-economic democracy platform in the late nineteenth century. Conservatives fought the more radical Populist policies from the 1890s through the Progressive era. In 1917 and 1918, conservatives again found themselves opposite rural farmers and laborers, but this time it was over American involvement in Europe and conscription. During the war, the Wilson Administration focused the attention of the Department of Justice on the rural South, where Populist sentiments remained strong and coordinated region-wide anti-war resistance, however improbable, was at the very least a possibility.

Works preceding Keith's that have focused to some degree on the South during the war tend to ignore the rural areas and focus on those who left the most records behind – middle and upper class elites. According to George Tindall, the South experienced a coming-of-age during the war. Southerners, he argues, emerged from the war with a new sense of belonging and patriotism. The First World War, Tindall says, marked the beginning of the decline of Southern sectionalism. Tindall, however, pays little attention to what occurred in the rural parts of the South where most Southerners lived. He claims that most rural opposition to the war ceased after April 1917 because men flocked to the colors. Southerners' "patriotic ventures overwhelmed the antimilitarism."¹⁰⁸

Anthony Gaughan, like Tindall, acknowledges the pacifist attitude of the South prior to the U.S. joining the war. Gaughan, though, credits the Wilson Administration's

¹⁰⁸ George Tindall. *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1967) , pp. 38-69.

“100 percent Americanism” campaign and the president’s purging of anti-war Southern Democrats with overcoming resistant Southern attitudes in Congress and in the region. Gaughan’s analysis is too simplistic in that he assumes the South was a place where class differences did not exist and the attitudes of the literate represented the region as a whole. For instance, he claims that because of the patriotic calls of the Wilson Administration, “pacifism and disloyalty had become linked in the South.” Although the South had “adamantly opposed conscription” before 1917, “after war was declared their reservations about the draft evaporated.”¹⁰⁹ As this study will show, the average Southerner did not naturally link pacifism with disloyalty or change his or her attitude about conscription in spring 1917. Even though Tindall and Gaughan mention Watson’s and others’ contentions they do not consider how their messages may have resounded with the majority of the South’s population. Both treat the South in general as a one-dimensional, monolithic entity.

Yet, at the same time, Tindall and Gaughan paint clear pictures of Southern anti-war dissent in Congress. Southern cries in Congress against Woodrow Wilson’s April 1917 War Message and his signing of the Selective Service Act in May were as loud as those from other regions. Though part of a small minority, Southern war opponents in Congress sometimes used language more familiar to socialism and radical populism than to the Democratic Party. Alabama Representative George Huddleston, for instance, maintained that conscription was backed strongly by businessmen and financiers who asserted that the U.S. had “too much discontent, too many Socialists, too much freedom of speech, too many ranting demagogues and labor agitators.” Claude Kitchin,

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Gaughan. “Woodrow Wilson and the Rise of Militant Interventionism in the South,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 65, no. 4. (Nov. 1999), p. 795.

Representative from North Carolina, called for legislation that would place the burden of paying for the war on the wealthy and those who would profit from the war. John K. Vardaman of Mississippi, who opposed nearly every war measure to come through the Senate, was condemned in his home state as “Herr Von Vardaman,” “a Kaiser-loving betrayer of the American people,” and a member of “the army of slackers.” Sickened by such attacks on his colleagues and himself, Georgia Senator Thomas W. Hardwick claimed to be abhorred by the “spirit of intolerance, spirit of suppression, the spirit of oppression, if you please, that seems to me to lurk in these times.”¹¹⁰

No southerner that spoke out against the war and conscription, however, carried as much support in the rural South as Tom Watson. A native son of Georgia, Watson was one of the founding members of his state’s Populist Party. In the late 1880s and 1890s, Watson gained popularity by attempting to unite rural farmers and laborers along class lines. In 1896, he ran as the Populist Party’s Vice Presidential candidate and later, in 1904 and 1908, as its Presidential candidate. The split within the Populist Party in 1896 over who the party’s nominees should be, however, left the movement in shambles. Election results reveal this trend, with Populist candidates, even Watson himself, garnering fewer votes each contest. Former Populist supporters lent their support to Progressive Democrats or, in some cases, to socialist parties. A frustrated Watson blamed Southern blacks as well as Jewish and Catholic conspiracies for his and his party’s political demise.¹¹¹ By 1910, according to historian Barton C. Shaw, Watson’s political power in the South, and even in Georgia, “had seemingly dissolved.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Quotes from Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, pp. 52-53.

¹¹¹ C. Vann Woodward. *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), passim.

¹¹² Barton C. Shaw. *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia’s Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1984), pp. 194-205.

Although his political career appeared finished, by 1917 his influence on the Southern working class was far from dead. Although not as politically radical as in the 1880s and 1890s, Populist sentiment was alive and well in the rural South during the First World War. Southern Democrats during the Progressive era, for the sake of their constituency and reelection, publicly adopted many Populist objectives and were at times assisted in their campaigns by former Populists. For instance, in 1906 Watson convinced his followers to back Democratic candidate Hoke Smith in Georgia's gubernatorial campaign – which Smith won.¹¹³

The preparedness movement and declaration of war provided Watson with an opportunity to be relevant again. In his mouthpiece, the *Jeffersonian*, Watson railed against what he perceived as American imperialism and a growing culture of militarism in the U.S. During the preparedness campaign, the target of his rage was Woodrow Wilson and his military and foreign policy. Playing on the region's general antipathy toward militarism and a strong, intrusive federal government, Watson cautioned against the dangers of compulsory military service. "Our people have yet to learn, and may learn it too late," Watson warned, that the money the Wilson Administration was spending on a larger military is "simply meant to prepare the country for a change of government...from a Republic, to a military despotism."¹¹⁴ In terms of Wilsonian diplomacy, Watson "complained of the sham neutrality that lay in the government's policy of permitting financial intervention on behalf of the Allies." During the preparedness campaign Watson's stance was complete neutrality, both commercially and

¹¹³ C. Vann Woodward. *Origins of the New South*, pp. 371-395.

¹¹⁴ "A Size Up of the Presidential Situation," *Jeffersonian*, Oct. 5, 1916, p. 3.

militarily.¹¹⁵ To him, producing “*big armaments*” for the U.S. and the Allies “*instead of insuring PEACE, insure[d] WAR*” for the U.S.¹¹⁶

As the United States was inching closer to war, Watson stepped up his denunciation of the president. At times the attacks were personal. For instance, in October 1916, Watson printed an article in the *Jeffersonian* admonishing Wilson for allegedly spending thousands of dollars on jewelry for his present wife while leaving the “*unmarked grave of [his] GEORGIA WIFE* – the mother of his grown daughters” without markings or even flowers. “*Gentlemen, the facts are ugly!*” he exclaimed, “But they are characteristic of Woodrow Wilson.”¹¹⁷

The United States’ entry into the war moved Watson to conjure up conspiracy theories that he knew would rile up his capitalist-hating readers. The war, he claimed, was a result of “the most ravenous *commercialism* that ever cursed a nation.”¹¹⁸ When explaining why he thought Wilson declared war on Germany, Watson evoked the name J.P. Morgan. His rationale was simple. Morgan and his business partners had invested millions in the Allied war effort. To protect Morgan’s investment from the prospect of a German victory reducing “their war paper to the status of Confederate money,” Wilson sent U.S. soldiers to fight in France. Watson summed up his point nicely: “*Where Morgan’s money went, your boy’s blood must go, ELSE MORGAN WILL LOSE HIS MONEY!*”¹¹⁹

Watson’s rants against Wilson, the war, and war profiteers, however, are not what made the rhetoric in the *Jeffersonian* dangerous to the war effort or inspired many rural

¹¹⁵ Woodward. *Tom Watson*, pp. 374, 390-391.

¹¹⁶ “How Much Farther are You Willing to Go?” *Jeffersonian*, Jan. 4, 1917, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ “Woodrow Wilson’s Neglect of His First Wife’s Grave,” *ibid*, Oct. 26, 1916, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ “Short Notes on the Great War,” *ibid*, April 12, 1917, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ “Kaiser Wilson’s Administration Shuts the Jeffersonian Out of the Mails,” *ibid*, Aug. 16, 1917, p. 6.

Southerners to oppose the war. To a large degree, Watson was preaching to the choir, one to which he had been preaching for the past three decades. It is likely that the generation sending their sons to fight in France – or shielding them from conscription – had supported Watson’s Populist Party and Populist-minded Democrats, such as Vardaman and Hardwick, since the 1890s. Their distrust of northern industrial and financial interests held firm. When Watson argued that the war in Europe belonged to the Europeans and the northern moneyed elites, most readers did not think twice about the validity of the statement.

What made Watson threatening to the Wilson Administration was that he inspired active and widespread resistance to conscription. Rural Southerners’ level of opposition to the war, as was the case with most Americans, was determined by how much the war would directly affect them or their families. Watson brought the war home to the backcountry with his claims that Wilson Administration would conscript rural sons to fight a war that was not theirs to fight. The method of resistance Watson encouraged was open contestation of the constitutionality of conscription. His campaign began in the *Jeffersonian* on May 10, 1917, when he printed a petition against sending soldiers to die on European battlefields. The petition’s third point of contention, however, is the most important in terms of opposition to the draft: “We most respectfully contend that the Federal Government has no constitutional authority to adopt and enforce any law requiring the citizen, *against his will*, to serve in the Army or Navy.” Passing the Selective Service bill “would violate the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.”¹²⁰ The petition, though, was too late. Wilson signed the bill on May 17, 1917.

¹²⁰ “Sign This! Petition Against Sending Our Young Men to War in Europe,” Ibid, May 10, 1917, p. 6.

In the following months, Watson actively organized anti-draft meetings in Georgia and allegedly promised young men he would fight for their right not to be conscripted. The Department of Justice, already keen to Watson's stance on the war and conscription, took interest in his anti-war activities. An agent from the DOJ's Bureau of Investigation reported that Watson advised a draft-aged man in Valdosta, Georgia named W.H. Stanford "that the conscription law was unconstitutional" and that "they were forming an organization in North Georgia to resist conscription, by force if necessary, and that he would defend and aid any one who desired to resist." The agent searched the Stanford's home for evidence of the correspondence but found nothing.¹²¹

At the request of the U.S. Attorney at Macon, Georgia, another BI agent, this time in Watson's hometown of Thomson, was sent to a mass anti-draft meeting on June 23, 1917, that Watson organized. His task was to listen for plans "to defeat the purpose of the selective conscription act" and begin an investigation based on the information he obtained. After the meeting, George Calmes, the agent, interviewed "the best informed and most dependable citizens of Thomson" in order to determine who had arranged the meeting. Because they did not attend the meeting, these men assumed, as Calmes did, that Watson was behind it. The Thomson postmaster claimed that 500 extra copies of the *Jeffersonian*, mentioning the time and place of the meeting, had been sent to non-subscribers in the rural districts in neighboring counties. Perhaps not coincidentally, the best estimate Calmes could get of the number of people at the meeting ranged between 500 and 600 people from eight counties.¹²²

¹²¹ George C. Smith, report, May 31, 1917, Old German File 17,761, reel 349, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

¹²² Ibid.

After introductions, Watson addressed the congregation for almost two hours. Watson made it clear that his aim was not to dictate to the crowd but only to “interchange” views on the war and conscription. Calmes’s notes from the meeting reveal, however, that Watson was the center of attention. Watson spoke of the “inequalities between the rich and the poor” and that economic conditions in the South had not been as bad since before the Civil War. The federal government also had been imprisoning men and women throughout the country without “due process of law” on “hysterical charges of treason and sedition.” The Selective Service Act, Watson supposedly claimed, was the worst possible violation of personal liberties in that holding a man “against his will in the Army” is tantamount to “involuntary servitude” and violated the 13th Amendment of the Constitution. Calmes reported that, from what he could gather, nearly the entire audience “was in sympathy with” Watson’s speech, as was evident in the resolutions adopted following Watson’s address. The resolutions condemned conscription and the “vast war debt” that mobilization would incur. The war debt, Watson’s followers believed, was “calculated to build up a permanent military establishment” in the U.S. Most importantly, the resolutions called for a petitioning of Congress to repeal conscription and for citizens to unite across the country to do the same.¹²³

From here, Watson’s call for passive resistance against the draft in the courts spread like wildfire, with local anti-draft organizations gradually springing up in all corners of Georgia. In Clyo, Georgia, not far from Savannah, three men had been found reading the *Jeffersonian* to whites and blacks in public.¹²⁴ The U.S. Attorney for North

¹²³ George G. Calmes, report, June 25, 1917, *ibid.*

¹²⁴ George C. Smith, report, July 1, 1917, *ibid.*

Georgia, Hooper Alexander, warned a BI agent of a Watson-led group of roughly 85 men that existed in Roswell, Georgia, 20 miles north of Atlanta. The members of the organization “were alleged to have...signed a pledge that they would fight this country against conscription” before allowing their sons or themselves to be sent to France. As it turned out, the group merely met to circulate an appeal to Congress contesting the draft, not to physically confront federal authorities.¹²⁵ The next month, July, Alexander received a letter from Lithonia, Georgia saying that an undisclosed number of men had “armed themselves with Winchester rifles and are preparing to resist any attempt” to draft anyone in their group. Although the letter’s author could not be sure, he was “inclined to believe” that the armed men were “ardent supporters of ‘Tom’ Watson.” It is unclear what, if anything, was done to apprehend the armed draft evaders.¹²⁶ Fifty miles west of Atlanta in Carroll County, Georgia, Calmes interviewed county elites to garner information on a possible clandestine anti-draft group. He found that meetings were held in the rural areas of the county, where Watson and the *Jeffersonian* were wildly popular, for the purpose of petitioning Congress and to raise money “for the purpose of employing Watson and his associate lawyers” to “test the constitutionality” of conscription. At the time of Calmes’s report, August 1, the citizens of Carroll County had raised about \$100.¹²⁷

By July 1917, Watson’s anti-draft rhetoric and petitions had infected rural communities throughout the South. Near Dothan, Alabama, a group of *Jeffersonian* subscribers held a meeting where it was supposedly claimed “that if an attempt was made

¹²⁵ Russell M. Anderson, report, June 26, 1917, *ibid*.

¹²⁶ Cagle to H. Alexander, July 12, 1917, *ibid*.

¹²⁷ George G. Calmes, report, July 31, 1917, *ibid*; George G. Calmes, report, Aug. 1, 1917, *ibid*.

to conscript them they would set up a government of their own.”¹²⁸ An agent stationed in Cornersville, Tennessee reported that the *Jeffersonian* had created “a strong spirit of animosity toward the Government.” As in Carroll County, Georgia, some men there were alleged to be trying to raise money to fight the draft in court. In the same report the agent also claimed that he somehow had gotten wind of communities in Arkansas and Mississippi that were also raising money for Watson. Watson was doing “what he has always done; stirring up strife and confusion among the more illiterate people, appealing especially to country folk.”¹²⁹ In early August, local authorities arrested a man in Sanford, North Carolina, for “advising young men not to answer the call of the Exemption Board” and “soliciting funds” for a Watson-led legal challenge of the draft.¹³⁰ The regional BI agent asserted that “All of the trouble here in this state [North Carolina] is traceable to Watson, and I think a few arrests of agitators will keep the ones who are against the draft quiet and inactive.”¹³¹ BI agents filed reports about groups raising money for Watson from near Birmingham, Alabama, to Louisville, Kentucky, to outside Austin and San Antonio, Texas.¹³²

To one powerful Southern Senator, Watson’s influence was indeed a dangerous infection that needed to be contained. J.P. James, an attorney from Calhoun City, Mississippi, informed his friend and Senator John Sharp Williams of the level of anti-draft sentiment in his state. After visiting the supposed hotbeds of anti-draft dissent in the state, James felt “something should be done at once, according to my serious

¹²⁸ George C. Smith, report, July 1, 1917, *ibid*.

¹²⁹ McElveen, report, July 31, 1917, *ibid*.

¹³⁰ D.E. Haley to A.B. Bielaski, Aug. 5, 1917, *ibid*.

¹³¹ D.E. Phillips, report, Aug. 5, 1917, *ibid*.

¹³² H.F. Rape, report, Aug. 4, 1917, *ibid*; Hilton D. Campbell, report, Aug. 20, 1917, *ibid*; J.J. Lawrence, report, Aug. 8, 1917, *ibid*; Manuel Servia, report, Aug. 17, 1917, *ibid*; Willard Utley, report Aug. 8, 1917, *ibid*.

estimation of the affair.”¹³³ The ardently pro-war Williams wrote to the Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, A. Bruce Bielaski, relating the reported situation in Mississippi. According to Williams,

“A lot of loose talk on the floor of both Houses and a lot of loose writing by Thomas E. Watson and men of his sort have put notions into these people’s heads which, if attempted to be carried out, might lead them into serious trouble, and which might possibly be counteracted by your branch of the Government service before anything serious has occurred.”¹³⁴

The U.S. Attorney for Charleston, South Carolina, Francis Westin complained to Attorney General Gregory about the level of anti-war dissent in the South. In his letter from August 5, Westin, expressed his concerns over “how ignorant the average man is of the causes that compel the United States to enter the war” in his state and the region at large. Westin argued that “unscrupulous demagogues,” often through newspapers, have convinced the uneducated rural poor “that this war is a matter with which we have nothing to do” and that the U.S. should have “no grievance against the German government.” His solution to this problem: send numerous pro-war speakers to different Southern communities to explain the threat Germany posed to the United States. This, according to Westin, would lead to a “much more generous response and a much better feeling to the demands made for soldiers than there is now.”¹³⁵

Before Williams, Bielaski, or Gregory could act, Watson took the over \$100,000 anti-draft organizations had raised throughout the South and challenged the Selective Service Act in court. On August 18 in Augusta, Watson, representing two African American men of draft age, claimed that conscription violated states’ rights, undermined

¹³³ J.P. James to J.S. Williams, Aug. 6, 1917, *ibid*.

¹³⁴ J.S. Williams to A.B. Bielaski, Aug. 9, 1917, *ibid*.

¹³⁵ F.H. Westin to T.W. Gregory, Aug. 6, 1917, Thomas W. Gregory Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, DC).

“the common-law provision that a man should not be sent against his will outside” the country, and ran counter to the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Judge Emory Speer ruled against Watson and his clients. On the subject of states’ rights, Speer claimed that the states had no jurisdiction over the raising of a national army. He declared Watson’s common law argument was invalid because the Selective Service Law was an act of Congress. Finally, in regard to Watson’s argument that conscription constituted involuntary servitude, Speer ruled that conscripts were not the legal equivalent to slaves. “Nations do not pension slaves, to commemorate their valor,” he concluded.¹³⁶

Within a week, the executive branch of the federal government finally attempted to counteract the anti-draft situation in the South in 1917, but it did not involve silencing local anti-draft organizations. In late August, Watson's *Jeffersonian* fell victim to the clause in the Espionage Act that allowed U.S. Postmaster General Albert Burleson to deny mailing privileges to publications he deemed seditious. Silenced against his will and shaken by the death of his only remaining daughter, Watson again faded into the shadows – prostrate, frustrated, and depressed.¹³⁷ The BI’s investigation of Watson ended temporarily with the banning of the *Jeffersonian*. The wartime BI records do not mention further action against Watson-inspired anti-draft resistance until the investigation that led to the raid into Cobb and Cherokee Counties in north Georgia in spring 1918.

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the investigation is that apparently no BI agents or local authorities approached or arrested Watson for giving voice to such

¹³⁶ Keith, *Rich Man’s War*, pp. 108-109.

¹³⁷ Woodward, *Tom Watson*, pp. 396-397.

widespread discontent. Yes, the Espionage Act had silenced Watson, but why not arrest him under the same law and make an example out of him as the Department of Justice would with the IWW leadership in September 1917 or Eugene Debs in June 1918? The fact that the DOJ left Watson alone in 1917, to a large degree, is a testament to his popularity and the respect given to his abilities as a lawyer and orator. At the same time, if a federal court had tried and acquitted him under the Espionage Act, Watson would have become even more of a hero to those he had already inspired. Perhaps Watson's situation was similar to that of New York City mayoral candidate and Socialist Morris Hillquit, whom Wilson decided not to have prosecuted for anti-war remarks during the November 1917 campaign for fear of making him into "a martyr."¹³⁸

The suppression of the radical press was the most effective means of quieting rural dissent, more so than arresting and trying leaders such as Watson. The Espionage Act prevented "any possibility that geographically isolated rural dissent could be drawn together into a coherent protest movement."¹³⁹ But Keith fails to account for the fact that Watson's movement already spanned the entire region. The pockets of rural anti-draft dissent may not have been an interconnected organization, but each group the BI investigated could be traced back to a central figure – Watson. At the same time, merely discontinuing the flow of information or opinion does not erase the effects of the message. In short, suppressing the radical press, in the case of the *Jeffersonian*, did not make rural Southerners any less anti-war or anti-capitalist. Anti-draft resistance in the rural South had to be combated at the ground-level as well. The Administration did not actively pursue this end until spring 1918.

¹³⁸ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 151. The New York City election and the Wilson Administration's response to Hillquit's campaign are discussed in the following chapter.

¹³⁹ Keith, *Rich Man's War*, pp 109-110.

In early 1918, two plans to combat anti-draft activity came out of Georgia. Major Joel B. Mallet, Georgia state Adjutant General and the officer in charge of implementing and enforcing the Selective Service Law in the state, explained to Crowder that general ignorance within the population was the reason for Georgia's high rate of evasion. White farmers, Mallet claimed, "employ ignorant negroes [sic.], by the year." These workers move from farm to farm each year and because "as stated above, they are very ignorant," they often forget to leave a forwarding address for their mail. Many African American farm laborers did "not receive their Questionnaires or orders to appear for physical examination." Consequently, they were classified as delinquents. Mallet made it clear that this was not necessarily exclusive to African American farm hands. "This condition also exists in several manufacturing industries" that also employed ignorant workers that did not understand the process of draft registration. Mallet's solution to the problem was to require all employers "to investigate the status of each registrant in his employ," and to help the local draft boards "in apprehending any delinquent in his employ." He also recommended that employers be required to present a list of their draft age employees to local boards. The Provost Marshal General responded by rejected Mallet's plan, claiming it was unnecessary because "the public has been, to a large extent, instrumental in the successful" enforcement of the Selective Service Law.¹⁴⁰ Investigations into draft evasion in north Georgia, however, would prove Crowder's assumption wrong.

Georgia Governor Hugh M. Dorsey also wrote a letter to Crowder explaining the problems of draft evasion in his state and endorsing a plan to combat the problem.

Although Dorsey "thoroughly concur[red] in the sentiment that all" draft evaders "should

¹⁴⁰ J.B. Mallet to E.H. Crowder, Mar. 11, 1918, and E.H. Crowder to J.B. Mallet, Mar. 14, 1918, file Ga. 17-38, box 109, States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

be rounded up and their cases finally disposed of,” his letter mostly focused on the problem of African American draft evasion. Of the 13,693 reported cases of draft evasion in the state, Dorsey asserted, “there are only about 2000 white men – over 11,000 being negroes.” In his opinion, “a very large percent” of the 2,000 white slackers were counted by mistake because they had already enlisted in some branch of the military. In terms of black slackers, “comparatively few” volunteered for military service and “many are wilful [sic.] deserters.” Yet in the next line, Dorsey claims that “a great majority” of cases of black delinquency or desertion are “due to the ignorance of the negroes.”

African Americans, he assured Crowder, were largely illiterate, known only by their white employers, and migrated from job to job. In order to make sure all black males of draft age followed the correct procedure put forth in the draft law, Dorsey fully endorsed Mallet’s plan to require employers to turn in the names and classification status of all of his employees to local draft boards.¹⁴¹ Although Dorsey wrote his letter a week after the Cherokee County raid, he focused on combating African American draft evasion and commented about apprehending white slackers only in passing. This does not necessarily suggest he was unaware or disapproved of the raid, but it does imply that the governor of Georgia did not believe – or chose not to believe – that a serious problem existed in the mountains north of Atlanta.

On June 11, 1918, Simon Fritag, head of one of Atlanta’s many draft boards, also wrote to Crowder suggesting a way to deal with deserters and delinquents. If the conditions in the rest of Georgia were similar to what Fritag observed in Atlanta, then there were “a great many men listed in Class One [those judged most fit for military service] who have either failed to answer the questionnaires, failed to respond to notice

¹⁴¹ H.M. Dorsey to E.H. Crowder, June 25, 1918, file 17-245, box 8, General File, *ibid*.

for appearance, or failed to appear for physical examination.” Because of the lack of time and resources available to local boards, Fritag proposed giving each draft board the ability to appoint an investigator to track down the missing men. Preferably, the investigator would have “a local knowledge necessary to make these investigations of value.”¹⁴²

Unlike Mallet’s plan, Crowder found Fritag’s proposal intriguing. The Provost Marshal General asked Mallet of the availability of members of the American Protective League (APL) for such tasks. Yet, as of a week after Crowder’s inquiry to Mallet, no action had been taken. Fritag believed that Crowder and Mallet did not fully understand the urgency of the problem in Georgia. He wrote to Crowder again on June 21, emphasizing the degree of delinquency and desertion in the state as well as the inexpensiveness of his plan compared to the nation-wide urban raids already in progress. To drive his point home, Fritag contended “that there are in the state of Georgia over fifteen thousand delinquents and deserters” and that his plan “would not exceed in cost to the Government \$2.00 for each man put in the service.” Despite his earlier endorsement, Crowder still did not implement Fritag’s plan. The Atlanta draft board member wrote a brief final letter to Crowder, dated July 12, asking for his recommendations to be considered once again.¹⁴³

Perhaps Crowder did not respond because reports he received from north Georgia revealed that anti-draft activity needed to be suppressed immediately. The hills and mountains of northern Georgia were considered a hotbed of anti-draft activity during the First World War. The most extreme example is Union County, near the Georgia-

¹⁴² S. Fritag to E.H. Crowder, June 11, 1918, file Ga. 17-108, *ibid*

¹⁴³ E.H. Crowder to J.B. Mallet, June 14, 1918; S. Fritag to E.H. Crowder, June 21, 1918; and S. Fritag to E.H. Crowder, July 12, 1918, *Ibid*.

Tennessee border. According to Felix Crawley, an informant for Mallet and the Governor's office, in Union County, Georgia, it was common knowledge that most of the deserters in the county hid in the mountains. To make matters worse, the sheriff and his deputies angered the community with their refusal to round up slackers unless the military compensated them.¹⁴⁴ Even then, the military competed for the sheriff's favor with the slackers themselves. Some he did not pursue because, as Crawley claimed, "they were his friends." The slackers also bribed him and his deputies with the moonshine whiskey they distilled while hiding.¹⁴⁵

A Dorsey-appointed inspector found that desertion and corruption by the local authorities were "the rule and not the exception, and that resistance" to the draft in Union County "amounts to almost armed resistance." In a letter to Crowder dated June 13, 1918, Mallet expressed his wish to nip the problem in the bud, recommending that "a detachment of soldiers be sent to Union County for the purpose of apprehending these deserters." The commanding general at Camp Gordon, according to Mallet, suggested that 500 soldiers be organized to comb the county and apprehend the alleged 50 to 75 armed slackers. Mallet and the general, however, left the final decision to dispatch the troops to Crowder. News of the situation in Union, Mallet asserted, was "spreading throughout the surrounding and connecting counties." "Unless some drastic action is taken immediately," Mallet warned, "the condition will spread throughout the State."¹⁴⁶

In an attached memorandum from one of his subordinates, it was suggested to Crowder

¹⁴⁴ According to Crowder's postwar report, "a reward of \$50 [was] payable" to state and federal police officials "for the apprehension and delivery to military control of each draft deserter who is physically qualified for military service and whose offense the local board finds to have been willful." *Second Report*, p. 200.

¹⁴⁵ "Testimony of Mr. Felix Crawley", May 30, 1918, file Ga. 17-179, box 110 States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

¹⁴⁶ J.B. Mallet to E.H. Crowder, June 13, 1918, *ibid*.

that the issue be left to the DOJ.¹⁴⁷ The situation in Union County, however, did not appear to move Crowder to act. Based on what occurred that same week in Cherokee County, the PMGO and DOJ viewed evasion backed by anti-draft rhetoric to be far more threatening.

In neighboring Cobb and Cherokee counties, families and neighbors of those at large gave refuge to slackers and their fellow fugitives. Convinced that members of an anti-draft organization existed in Cobb County and worked to convince young men in the area to avoid registration, U.S. District Attorney Hooper Alexander requested that the DOJ send an agent to investigate. An interrogation of a captured slacker named Pearce revealed that the group did in fact exist and had met on several occasions in August 1917. According to BI agent Howell Jackson's report, respected local men in rural Cherokee County above the draft age were the group's ringleaders. Pearce acknowledged that the organization met "to induce the young men...not to follow out the Conscription Laws, but to rebel against them." The group's leaders promised "to protect any of the young men who would get in trouble over this." At a meeting in August 1917, Pearce recalled, one of the organization's leaders read a letter from Tom Watson in which the politician suggested organizing the group.¹⁴⁸

It is unclear how long the anti-draft group had existed. In late June 1917, almost exactly a year before the raid, local county authorities in Cherokee were reportedly "hot on the trail of 'Slacker'" and had turned evidence of their whereabouts over to U.S. Attorney Alexander. The local newspaper warned that all records from the June 5 registration date were being combed through "and those who did not register, that were

¹⁴⁷ H.C. Kramer to E.H. Crowder, June 18, 1918, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Howell Jackson, report, Mar. 7, 1918, Old German File 17,761, roll 349, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

subject to register, will be run down.” Local authorities would then turn over evidence of evasion to the Attorney General “who will take necessary action.” The newspaper claimed that the ten presumed slackers who were still at large would, “in all probability,” be convicted.¹⁴⁹

However, none of the existing evidence suggests that any of the above mentioned actions took place. It is entirely possible, perhaps likely, that these ten slackers were part of the band of deserters the Cobb and Cherokee County communities protected in spring 1918. The second large registration date was exactly a year after the first, on June 5, 1918. As Agent Jackson’s March 7, 1918 report reveals, anti-draft meetings took place as early as August 1917. In that case, at least some of the men who Pearce said attended the August meeting with him and hid in the hills in June 1918 were most likely slackers from the June 1917 registration date.

Regardless of the number of draft evaders in the two counties and how long they had been hiding, the investigation was primarily a hunt for evidence against Watson and the anti-draft organization. The group’s plan to incite anti-draft sentiment and desertion among draft eligible men violated the Sedition Act. The group’s message was well received by at least some of the young men in both Cobb and Cherokee counties. Charlie Armstrong, pegged as one of the organization’s ringleaders, declared that his son and other deserters “were backed up in these mountains, waiting for the authorities to come.” The number of deserters in the hills, however, was quite small. An APL agent familiar with the area reported to the investigator that he had “positive information that there were some ten to twelve men [slackers] hiding out in the mountains back of old man Bud Henry’s farm.” The investigator also learned of eight to ten additional deserters, from

¹⁴⁹ “Evidence Secured Against Slackers,” *The Cherokee Advance*, June 22, 1917, p. 1.

Camp Wheeler near Macon, who had joined the local group. These men reportedly “were all armed for resistance and were engaged in making moonshine w[h]isky.”¹⁵⁰

The usual band of local authorities, APL members, and a few BI agents did not confront this small group of 18 to 22 draft evaders and deserters in Cherokee County or those involved with the Watson anti-draft group in Cobb. On July 13, Governor Dorsey’s representatives, Major Mallet, agent Jackson, a Deputy Marshal, and Camp Gordon commanders met over how best to handle the situation in Cobb and Cherokee counties. The group decided to send fifty fully equipped soldiers, along with agent Jackson, another BI agent, four revenue officers, a U.S. Deputy Marshal, and an APL operative working as a guide.¹⁵¹

The expedition set out from Marietta, Georgia in Cobb County in the early morning of June 16. The group consisted of the soldiers and officers in two trucks. Agent Jackson and another federal investigator, four revenue officers, a U.S. Deputy Marshal, and an APL operative followed in several cars. Jackson accompanied one truckload of soldiers to the home of Bud Henry, one of the several suspected ringleaders. The soldiers surrounded the house and searched the woods in the vicinity, finding no deserters. Jackson proceeded to interrogate Henry about his slacker son’s whereabouts and his own involvement in the anti-draft group. With twenty-five fully armed soldiers surrounding his home and family, Henry claimed he had not seen his son “for some time” and that the young man “was not in this state.” In terms of his involvement with Watson’s organization, Henry contended that it was his understanding that the purpose of the group was to petition “Congress through Senator Hardwick...to repeal the Selective Service

¹⁵⁰ Howell Jackson, report, Mar. 28-April 1, 1918; June 7-12, 1918; June 8-13, 1918, Old German File, 17,761, reel 349, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

¹⁵¹ Howell Jackson, report, June 8-13, 1918, *ibid*.

Law, and not for the purpose of rebelling against” the draft. Jackson “endeavored to explain” to Henry, whom the agent describes as “an ignorant mountaineer,” what would happen to his son if the young man “did not come and respond to the call.” Henry then promised Jackson that he would do all in his power to convince his son to report for duty when he saw him.¹⁵²

Agent Jackson and his posse then proceeded to the Armstrong home, where the other half of the expedition had gone. Now Charlie Armstrong had all fifty fully armed soldiers on his property. When Jackson’s party arrived, the soldiers already present had taken two of Armstrong’s young sons into custody, claiming they were within the draft age and thus obvious slackers. As he had with Henry, Jackson “appealed to these people [Armstrong and his wife], as they also are very ignorant mountaineers,” to give up their son’s whereabouts. Armstrong, the same man who in March declared that he “would kill any man that tried to make his son join the army,” assured Agent Jackson and the party of soldiers that when he saw his son again he would compel him to “answer the call of his Country.”¹⁵³

Following his interrogation of Armstrong, Jackson, five soldiers, the other BI agent and the Deputy Marshal traveled to the home of John Esque, the man Watson allegedly wrote the previous summer about starting the anti-draft group and raising money to contest the draft in court. Esque freely admitted to Jackson that he had led the August meetings in Cobb County and “had conducted them in an effort to have the conscription law repealed by Congress.” Esque disclosed that he and others read “Watson literature” – which undoubtedly means the *Jeffersonian* – arguing that the draft

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid. Armstrong quote from March 1918 in Jackson’s report of Mar. 28-Apr. 1, 1918, *ibid.*

law was unconstitutional. Esque “denied that any oath had been signed to rebel against the law.” Instead, the young men at the meetings were asked to sign a petition to Congress. Esque claimed that he quit holding meetings after the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law. Before leaving the soldiers accompanying Jackson searched Esque’s property for draft evaders, finding none.¹⁵⁴

Jackson and his posse interrogated four more men who attended the meetings. Each man, living in the same community as Henry, Armstrong, and Esque, reported that they understood the purpose of the meeting to be to rebel against conscription. Because Jackson does not go into nearly as much detail about these interrogations, it is unclear what is meant by the word “rebel.” The evidence cited in Jackson’s report does not suggest that Watson or those who led the meetings advocated armed resistance. Jackson, however, seems to have concluded that this was the case. The entire expedition then proceeded to Cherokee County in search of the young, and allegedly armed, young men whom the Cobb County group incited to resist conscription.¹⁵⁵

The expedition ended in tragedy that afternoon when one truck carrying half the party of soldiers crashed through the center of Steele’s Bridge over the Etowah River in Cherokee County. The crash left three dead, eight seriously wounded, and approximately ten with less severe injuries. Jackson, whose car was first over the bridge, did not hear the crash and was informed minutes after the crash by a local farmer on a mule. Upon returning the short distance to the crash site, Jackson reported to have seen those in the raiding party in the river working to free the dead and the injured from the wreckage.¹⁵⁶

The *Constitution*, however, reported that “soldiers and civilians lost not an instant in

¹⁵⁴ Howell Jackson, report, June 15-18, 1917, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

plunging down the embankment upon either side of the bridge” to rescue those in the wrecked truck.¹⁵⁷ The arrival of these “citizens” from “either side of the bridge” is interesting in that, as Keith points out, it is odd that locals would be lingering near the side of a road in the middle of June, one of the busiest months of the year for farm labor. Farm houses were often miles apart, meaning that to have any number of local citizens from the area in the same place at one time was perhaps not a coincidence. Keith justifiably suspects that the citizens on the scene had been hiding out near the bridge waiting for the truck to pass. It is unclear if these men had sabotaged the bridge and, if so, if they intended for such a horrific crash to occur.¹⁵⁸

Agent Jackson had his suspicions about the accidental nature of the crash. Upon inspecting the damaged bridge, Jackson noticed “that nearly every one of the big pieces of timber” supporting the bridge floor “had been hacked almost in two, some of them actually hacked in two.” A local man on the scene claimed the Union army had sawed the timbers during the Civil War fifty years earlier. In Agent Jackson’s opinion this claim was entirely untrue. Not only was it unlikely that a bridge with such damage could remain in use for over fifty years, but “there was no sign on either end of this bridge” giving its weight capacity or a speed limit for crossing. “It is entirely probable,” Jackson claimed, “that if these timbers had been cut at a recent date, that they would become aged in looks by the dust and grind falling beneath the flooring of the bridge and covering up any fresh scars.” No other part of the bridge fell “except where the truck actually went through” and it appeared to Jackson that the bridge was not “rent or thrown out of place

¹⁵⁷ “Heartrending Scenes as Men Prayed Heaven for Strength,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 17, 1918, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Keith, *Rich Man’s War*, pp. 187-188.

very badly in any other spot.” All Jackson could definitely conclude was that the accident “was absolutely unavoidable.”¹⁵⁹

The press coverage of the incident coming out of Cherokee County and Atlanta said little of the actual reasons why the party was in the area in the first place. Press coverage primarily focused on the “superhuman” effort of the men in the expedition who rescued the injured and recovered the dead as well as the courage of the wounded. The *Atlanta Constitution* touted that “if the same courage is apparent on the battle front in France, Germany can never muster an army strong enough to whip the American boys in drab.”¹⁶⁰ Perhaps such patriotic journalism was necessary to remind the local population who were the true “heroes” in this instance.

Interestingly, the week after the incident over the Etowah River, the *Constitution*, at the behest of U.S. Attorney Hooper Alexander, printed the terms of the Sabotage Act which Congress passed earlier in 1918. The Act would punish those who:

...willfully injure or attempt to injure or destroy any war material, war premises, or war utilities, with intent to injure, interfere with or obstruct the United States, or any associate nation, in preparing for or carrying on the present war; or to do any of these things where the wrongdoer has reason to believe that his act in so doing may injure, interfere with or obstruct the United States or any associate nation in so carrying on this war or preparing therefore.

The article goes on to define “war premises,” “war material,” and “war utilities” in extremely vague terms. For instance, the description of “war materials” contains not

¹⁵⁹ Howell Jackson, report, June 15-18, 1918, Old German File 17,761, roll 349, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

¹⁶⁰ “Three Soldiers Killed and Many Injured When Steele’s Bridge Over Etowah Falls,” June 17, 1918, *Atlanta Constitution*, p. 1; “Heartrending Scenes as Men Prayed Heaven for Strength,” *ibid*, June 17, 1918, p. 5; “Steele’s Bridge Falls with Truck Load of Soldiers Sunday, June 16th,” *The Cherokee Advance*, June 21, 1918, p. 1. The local Cobb County newspapers did not mention the raid but the incident received scant national attention. *The Washington Post* ran a short story with a brief description of the crash, the rescue, and a list of the deceased and seriously wounded.

only specific items such as arms, ammunition, and fuel but the blanket term “supplies” as well. Also, “war utilities” included practically every means of transportation known to man. The article lists “all railroads, electric lines, roads of any description, railroad fixtures, canals, locks, dams, wharves, piers, bridges and any other means of transportation whatever wherein war material or troops are being or may be transported within the United States.”¹⁶¹ The vagueness reveals the all-encompassing nature of the Act. This article indicates that Alexander accepted Agent Jackson’s assumption that the collapse of Steele’s Bridge was the result of sabotage. It is also safe to assume that Alexander requested the printing of the Sabotage Act’s provisions in the *Constitution*, widely circulated throughout Georgia, in order to ward off similar attempts of subversion in the future. Other than this article, none of the local newspapers in the area, including the *Constitution* and *Cherokee Advance*, either implicitly or explicitly mentioned the Cherokee County raid after it was originally reported.

Jeanette Keith cites the raid in Cobb and Cherokee counties and the conditions in Union County on two occasions, in *Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight* and her article “The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance.” In the article, Keith makes several careless mistakes, such as describing Liberty County (in southeast Georgia) as being in north Georgia and claiming the Cherokee raid took place in August 1918 and not June. Keith corrects these problems in the book, but continues to err in linking the situation in Union County with the raid into Cherokee. Bureau of Investigation records and Selective Service System records contain no evidence that federal or state authorities believed draft evasion in Union County was linked to Watson or the slackers and anti-draft organization in Cherokee and Cobb counties. The Governor’s office and PMGO knew of the

¹⁶¹ “Hooper Alexander Defines Sabotage Under Recent Act,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 23, 1918, p. A16.

conditions in both areas. Also, that Union County is over seventy miles from Cherokee and over ninety miles from Cobb implies that the anti-draft group probably did not contain members from Union. Keith does not adequately explain why federal and state authorities sent an expedition into Cobb and Cherokee and not Union. Mallet and the PMGO had plenty of evidence suggesting that conditions in Union County were more urgent than those in Cobb and Cherokee. Keith floats the possibility that the results of the Cherokee County raid held back authorities from attempting the same in Union. Yet this does not explain why the state, PMGO, and DOJ did not move on the more corrupt county with the larger number of armed slackers before going into Cobb and Cherokee.¹⁶²

This study argues that the Cobb and Cherokee raid is significant for several reasons. Under the terms of the Sedition Act, the DOJ had every right to interrogate or arrest any suspected members of an organization planning to interfere with the draft. The use of soldiers to round up deserters was also legal in terms of military law. No law on the books, not even the Sedition Act, allowed for the use of federal troops to intimidate and coerce private citizens during interrogation. Most importantly, in terms of the conduct of the raid, is that the Wilson Administration used federal troops and similar extralegal methods to intimidate those accused of anti-draft activity all over the United States. Despite what Georgia authorities viewed as a more threatening situation in Union County, the DOJ and PMGO targeted Cobb and Cherokee because of the presence of the Watson-inspired anti-draft group. The expedition, the largest Southern slacker raid in

¹⁶² Keith, *Rich Man's War*, pp. 185-189; Keith, "The Politics of Southern Draft Evasion, 1917-1918: Race, Class, and Conscription in the Rural South," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, no. 4, (March 2001), pp. 1358-1359.

terms of the amount of manpower deployed, was an operation to suppress anti-war dissent while also hunting draft evaders.

Although the presence of soldiers during interrogations in Cherokee County may seem tangential to the investigation of Tom Watson, they did not arrest any suspected deserters other than Armstrong's young sons – who turned out to be below draft age. Agent Jackson's report strongly implies that the actual purpose of the soldiers' presence was to coerce the suspected anti-draft club members into revealing information regarding Watson's role in the group's formation. Federal or state authorities did not send BI agents or troops to Watson's home to arrest or interrogate him after the 1918 raids, for the same reasons he was not pursued in 1917 or because Watson had remained politically dormant since August 1917. As the infringement upon the mountaineers' rights clearly shows, neither warrants nor due process mattered to the DOJ, PMGO, or the state of Georgia. But by infringing upon Watson's rights in a similar manner, the state and federal governments could have potentially awakened a sleeping giant.

Watson's calls to challenge the draft were not tinged with talk of armed rebellion. Although allegations of hostile action planned against authorities in these meetings were likely to be true in many cases, any charge that Watson personally appealed for armed resistance is unsupported. He pushed for peaceful resistance and believed that conscription could be defeated in the courts without resorting to bloodshed. The assumption that he called for armed resistance is likely the result of false impressions on the part of overzealous BI agents and U.S. Attorneys such as Alexander in north Georgia. Watson merely gave poor rural Southerners a specific cause around which they could rally their pre-existing anti-war and anti-capitalist sentiments. At the same time,

considering that Watson was the most widely cited inspiration for anti-draft resistance in the South, it would be natural for federal authorities to assume Watson suggested to slackers that they protect themselves in every way from the draft.

According to Keith, three factors led the Administration to send a BI agent and troops into rural counties with problems of draft evasion. The first was when local law enforcement was unwilling or unable to force men to comply with the draft law. Another factor was the support networks within anti-war rural communities that protected local slackers. Finally, she claims that state governors in the South generally hesitated to use their own forces – National Guard units – to find deserters. Although summer 1918 raids into east Tennessee and Mississippi fulfilled her criteria, the Cobb and Cherokee raid does not fit the first and third despite her contention otherwise.¹⁶³ Although in Union County the sheriff reportedly knew of the band of deserters and slackers in hiding and did nothing about it, the evidence does not support this conclusion in Cherokee. Neither the Cobb nor Cherokee County Sheriff were part of the expedition and someone may have warned the alleged saboteurs of Steele's Bridge. But these factors do not necessarily imply that Cherokee authorities in general were untrustworthy. Some states did not want to use their own troops to locate slackers, but the evidence does not suggest this was the case in Georgia. The investigation into the anti-draft group and slackers in Cherokee belonged to Agent Jackson of the Bureau of Investigation. Jackson was involved in the planning of the raid from the beginning along with the commanders of federal troops at Camp Gordon. No evidence exists suggesting that anything other than Camp Gordon soldiers were considered for the raid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 192. Keith admits that the Cleburne County, Arkansas raid, which she describes in the chapter, is the only southern raid that used National Guard troops instead of federal soldiers.

The most significant factor that sets the Cherokee County raid apart from the handful of other troop-supported raids in the rural South in 1918 is the direct link between the anti-draft organization and Tom Watson. Selective Service System records and Jackson's report suggest that the slacker situation in Union County was more urgent and dangerous than Cherokee's. The sheriff and his deputies in Union were allegedly accomplices and the number of armed men hiding in the mountains was two to three times the number in Cherokee. Yet neither federal nor state authorities sent a raiding party into Union County. It is unclear if federal or state authorities linked Watson's fight against conscription with the slackers they hunted down in east Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Keith floats the possibility of that being the case in east Tennessee, but provides no supporting evidence.¹⁶⁴

The collapse of Steele's Bridge may reveal the true extent to which some in north Georgia supported Watson's anti-draft rhetoric and opposed sending their sons to fight a war they perceived as having nothing to do with their interests. If Agent Jackson's assumption of sabotage was true, this implies a certain degree of coordination and networking within the community for the protection of the group and deserters. Regardless of who in the community was involved, there is a real possibility that someone knew the path down which the expedition headed and had the bridge sabotaged in order to impede their progress. The sabotaging of the bridge reveals the threat the anti-draft sentiment in the region posed to the implementation of the draft.

Another significant aspect of the raid was its timing. According to Agent Jackson's first report on his investigation, Alexander ordered the inquiry into the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 162.

suspected anti-draft group during the first week of March 1918.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps not coincidentally, the Sedition Act was introduced in Congress the same week. Also, from April 1 until June 7, Jackson did not file a report. In his reports from June 7 and June 8, he does not speak of gathering any further information. The agent only mentions his meeting with state, military, and Selective Service officials in Atlanta on how to proceed against the slackers and group members.¹⁶⁶ This gap suggests that Jackson had completed his investigation by April 1. No evidence exists of any activity in this case during April and all of May. Not until early June, nearly one month after the passage of the Sedition Act on May 16, did state and federal officials seriously plan a response to the anti-draft group and slacker problem in north Georgia. The sequence of events implies that during the two month gap between Agent Jackson's reports, the DOJ, PMGO, and the Governor's Office waited for the Sedition Act to become law before taking action.

The purpose of using military forces in the Cobb and Cherokee raid was to strike fear in the hearts of slackers and those involved with anti-draft organizations. Provost Marshal General Crowder's description of the effects of the urban dragnet raids can be applied to the raid in north Georgia. The man in charge of administering the draft claimed "the publicity given it [slacker raids] caused many registrants" that were delinquent or deserting "to realize the danger of that course and communicate with their boards immediately for the purpose of putting their records in proper shape."¹⁶⁷ As Howell Jackson's report made clear, this strategy worked well in intimidating the members of the anti-draft group instigated by Tom Watson. It would also work well in

¹⁶⁵ Howell Jackson, report, March 6-7, 1918, Old German File 17-761, roll 349, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

¹⁶⁶ Howell Jackson, report, June 7-12, 1918, *ibid.* Howell Jackson, report, June 8-13, 1918, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Second Report*, 202.

northern industrial cities, where alien populations were large and anti-war Socialist politicians received a surprising amount of support.

CHAPTER 3 – Restraining the Rising Reds: Aliens, Conscription, and the 1918 Red Scare

“So Socialism, mighty as it has proved to be, is mighty only in evil.” – *New York Times* editorial, December 13, 1917¹⁶⁸

“Never in the history of Germany, until military rule was declared, could such acts as this have been committed. Never in the history of any civilized country under the heavens, except in the history of Russia, could such acts have been committed.” – Senator Fall, September 6, 1918¹⁶⁹

Federal wartime repression, in whatever form it took, did not result in a major public or congressional outcry until early September 1918. On the floor of the Senate, Republican Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen from New Jersey described what he had observed in New York City the previous day (Sept. 5): “I stood on a street corner and saw soldiers armed with rifles, with bayonets fixed, hold up citizens, compel them to stand waiting while there were crowds jeering at them.” These citizens “were put in motor trucks and driven through the streets amid the jeers and scoffs of the crowd.” Their destination was one of the several armories in the city, where the soldiers held the suspects “for hours without food, practically without opportunity of communicating with their relatives and friends in order to procure the evidence demanded by the authorities.”¹⁷⁰ Even Frank Cobb, editor of the ardently pro-Administration publication the *New York World*, was taken aback. “I can think of nothing that will have a worse effect on public opinion and war sentiment in this city,” Cobb wrote the president’s secretary, “than...arresting tens of thousands of patriotic and law-abiding citizens at the

¹⁶⁸ “Socialism’s Offensive,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1917, p. 12.

¹⁶⁹ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 2nd Session, Sept. 6, 1918, p. 10070.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, *Congressional Record*, p. 10067.

point of the bayonet and driving them through the streets under armed guards to remain under arrest until they prove their innocence.”¹⁷¹

The scene Frelinghuysen recounted for his Senate colleagues and Cobb lectured the White House about was the largest slacker raid of the war. From September 3-6, 1918, in New York City and northern New Jersey, federal and municipal authorities apprehended over 60,000 men who were without their registration cards and appeared to be within the draft age. Federal authorities held the detainees for hours, sometimes days, while waiting to determine their draft status. The vast majority were released at some point. After the massive operation was completed, the Army inducted less than half of one percent of the suspected slackers. This chapter argues that the Department of Justice carried out the massive slacker raids in the New York City area, as well as those in other major industrial centers, in order to suppress coercively foreign and lower class dissent. The common denominators among the raided cities were that they were all northern industrial centers, contained large foreign-born and working-class populations, and had shown an alarming increase in support for anti-war and Socialist candidates. Not coincidentally, the “Red Scare” Palmer raids in January 1920 took place in the same cities that experienced slacker raids in 1918.

Historians of American society during the First World War rarely discuss rural slacker raids, if they mention draft evasion at all. The large-scale urban raids, however, find their way into the more complete general studies and into all that discuss wartime government repression. Yet the raids are almost always mentioned very briefly and in the context of the Army’s need for more soldiers. David Kennedy asserts that the urban dragnets, the “work or fight” order, and the expansion of the draft age “revealed the

¹⁷¹ F. Cobb to J.P. Tumulty, Sept. 5, 1918, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 49, p. 451.

growing desperateness of the military's manpower needs.”¹⁷² Robert Zieger, Robert Goldstein, and Neil Wynn tend to agree but, like Kennedy, do not address the raids in any significant detail.¹⁷³ H.C. Peterson and Gilbert Fite, in *Opponents of War*, mention raids occurring in Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Atlantic City, and New York but give scant detail on what occurred and why. They spend some time discussing the New York City raids but only in terms of the outrage several Senators expressed afterward.¹⁷⁴

Surprisingly, two of the most widely cited works that mention the urban raids do not look closely at their origins. John W. Chambers, in his definitive work on the draft, does not look closely at the slacker raids. He claims, with no supporting evidence, that Attorney General Gregory and Provost Marshal General Crowder ordered the raids as a means of directing public hysteria resulting from the German offensives in March 1918 “into legal and more constructive channels and to overcome criticism that Washington had been lax in pursuing draft avoiders.”¹⁷⁵

Joan Jensen, in her study of the American Protective League, touches on the canvass in Chicago but discusses the New York City raids extensively. Jensen argues that one motivation for the urban raids was to satisfy General John J. Pershing's desire for more men. The Commander of the American Expeditionary Force said in late June 1918 that he needed three times the number of men already in uniform in order for the AEF to be effective. Yet when Jensen researched the number of men the first draft brought into the Army she either came across a misleading piece of evidence or

¹⁷² Kennedy, *Over Here*, pp. 165-167.

¹⁷³ Robert H. Zieger. *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 63; Goldstein, *Political Repression*, pp. 111-112; Wynn, *From Progressivism and Prosperity*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁷⁴ Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, pp. 231-234.

¹⁷⁵ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, p. 213.

misinterpreted the numbers. Her source was an interview Crowder gave in January 1918 in the magazine *Outlook*. From the interview she gathered that of the nearly ten million men who registered on June 5, 1917, only 76,545 were “certified” or inducted into service. In reality, by the end of 1917 the Army had inducted approximately 516,000 men as a result of the first registration.¹⁷⁶ Assuming this was Crowder’s or *Outlook*’s mistake, it is somewhat understandable how she could have been misled, although she should have realized that the numbers were unrealistic. Jensen also posits that the clamoring of Theodore Roosevelt and Republican leaders in Congress for a firm enforcement of the draft led the DOJ to stage the raids in Chicago and elsewhere.¹⁷⁷ Selective Service and DOJ records reveal that authorities began planning and conducting slacker raids in February and March 1918.

Unlike in backcountry areas of the South where authorities searched for a few needles in one large haystack, urban slackers could hide amongst other needles. The most significant difference is that raiders in cities did not face the same level of danger from armed slackers. The anonymity of the large cities allowed those unwilling to fight to blend into their surroundings and made individual draft evaders nearly impossible to find. The federal response was the urban slacker raid. Urban raids took on a much different character than the north Georgia raid. In industrial cities with large alien populations, Bureau of Investigation agents, APL members, local police, and, at times, soldiers and sailors confronted every man they perceived was within the draft age. Often, however, those targeted for apprehension and sent to military camps were nondeclarant

¹⁷⁶ Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁷ Jensen, *Price of Vigilance*, pp. 192-213, 338-339. In her bibliography, Jensen admits that she relied heavily on Harold M. Hyman, *To Try Men’s Souls: Loyalty Tests in American History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1959) for her evidence and argument although she does not cite him in her endnotes.

aliens who were not eligible for military service but legally were required to register. The Administration and press automatically dubbed poor aliens as socialists and Bolsheviks, perceiving that anti-Wall street rhetoric – similar to what Tom Watson spouted in Georgia – inspired them to evade conscription.

In reality, however, the Socialist Party of America had difficulty making headway in the generally conservative urban communities of foreign-born immigrants before the war. Focusing on its competition with the American Federation of Labor for the hearts and minds of skilled workers in declining crafts, the SPA was ineffective in recruiting the mass of unskilled alien laborers. At the same time, while some came to the U.S. with socialist tendencies, for many aliens encountering the unfortunate consequences of capitalism raised a socialist-like political and class consciousness in many immigrant communities.¹⁷⁸ In industrial cities during the war, when the SPA and other socialist organizations scolded the Wilson Administration and Wall Street war profiteers, this budding class consciousness, among the native and foreign-born, contributed to the electoral success of the SPA.

In the autumn of 1917, many cities across the U.S. held municipal elections. The SPA, seeing this as an opportunity to spread its anti-war message, campaigned relentlessly. The results of the elections showed a fairly strong anti-war sentiment in several large and many small cities throughout the Northeast and Midwest. The perception among the press and federal officials, as this chapter will show, was that an increase in the socialist electorate was the result of foreign voters and socialist pro-German seditionaries. This, however, was not necessarily the case in many cities, large and small. For example, historian James Weinstein reveals that the socialist candidate for

¹⁷⁸ Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, pp. 104-105.

mayor in Gas City, Indiana, won the election with over 40% of the vote. At the same time, though, Gas City did not follow the expected trend in terms of foreign born voters. Only 4.9% of Gas City's population was born outside the United States. In Toledo, Ohio, Socialist candidates polled nearly 35% of the votes while the population was not quite 16% alien. In contrast, the 30% alien population in Cleveland translated to just 22% of the electorate voting for the SPA. These statistics reveal that a large foreign born population cannot, in itself, explain the SPA's strong showing. More significant was the increase in SPA votes since the 1916 elections. In Toledo, the SPA share jumped from 5.9% in 1916 to 34.8% in 1917 while in Cleveland Socialist support increased from 4.5% to 22.4%.¹⁷⁹ Unlike the municipal races in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Indiana, Weinstein was not able to give the percentage of the populations that were foreign-born in cities in New York, New Jersey, or Chicago.

Although a large immigrant population did not automatically translate to socialist success at the polls, the views expressed in the press indicate that the Wilson Administration perceived socialist electoral gains to be the result of a strong foreign element in industrial cities. In Chicago, the Democrats and Republicans ran several candidates on a fusion ticket out of the fear that anti-war Socialist candidates would win in wards with predominantly foreign-born voters and perhaps win in several where the votes were predicted to be close. Strangely, after the results were in, the SPA's relative success at the polls was characterized as an example of the city's patriotism. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "the impressive size of the majority cast by the loyal citizenship" exhibits "to the Kaiser himself, to President Wilson, and the federal administration...that Chicago is 'right.'" The SPA votes in the three wards expected to go to the Socialists

¹⁷⁹ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, pp. 174-176.

were “materially under what had been expected.”¹⁸⁰ Apparently, the expectation beforehand was that Chicago was not “right” and that anti-war socialists would rule the day. In total, SPA candidates in the Chicago elections earned 34.7% of the total vote, an increase of over 30% from the city’s last municipal election in 1915 (3.6%).¹⁸¹ This was not quite the resounding show of loyalty and patriotism the *Tribune* made the elections out to be.

Nationally, no municipal election received as much publicity as those in New York City. Considered “the slacker’s paradise” by one historian,¹⁸² a strong socialist and anarchist subculture existed within the predominantly foreign sections of the city. This subculture found a mainstream outlet, however, for its anti-war attitude in the November 1917 municipal elections. Socialist Mayoral candidate and Russian immigrant Morris Hillquit ran on a strictly anti-war platform. In September Hillquit announced he would adhere to the St. Louis Resolution:

“We are for peace. We are unalterably opposed to the killing of our manhood and the draining of our resources in a bewildering pursuit of an incomprehensible ‘democracy’ ...a pursuit which begins by suppressing the freedom of speech and press and public assemblage, and by stifling legitimate political criticism.”¹⁸³

Hillquit polled 138,793 votes, good for third. Although his total was less than half that of the anti-war Democratic candidate, John Hylan, Hillquit finished very closely behind the incumbent and staunchly pro-war Republican John Mitchell.¹⁸⁴ Over two-thirds of New York City voters (68.5%) voted for a candidate who opposed U.S.

¹⁸⁰ “City Rebukes Disloyalty,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 175.

¹⁸² Jensen, *Price of Vigilance*, p. 196.

¹⁸³ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, p. 151.

¹⁸⁴ “A Tammany Sweep,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1917, p. 1.

involvement in the war.¹⁸⁵ The largely immigrant and working-class parts of the city contained the largest numbers of Hillquit voters and his base of support.¹⁸⁶ After the election, Hylan proclaimed his loyalty to the Administration. Anti-war sentiment, though, was alive and well in New York City. During the campaign, the *New York Times* took every opportunity to run Hillquit's name, but not Hylan's, through the mud. The newspaper ran headlines dubbing Hillquit as "The Kaiser's Servant," and "Democracy's Foe," while claiming that a Hillquit peace was a "German Peace." The *Times* reported that one disgruntled former Socialist predicted that those who would vote for Hillquit would "Be Made Up of Cowards, Pro-Germans, and Fools."¹⁸⁷ In one year's time, the Socialist vote in the city nearly quadrupled, from 4.5% in the 1916 municipal elections to 21.7% of the total vote in November 1917.¹⁸⁸

The White House and the Department of Justice, along with the leaders and press of other large cities, paid close attention to the election. Wilson sent his long-time personal secretary Joseph Tumulty to New York to gauge the city's support for Hillquit and the war. The press report of his visit claimed that the Administration had "followed a strictly neutral attitude" in the campaign. Going into the campaign, however, "there [was] a well-defined fear in Washington that the Socialist vote will be dangerously large."¹⁸⁹ Soon after Tumulty returned to Washington, the DOJ began to keep close tabs on the anti-war rhetoric in Hillquit's speeches. Department stenographers took down Hillquit's speech of October 31 in order to "scrutinize...with great care the utterances of

¹⁸⁵ James Weinstein, "Anti-War Sentiment and the Socialist Party, 1917-1918," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 74, no. 2 (June 1959), p. 229.

¹⁸⁶ Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, p. 105.

¹⁸⁷ "Call Morris Hillquit the Kaiser's Servant," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1917, p. 6. "Accuse Hillquit as Democracy's Foe," *ibid*, Oct. 29, 1917, p. 4. "A German Peace and Confiscation," *ibid*, Nov. 6, 1917, p. 12. "Hillquit Vote Analyzed," *ibid*, Nov. 4, 1917.

¹⁸⁸ Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism*, p. 175.

¹⁸⁹ "Tumulty Comes Here to Study City Campaign," *New York Times*, Oct. 27, 1917.

the Socialist candidate and his supporters” to ensure no party violated the Espionage Act while pandering for votes.¹⁹⁰ The next day, the New York State Chamber of Commerce unanimously adopted a resolution asking the DOJ to arrest and prosecute Hillquit for giving disloyal, anti-war addresses.¹⁹¹ Wilson agreed that Hillquit deserved to be imprisoned for his remarks but decided that arresting the Socialist would “only be assisting [him] by making him a martyr.”¹⁹²

Wilson’s interest in the New York municipal race reveals that his Administration viewed immigrant population centers as particularly disloyal and seditious. The president even felt uncomfortable when visiting the city on May 17, 1918. Colonel Edward House, Wilson’s most trusted advisor, wrote in his diary that Wilson “evidently feels he is in hostile territory” when in New York City. House asserts that he “tried to get [Wilson] to differentiate between the great mass of people” and the disloyal elements of the city but to no avail.¹⁹³

Urban newspapers from across the country shared this same dissatisfaction over the New York City election results. *The Boston Post* declared that the election of the then anti-war Hyman was “far less deplorable than the election of Hillquit would have been.” *The Hartford Courant* described the election results as a “Setback for Good Government.” The *Des Moines Register* called the election a victory for the Kaiser whose satisfaction “will be due to the large...vote cast the Socialist candidate.” From St. Louis, *The Globe-Democrat* suspected that Hillquit “no doubt drew to himself virtually all the disloyal elements of the city. The size of his vote, upon such an issue, is a

¹⁹⁰ “Government Keeps Tabs on Hillquit,” *ibid*, Nov. 1, 1917, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹¹ “Hillquit is Named as a Seditious,” *ibid*, Nov. 2, 1917, p. 3.

¹⁹² Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism*, p. 151.

¹⁹³ Diary of Edward Mandell House, May 17, 1918, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 48, p. 50.

disgrace to the first city in the country.” Articles also appeared in newspapers in Los Angeles, Baltimore, Providence, New Haven, Connecticut, and Springfield, Massachusetts condemning the number of Socialist votes and, to a lesser extent, the election of Hylan.¹⁹⁴

The *Chicago Tribune* claimed that the Chicago and New York elections “indicated that there is an anti-American element in the composition of large American cities.” The press often stated that the only factor that saved Chicago and New York from the degradations of socialism was the unexpectedly large turnout of loyal voters who cast their ballots against pro-Germanism. Results in Chicago and elsewhere indicated that “the elements of dissent and protest must be guarded against.” Socialist appeals to “diseased and disordered minds” revealed that socialism and disloyalty were “element[s] which need[ed] watching and handling.”¹⁹⁵

In the days immediately following the municipal elections, the Bolsheviks in Russia overthrew the Provisional Government, installing the world’s first radical socialist government. Lenin’s calls for an immediate end to the war, chastisement of alleged war profiteers, and claims that the belligerent governments sought only money and empire sounded eerily similar to rhetoric spouting from the mouths of anti-war rabble-rousers across the U.S. The urban press began linking aliens, socialism, and anti-war groups to Bolshevism in the ensuing days and weeks. The *Chicago Tribune* wasted no time in warning against the danger of socialists in a new context: as the “American Bolshevik.” American Bolsheviks called for a proletarian revolution and “urged the American people

¹⁹⁴ Quotes taken from “Other Cities Do No Like New York Election Results,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1917, p. 4.

¹⁹⁵ “The Elections,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1917, p. 6.

to become Bolsheviki.”¹⁹⁶ It was also the hypocritical American Bolsheviki that “wants us to make peace with the rich man’s system of Germany”¹⁹⁷ In Chicago, a mysterious 16 year-old referred to only as “the Girl in Red,” who allegedly knew Lenin as a child, claimed that he was “an I.W.W., as is every member of his cabinet.” Leon Trotsky, whom she also pegged as a Wobbly, “has exhorted Chicago I.W.W. audiences and a couple years ago held a great meeting.”¹⁹⁸

Despite the city’s massive eastern European-born population and the perception that it suffered from widespread radicalism, the *New York Times* did not exhibit the same knee-jerk reaction to the Revolution. On November 9, the newspaper ran an article about Trotsky’s three-month-long stay in New York City. Although there is no mention of him being a Wobbly, the article claims that Trotsky was “welcomed not only by the most radical faction of Russian Socialists, but by the German Socialists too.” “Leaders of radicalism on the east side and in Harlem contributed furniture” to Trotsky’s Bronx apartment. While in the city, Trotsky allegedly “wrote many articles for the *Vorwärts*, the Jewish Socialist paper,” and was chief editor of the Russian Socialists’ major publication.¹⁹⁹ In December, the *Times* ran an editorial lambasting the role socialism played in putting democracy “on the defensive” and autocracy “on the offensive” in Europe. The kind of socialism the editorial spoke of was that “found in Russia and the United States.” So far “it has been powerless to change the steady and resolved course”

¹⁹⁶ “Our Own Brand of Bolsheviki Demand Peace!” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 26, 1917, p. 13.

¹⁹⁷ “A Rich Man’s War,” *ibid*, Nov. 8, 1917, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ “Lenine Cabinet Ruled by I.W.W., Says ‘Girl in Red,’” *ibid*, Nov. 13, 1917, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ “Trotsky in Exile Lived in Bronx,” *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1917, p. 2.

of the U.S., “but in Russia it has gained the ascendant, and there it has been an infinite cause of disaster to liberty.”²⁰⁰

Chicago was also the home of the national headquarters of both the SPA and IWW, perhaps adding to the *Tribune*’s hysterical reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution. Although 166 Wobblies had been rounded up nationwide and imprisoned in the Cook County jail, the *Tribune* published an article claiming that the Wobblies were planning to “battleship,” which allegedly was “their vernacular for ‘start something.’” This vague threat, the result of a captured love letter between a Wobbly prisoner and the mysterious – perhaps fictional – “Girl in Red,” led federal authorities to disperse the Wobblies in several prisons in close range to Chicago.²⁰¹ Apparently, Wobblies, the bedfellows of Russian Bolshevism, posed a terrifying threat to law and order even while locked up in federal prison.

The message the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* were trying to send was that Bolshevism had thrived in both cities for some time. For the newspapers, the alleged link between socialists and the Bolshevik Revolution provided them with a means of warning their readers of the possible dangers the electoral success of Socialist candidates and large alien populations posed.

Socialists in Chicago and New York City exacerbated the problem in late November and early December. At a mass meeting organized by the People’s Council of America for Democracy and Peace in Chicago on November 26, socialists, “many of Russian extraction,” pledged their support for the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin’s calls for an immediate end to the war. According to Socialist Louis Engdahl, the crowd

²⁰⁰ “Socialism’s Offensive,” *ibid*, Dec. 13, 1917, p. 12.

²⁰¹ “I.W.W. Rushed from Jail to Prevent Riot,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1917, p. 1.

“looked like a gathering of Bolsheviki.” During the course of the meeting, these Bolsheviki-types poked fun at President Wilson, denigrated the “capitalist class,” and demanded peace. The reporter on the scene interpreted the meeting’s message as being a warning to the federal government “to get peace at once or take the consequences.”²⁰² The nature of the “consequences” was left open to interpretation. The open support for the Bolshevik Revolution at the meeting, however, implied to readers that a similar type of uprising could be imminent in Chicago.

In New York City on December 3 “Anarchists, Socialists, I.W.W.s, and extreme left wing radicals” met “to celebrate the triumph of their cause in Petrograd.” Like the Chicago meeting, the speakers “hissed at the name of President Wilson” and “hailed the approach of social revolution and the destruction of the existing order of things.” Unlike the description of the Chicago rally, the New York account describes in detail the “demonstration of the Bolsheviki in action.” Some at the rally allegedly shouted “‘Down with Trotsky and Lenine [sic.]’ because they did not consider those Russian extremists to be extreme enough to keep pace with their conception of social revolution.” One “long-haired Bolshevik” wearing “shabby clothes,” overcome by a “frenzy of music,” stumbled through the crowd “with a bottle of whiskey in his hands” while his comrades danced.²⁰³ The drunken and unkempt idler who denounced order and fomented chaos did not, in any sense, represent the majority of war opponents or urban immigrants. Yet those fitting a similar description to that of the drunken Bolshevik could be found on street corners in

²⁰² “Our Own Brand of Bolsheviki Demand Peace!” *ibid*, Nov. 26, 1917, p. 13.

²⁰³ “City’s Bolsheviki Disown All Order,” *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1917, p. 6.

Chicago, New York, or any other major industrial center.²⁰⁴ Thus, the press presented the caricature as the common radical.

The Provost Marshal General's Office and the DOJ also acted differently toward aliens, radicals, and urban centers after the Bolshevik Revolution. In spring 1918 in Washington, the PMGO and the DOJ were contemplating ways to deal with urban draft evasion and socialism. For the most part this was not a joint process, as each had its own agenda. Even though Crowder and his subordinates viewed draft evaders and anti-war agitators as undesirable elements of society, Selective Service records suggest that they viewed evasion as more of a military manpower issue than a social or law enforcement problem. The PMGO rarely cited the suppression of socialism or sedition as a reason for rounding up slackers. On the other hand, the BI's actions during the urban raids indicate that Attorney General Gregory and BI Chief A. Bruce Bielaski viewed their task to be the same as it had been during the first months of the war: to silence or capture as many potential radicals and converts as possible.

In March 1918 the PMGO began formulating its own plans to round up slackers in cities and nationwide. In a March 6, 1918 telegram to all governors, Crowder ordered that a "vigorous campaign to round up, apprehend, and turn over to the military authorities all deserters" commence as soon as possible. Although he was unclear on how this was supposed to be done, Crowder's proposal revolved around the inability of local boards to investigate, report on, and induct individual delinquents on their own and

²⁰⁴ Weinstein, "Anti-War Sentiment and the Socialist Party," p. 220.

in a timely fashion.²⁰⁵ What he apparently did not know was that the DOJ had already begun such a campaign.

In April, Crowder suggested another plan: a “Nation-wide effort” to “apprehend and deliver to the military authorities all such registrants who...are found by local selection boards to be wilful [sic.] deserters” between the first and fifteenth of May. Crowder did not mention the previous activities of the DOJ or APL in conducting city-by-city raids, which began in early March. To the detriment of the plan, the number of men that such a campaign would corral was unclear.²⁰⁶ Crowder, estimating that over 50,000 had failed to file registration questionnaires, wondered whether facilities would “be available at such camps for the proper reception of such men.” The General Staff, though, could not promise that training camps could hold those brought in without a solid estimate from Crowder of how many slackers his two week canvass would find.²⁰⁷ The matter was dropped entirely.

In May, Major Conkling, Chief of the PMGO’s Classification Division, recommended a national “Show Your Card Week.” The general slacker raid process the DOJ employed, Conkling claimed, was inefficient. BI agents, APL members, and local police were less likely to know where to find slackers than men of a similar class. Those with the most to gain from the apprehension of slackers were the other men comprising Class I. “Why not call upon them as their first duty” before reporting to camp “to join in this round up of delinquents.” Using his classification card as “his badge,” the new inductee would “demand at any time and place,” and of any man seemingly within the

²⁰⁵ E.H. Crowder to All Governors, Mar. 6, 1918, file 17-146, box 7, General File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

²⁰⁶ E.H. Crowder to Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, April 11, 1918, file 17-202, box 8, *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ L. Wahl to U.S. Army Chief of Staff, April 17, 1918, *ibid.*

draft age, “that his card be exhibited.”²⁰⁸ Conkling’s plan was never put into practice, perhaps because it relied upon the class of people that the federal government believed needed to be pacified.

Despite the PMGO’s best efforts, the DOJ almost exclusively decided when, where, and how slacker raids would take place. The first urban raid occurred in Pittsburgh on March 2, 1918, without the prior knowledge of the PMGO. Knowing that Socialists had assisted young men in evading draft registration in the city, Pittsburgh’s Public Safety Director requested a citywide manhunt be undertaken. BI agents, municipal police, federal troops, and members of the APL pursued every man in the city who appeared to be within the draft age. Local authorities announced that the raid’s purpose was to bring slackers into the army. Yet of the 503 alleged slackers arrested (out of 903 total arrests), none were sent directly to basic training camps. Most remained in police custody for weeks, being subject to the taunts and abuse of local officers. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of those apprehended were “transient day laborers and industrial workers, part of the horde drawn to Pittsburgh’s booming wartime job market.”²⁰⁹

In Cleveland, where future American Communist Party leader C.E. Ruthenberg received a significant number of mayoral votes in the November 1917 election,²¹⁰ the DOJ and APL were less than subtle in enforcing the Selective Service Law as a means of suppressing socialism. Instead of employing the dragnet technique they went straight to what they believed to be the source. On June 30th and July 3rd APL men interrupted local

²⁰⁸ Conkling to E.H. Crowder, May 16, 1918, file 17-912, box 11, *ibid*.

²⁰⁹ Charles H. McCormick. *Seeing Reds: Federal Surveillance of Radicals in the Pittsburgh Mill District, 1917-1921* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1997), pp. 58, 75-76.

²¹⁰ Weinstein, “Anti-War Sentiment and the Socialist Party,” p. 230.

SPA meetings and roughed up party members under the pretext of a slacker raid. The raid was not conducted in conjunction with the PMGO or local draft boards. The SPA, having been assured “that these activities of the A.P.L. [were] not directed against [them] as an organization,” filed a passive complaint to the local DOJ representative. Protesting the APL tearing off party members’ SPA buttons as well as the League’s “coarse language” and use of physical force, the SPA suggested “that a gentlemanly treatment of the people attending our meetings” would enhance the “thoroughness and efficiency” of the APL’s slacker hunts.²¹¹ The Cleveland SPA’s compliant response to the raids reveals the level of apprehension many in their ranks felt about openly challenging the federal government and their proxies at this point in the war.

The DOJ and APL, however, were not done suppressing socialists in the name of the Draft Law in Cleveland. On August 18, approximately fifty BI agents and League members descended upon the Cuyahoga County Socialist Party’s annual picnic. All the men were rounded up, “irrespective of age, and forced...to answer a list of questions” about their draft status, their country of origin, and if they were socialists. The party leaders in attendance “could not help but think” that the agents and Leaguers “wanted to precipitate a riot.”²¹² The U.S. District Attorney, after hearing detailed testimony from witnesses – which seem to have been APL members because no statements were taken from the socialists – believed that any violence that was perpetrated was done by the socialists and not the APL or BI agents. To add insult to injury, the DA also believed the Cleveland APL Chief’s statement that the picnic was “never raided” but “investigated...in a quiet and orderly manner, and not with ‘rough tactics.’” The

²¹¹ Local Cleveland Socialist Party to B. Morton, July 9, 1918, file 186,751, box 2186, Straight Numerical File, Central Files, Records of the Department of Justice (College Park, MD).

²¹² W.F. Bronatrupe to T.W. Gregory, Sept. 6, 1918, *ibid*.

Cleveland SPA was rightly “subject to frequent investigations, particularly their meetings.” The DA concluded that because of the adoption of the St. Louis Resolution in April 1917, SPA members “would be naturally, among the first men to violate the Selective Service Law.”²¹³

Although the PMGO was not informed ahead of time of the raids in Pittsburgh and Cleveland, Crowder’s office also had shown a strong disposition against urban aliens in the months leading to the huge Chicago slacker raid, which took place from July 11 to July 13. Beginning in January, Russian immigrants placed in Class I by Cook County Local Board No. 44, whose district was 90% foreign-born, were failing to comply with the board’s orders to report for physical examinations and to return questionnaires. The board’s problems were due to the work of A. Volkoff, the Russian Consul in Chicago under the ousted Russian Provisional Government. On behalf of thousands of nondeclarant Russian immigrants who had been placed in Class I, Volkoff argued to the board that these men were not eligible for military service. The nondeclarant men Volkoff represented won their cases, leading the Adjutant General of Illinois, Local Board No. 44, and the PMGO to worry that a dangerous precedent had been set. In response, Crowder wrote to the Adjutant General of Illinois, Frank S. Dickson, on March 2 asserting that “vigorous action” needed to be taken to round up and deliver “wilful [sic.] deserters” to “the nearest military authorities.” The “result of each action” would be that “the majority of delinquents will promptly comply with orders and those of the local board.”²¹⁴

²¹³ U.S. District Attorney to T.W. Gregory, Sept. 26, 1918, *ibid*.

²¹⁴ A. Volkoff to Adjutant General of Wisconsin, Jan. 19, 1918; J. Bernheim to F.S. Dickson, Mar. 11, 1918; Smith to A. Volkoff, Mar. 18, 1918; Crowder to F.S. Dickson, Mar. 2, 1918, file IL 17-74, box 118, States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

Four months after Crowder's suggestion of a raid to Dickson, however, the BI and APL, with the help of federal troops, began its citywide canvass for slackers without informing the PMGO. On the first day, July 11, BI agents locked the gates of Weeghman Park – later Wrigley Field – until the baseball game was over. Federal and APL operatives waited at the gates. As the crowd filed out, "those who seemed to be of draft age were held up." Five hundred of those detained did not have any or the correct draft registration or classification cards. After also searching theaters, docks, and railway stations, authorities estimated that the first day's round up resulted in more than 5,000 apprehensions. By midnight, however, all but fifty had been released. The raid, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, was "a search for slackers and unregistered aliens."²¹⁵ The search ended on July 13, with over 16,000 having been detained, 1,137 having been found delinquent, and only 250 turned over to military authorities for service.²¹⁶ The number of men sent to military camps differs in Crowder's postwar report on the draft, where he claims that authorities shipped 700 men to training camps as a result of the Chicago raids.²¹⁷

Despite his calls for action against slackers and aliens in March, the PMGO seems to have had very little involvement with the urban raids. No evidence exists linking the Volkoff scandal with the July raids, although Local Board No. 44's district undoubtedly received a great deal of attention. Ignorant of the fact that the raid had occurred, Crowder wrote to Dickson on July 13 requesting a report of the status of a few delinquents from a Chicago draft board. Dickson replied on July 15 that action had been taken against those

²¹⁵ "U.S. Combs City for Slackers; Releases Many," *Chicago Tribune*, July 12, 1918, pp. 1-2.

²¹⁶ "1,137 Men Held out of 10,000 in Draft Raid," *ibid*, July 13, 1918, pp. 1-2; "Slackers' Net Draws Again; 1,135 Detained," *ibid*, July 14, 1918, p. 1.

²¹⁷ *Second Report*, pp. 201-202.

slackers, advising – as if Crowder were unaware – “that a big drive has been going on in Chicago for the last three days to round up all slackers and deserters.”²¹⁸

The day before receiving Dickson’s reply Crowder sent a telegram to his state executives asking for information on the slacker situation in the state. The slacker raids that he knew had occurred seemed to be “individual efforts to dispose of slackers or deserters, whose whereabouts are known.” Here he was referring to instances where individuals, mobs, and vigilante organizations conducted their own small-scale raids, mostly in small towns. Yet others “appear to be conducted and well planned campaigns to remedy an existing evil on a wholesale basis.” Perhaps the most telling aspect of the telegram, in terms of Crowder’s relative ignorance of the raids, is his plea for information from state draft officials.

“It is particularly requested, therefore, that draft executives in all States keep themselves informed, through the Local Boards, of these movements and advise this office promptly of details, both as to the methods followed and results obtained. This is a question of vital and unusual interest to this office, and it is hoped that draft executives will make a point to keep in close touch with all such activities in their respective states.”²¹⁹

Crowder’s lack of insight reveals that the task of planning and implementing the raids belonged solely to Attorney General Gregory’s Justice Department. It is unclear why the DOJ would have excluded the PMGO from its planning, but the dispute over the use of the APL between McAdoo and Gregory may give some indication. The different departments within the Wilson Administration, not unlike those in other administrations past or present, were constantly in competition with each other over funding, presidential favor, and public prestige. Gregory’s quarrel with McAdoo over the APL is a classic

²¹⁸ E.H. Crowder to F.S. Dickson, July 13, 1918; F.S. Dickson to E.H. Crowder, July 15, 1918, file IL 17-262, box 118, States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

²¹⁹ Crowder to Draft Executives of All States, July 17, 1918, file 17-367, box 9, General File, Selective Service Records (College Park, MD).

example of two department heads fighting over resources (access to manpower) and prestige (permission to protect the U.S. against radicals and disloyalty). The fact that the DOJ did not consult with the PMGO – until planning for the New York City raids in August 1918 – implies a similar dynamic. In short, the lack of coordination between the PMGO and DOJ reveals that the departments within the Wilson Administration did not necessarily have the same objectives or opinions on how to handle the pressures of war mobilization. Yet the DOJ could not have taken the lead in the suppression of radicalism, sedition, and draft evasion without the president's authorization. The role the DOJ played in suppressing dissent – and, in turn, draft evasion - was more of a reflection of Wilson's will than Gregory's.

The DOJ had been allowed to actively participate in the suppression of the western copper and lumber strikes, raid IWW and SPA offices, spy on suspected war opponents and the foreign-born, subsidize the unlawful activities of the APL, and prepare the bills that would become the Espionage and Sedition acts. The same tactics used against radicals throughout the war were also applied to the urban slacker raids of 1918. The Bureau of Investigation and APL had spent the entire war investigating and suppressing radicals and aliens. That the BI and APL – without the involvement of draft officials – controlled the methods in which the raids were conducted indicates that slackers were not their only targets. The combined slacker raids in New York City and northern New Jersey, more than any other example of urban slacker canvassing, best exemplify the DOJ's newest method of combating radicalism and anti-war dissent.

The perception of the types of people who followed the IWW, SPA, and other radical ideologies mirrored realistic and general characteristics of those who typically

evaded conscription. John W. Chambers asserts that the vast majority of slackers “were poorer men: agricultural and industrial laborers...alienated from the larger society or the national war effort because of geographical location or their economic, ethnic, or racial status.”²²⁰ Some sections of New York, such as East Harlem, were filled with such people. Of the roughly 120,000 living in East Harlem in 1918, only four percent (4,800) were “native white of native parentage” and only 2 percent were “Negroes or mulattos.” Over half of the 60,000 first generation immigrants in East Harlem were Jews from Russia, Poland, or Romania.²²¹

Although African Americans had yet to turn Harlem into a cultural center of their own, evidence of their northern migration was becoming increasingly evident. William Bernard, a small business owner in New York City, wrote to Crowder explaining that “The increase in the colored population...is perceptible.” “Many of the males,” Bernard assumed, “have dodged conscription, or even failed to register.”²²² Bernard was not the only person to tie ethnic minorities in New York City to draft evasion. Explaining the existing slacker conditions in New York in July 1918, Major W. D. Scholle reported that three kinds of slackers infested the city. “Part of these,” he explains, “are negroes coming up” from the South “with the idea of losing themselves in the metropolis.” Another consisted of “aliens, friendly, neutral, and enemy, who either through ignorance of the language or lack of appreciation of their responsibilities” have not fulfilled their obligation to register or report for duty. The third type of slacker was an American

²²⁰ Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 211-212.

²²¹ Polenberg, *Fighting Faiths*, pp. 23-25.

²²² W. Bernard to Crowder, Aug. 3, 1918, file NY 17-981, box 207, States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

citizen of either native or foreign birth.²²³ It is unclear what proportion of the total of supposed slackers that each group composed.

Scholle's contention that aliens were their own brand of slacker indicatives the ignorance federal authorities had about the draft status of aliens. Scholle's opinion, along with the New York City raids, is also characteristic of the effectiveness of wartime federal propaganda against aliens and radicals as well as the general public's enduring distrust or "freeloading" immigrants. Raiders assumed that aliens were subject to the draft or, at the very least, were in need of some rough treatment. The result of this same ignorance and attitude among those who took part in the urban slacker raids was that thousands of nondeclarant and enemy aliens – exempt from military service – were apprehended and taken to detention centers, held in jail for indiscriminate amounts of time, or sent directly to military camps. As will be shown, during the New York City raids a large proportion of men detained were poor aliens.

In a rare sign of inter-departmental cooperation, BI Chief Bielaski informed Crowder in mid-August that the DOJ wished to stage a slacker raid in New York City by the end of the month. Crowder immediately sent a telegram to Martin Conboy, Director of the Draft for New York City, requesting information on the ability of the local boards to assist the BI in a raid.²²⁴ Conboy responded that his office agreed to cooperate with the DOJ, but what the department asked of the local boards was impractical. Charles A. DeWoody, Department Chief of the Justice Department in New York, requested that the records of every man registered in all of New York City be pooled in one central location. This, Conboy said, was not possible because local boards were "preparing for

²²³ W.D. Scholle to Maj. Gen. Bell, July 4, 1918, file 17-910, box 11, General File, *ibid*.

²²⁴ E.H. Crowder/Jones to M. Conboy, Aug. 19, 1918, file NY 17-996, box 207, States File, *ibid*.

mobilization and reclassification and cannot spare the records from the office.”²²⁵

Neither Crowder nor Bielaski heeded Conboy’s objections. The consequence during the raid was gross overcrowding in detention centers as suspected slackers waited for their overwhelmed local boards to send evidence that they had complied with the draft law. BI agents and APL members kept thousands overnight, some for days, while they waited for the suspects’ registration and classification information.

The formal instructions DeWoody issued for the raid would cause just as many problems as the lack of coordination with local draft boards. The raid would begin on the morning of September 3 and continue indefinitely or until the DOJ ordered a discontinuance. Including northern New Jersey, the number of men Crowder and Bielaski planned to deploy was twice the number of slackers apprehended in the Chicago raid. BI agents, APL operatives, local police, and military personnel – 20,000 in all – would participate in the canvass. In bold capital letters, DeWoody issued the most important order of the raid:

“NO MAN WITHIN THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF
NEW YORK SHALL AVOID BEING REQUESTED TO SHOW
HIS RESIGNATION CERTIFICATE AND BY AFFIRMATIVE
EVIDENCE ESTABLISH HIS AGE AND HIS STATUS UNDER
THE SELECTIVE SERVICE ACT.”

In other words, check the status of *every* man in the city. Further into the “General Instructions” and also the “Instructions to Operatives”, DeWoody contradicted himself when telling operatives to stop and question only those “persons of apparent military age.” This was not the only directive that the raiders disregarded or caused confusion. DeWoody’s instructions to military personnel – to assist in transporting the accused to

²²⁵ M. Conboy to E.H. Crowder, Aug. 27, 1918, *ibid*.

detention centers and to stand guard there – were either blatantly ignored or were not relayed to the soldiers and sailors.²²⁶

On September 3, the *New York Times* warned the city that the raids would commence that morning. The article carried more detail than the instructions DeWoody issued five days earlier. The *Times* informed its readers of everything from the types of places raiders would search (theaters, hotels, saloons, etc) to the number of vehicles ready to transport delinquents to detention centers (650).²²⁷ The article, printed on page eight, was too little too late for the young working-class men most likely to be stopped. In fact, it is likely that most of the men who authorities would apprehend that day could not read or speak English, let alone have had the opportunity to read the newspaper before the beginning of the raids at 7 a.m. The *Times* was a warning to white middle-class men to remember their registration and classification cards and perhaps steer them away from certain businesses and parts of town.

On the first day of the raid, BI agents, APL operatives, and detachments of soldiers and sailors seized upwards of 20,000 men in the city and roughly 12,000 in northern New Jersey. After three days of raids, Woody announced the total number of men temporarily detained or arrested to be 60,187. Of these, the authorities referred roughly 15,000 to their local boards for further investigation. Reportedly, about 1,500 more “were found to be seriously delinquent” and sent to camps as deserters. Most of those detained were released after sending home for their proof of registration or exemption. This proved complicated for men from out of town, those mistaken to be

²²⁶ General Instructions (A) and Instructions to Operatives (B), Aug. 29, 1918, American Protective League, Correspondence with Field Offices, box 1, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

²²⁷ “Start Drive Today for Draft Slackers,” *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 1918, p. 8.

within the draft age who, naturally, had no registration or classification cards,²²⁸ and nondeclarant aliens.

The story of one of the over 60,000 men apprehended reveals a great deal about whom the raiders detained and how they treated their suspects. Henry Mathews, a white native-born twenty-four year old poultry farmer and car salesman from Oradell, New Jersey, registered at his local board in nearby Ridgewood and received his registration card. Although he supported his unemployed father, mother, and younger sister, Mathews did not file an exemption claim. His notice to report for physical examination, however, did not reach him because the Ridgewood board had the wrong address in their records. By chance his sister happened to see a newspaper that included his name in the list of men ordered to appear that day for physical examination. Mathews rushed to Ridgewood, only to fail his exam on account of a severe hernia. Despite his attempt to correct the problem with his address, it remained unchanged in the board's files.²²⁹

On the morning of September 3 Mathews left for work in Patterson, New Jersey, without the classification card that the overworked or negligent Ridgewood board had mailed to the incorrect address. That afternoon raiders forcefully removed Mathews from his vehicle.²³⁰ "From then on," Mathews said, "I lost my identity and became a prisoner in the Patterson Armory." Writing his mother three days later from Camp Dix in New Jersey, Mathews railed that "the biggest joke of the season is the so-called 'Department of Justice.' I do not believe they know the meaning of the word justice." In the armory, Mathews found himself surrounded by thousands of poor immigrants and blacks: "Only

²²⁸ "Seize 20,000 Here in Slacker Search," Sept. 4, 1918, *ibid.*, p. 1. "60,187 Men Taken in Slacker Raids," Sept. 8, 1918, *ibid.*, p. 9.

²²⁹ E.C. Stillwell to J.L. O'Brian, Sept. 7, 1918, Series 4, file 3735, reel 353, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Library of Congress (Washington, DC).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

one other man in the crowd detained has a collar and tie. Very few spoke English and negroes and whites were mixed together.”²³¹

Mathews soon found himself in Camp Dix – a cantonment camp in northern New Jersey – because the Ridgewood board claimed he had missed a second physical examination that he had been notified about by mail. Classifying him as a delinquent in Class I – the classification from which men were drafted – the local board sent Mathews to Camp Dix for induction. In a letter to the president’s Secretary, Joseph Tumulty, Mathews’s sister, V.J. Mathews, described the scene at the military camp as similar to the ethnic and class make up her brother noticed in the Patterson Armory: “Out of the three hundred odd men sent to Dix my brother and about three others are the only American born men. The majority of them are foreigners, many of them hardly speaking or understanding English.” The sight of her brother, “the finest type of young American manhood,” lined up among a large number of “men of the lowest conceivable type” caused Mathew’s sister and his mother much distress.²³² If Ms. Mathews’s estimate of “three hundred odd men” at Camp Dix is correct, then she personally saw roughly one-fifth of the total men sent to military camp from the raid. This suggests that at least a large proportion of the total number of men sent to camp were aliens from ethnically diverse areas such as Patterson.

The *New York Times* presented a much different perspective of Camp Dix. The men sent to camp were dubbed “prisoners” despite the fact that only 8% were found to be willful deserters. Yet the majority of prisoners “seemed highly pleased...over the prospect of getting in the army.” The *Times* hid the dissatisfaction that most detainees

²³¹ H.R. Mathews to Mother, Sept. 7, 1918, *ibid*.

²³² V.J. Mathews to J.P. Tumulty, Sept. 8, 1918, *ibid*.

expressed about their internment. Even willful slackers were pleased. A number reportedly admitted they had grown “tired of the apprehension of capture and that their arrival” at Camp Dix was “a real relief.”²³³

Along with the ethnic and class profiling, the abuses the raiders perpetrated against their suspects reveal the extent to which the tensions of ethnic and class conflict – combined with the stresses of a war and a red scare – colored perceptions of justice. Ms. Mathews asked a soldier in Patterson whom she had seen apprehending a suspected slacker “why it was necessary to handle the men in such a rough manner.” The soldier replied, “Oh they’re a rough bunch and they will be treated rough where they are going.” The soldier was under the impression that the army was sending every man apprehended in the raid immediately to the front line in France. In another instance, Ms. Mathews claims to have heard from Henry a story of raiders in New York who had pulled a limousine driver from his car while a desperately ill woman was left in the back seat “to manage as best she could.”²³⁴

An eyewitness in New York City, a Mr. Friedberg, also wrote directly to the White House of the harsh methods soldiers and sailors employed. Friedberg “saw people suddenly accosted by two soldiers with bayonets and a third in civilian uniform.” Large groups of men were “loaded and carried away as if they had been gathered in the night before by the Police.” Friedberg also spoke of the apparent psychological effect scenes such as this must have had on bystanders: “The Modus Operandi...very materially added to the revolt of a Terror stricken public.”²³⁵

²³³ “Take Slackers Into Army,” *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1918, p. 6.

²³⁴ V.J. Mathews to J.L. O’Brian, Sept. 7, 1918, Series 4, file 3735, reel 353, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Library of Congress (Washington, DC).

²³⁵ H. Friedberg to J.P. Tumulty, Sept. 9, 1918, *ibid*.

The number of men detained in comparison to the number of actual slackers, the suspects' class and ethnic composition, and the brutal manner in which soldiers and raiders apprehended them in the New York City area reveals that the intention of the raids was not to supply men for a larger army. Previous slacker raids exhibit this same point. The ethnic and class makeup of detainees in the Patterson armory and those sent to Camp Dix unveils the true targets of the drives: the perceived objects of radical and socialist rhetoric. The fact that nondeclarant and enemy aliens were not subject to military service suggests their detainment and induction into military camps were a means to intimidate potential radicals from obstructing the war effort. The apparent ignorance of some involved with the raids concerning who was eligible for military service does not suggest that those planning the New York City raids were ignorant as well. The DOJ was well aware that the same people were detained in earlier raids in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, and other bastions of anti-war dissent.

The methods used in the New York City area led to much public criticism. To many in the U.S. Senate, the most distressing issue was the use of soldiers and sailors in the apprehension of suspected slackers. On September 5, Senator William Calder of New York shared with his colleagues what he had witnessed on the first day of the raid in New York City:

“In one place I saw a street car stopped and an armed sailor go into the car and take men out of it, in some cases where they were escorting ladies. Men were stopped in the street. They were taken out of their places of business and crowded into vans, perhaps 50 or 60 packed in like sardines, and sent to the police station houses.”

Upon seeing such offenses, Calder claims to have protested to the officer in charge of the soldiers and, after returning to Washington, to the DOJ as well. The Assistant Attorney

General – Gregory was out of town – informed the Senator that his office was completely unaware of the proceedings in New York and New Jersey “and would have his immediate attention.”²³⁶

President Wilson also claimed to be in the dark about the raid. Yet evidence suggests that he was at least aware of and approved of the APL’s role in the apprehension of slackers in past raids. On September 3, the first day of the New York City raid, he and Attorney General Gregory discussed a plan for allocating DOJ funds for the APL. In the course of the meeting, Wilson “expressed his appreciation of the work done” by the APL.²³⁷ Because of the date of their meeting and the fact that the APL’s prime task was to investigate slackers, it is likely that Gregory brought up the New York City raids to the president. But Wilson, at least publicly, pled ignorance about the raid. After hearing that Senator Reed Smoot of Utah had proposed a resolution asking the Military Affairs Committee to investigate who was responsible for the raid, Wilson wrote to Gregory asking – in full Wilsonian righteous indignation – that he be given full details on what had happened and who was responsible.²³⁸

In his reply, Gregory explained that any arrests the military or APL made “would have been contrary to law and contrary to the express directions of the Attorney General.” He intended for the soldiers and sailors to guard the slackers his agents brought into custody. As the accounts above reveal, military personnel played a more hands-on role. Gregory took full responsibility for this and the other urban slacker raids despite revealing the involvement of the PMGO. In an apparent attempt to take the heat

²³⁶ *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress, 2nd Session, Sept. 5, 1918, p. 9977.

²³⁷ T.W. Gregory to A. Bielaski, Sept. 3, 1918, file 186,751, box 2186, Straight Numerical File, Central Files, Records of the Department of Justice (College Park, MD).

²³⁸ W. Wilson to T.W. Gregory, Sept. 5, 1918, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 49, pp. 451-452.

off himself, Gregory pointed out that some of his investigative agents illegally “used soldiers and sailors and certain members of the American Protective League...in making arrests.” This occurred, he claimed, “contrary to my express instructions...instructions which I have repeated over and over again.”²³⁹ The next day Gregory’s explanation appeared in newspapers around the country. Historian Joan Jensen posits that Republican Senators railed against the methods employed in the New York City raids in order to publicly embarrass the Administration. The publishing of Gregory’s reply to Wilson, she argues, was a vain attempt by the White House to forestall a Senate investigation so close to midterm elections.²⁴⁰

More representative of the Administration’s panic over the Senate’s reaction to the raids were the reports Crowder found on his desk. Captain Jones, Delinquency Division Chief, reported to Crowder that his office “in no sense proposed, inaugurated, or directed” the slacker campaign in New York and northern New Jersey. The true culprit, Jones explained, was the DOJ. BI Chief Bielaski informed Jones that the raids were “a means of propaganda before the new registration of September 12.” Intimidation was their goal. Bielaski, Jones went on, assured the PMGO that he was responsible for perfecting the plans of the raid and would issue such a statement if the press asked for one.²⁴¹

Jones was also involved in some damage control of his own. On August 30, at the behest of Bielaski, Jones contacted the Adjutant General of the New York National Guard in order to secure Guardsmen for use as sentries at the various detention centers.

²³⁹ T.W. Gregory to W. Wilson, Sept. 9, 1918, box 1, Thomas W. Gregory Papers, Library of Congress (Washington DC).

²⁴⁰ Jensen, *Price of Vigilance*, p. 217.

²⁴¹ B. Jones to E.H. Crowder, Sept. 5, 1918, file NY 17-1070, box 208, States File, Selective Service System Records (College Park, MD).

The Adjutant General informed Jones that Crowder or the War Department needed to send an official request to the Governor. Jones overstepped his bounds when he wrote the telegram and attached Crowder's name to the bottom without the Provost Marshal General's approval. The Governor's office did not approve the deployment. Upon hearing that the New York Adjutant General had informed Crowder of the deception, Jones came clean. He claimed that he "knew these campaigns were...purely Department of Justice activities, but [he] assumed from these laudatory press comments on file here [concerning previous urban raids] that they met with no objection from this office, or from the Administration."²⁴²

Despite the mistakes and public cries for the raids to end, the DOJ, in conjunction with the APL, planned future slacker drives. On September 21, Attorney General Gregory made amends with the APL²⁴³ and, later that week, had his Bureau of Investigation issue new rules for slacker raiding to the APL's Division Chiefs. The New York City APL Chief disagreed with the new, milder method of apprehending slackers: "It seems to me that it will be rather a hard matter to persuade a deserter to accompany you entirely voluntarily, as Mr. Bielaski expresses it in his circular."²⁴⁴ The DOJ issued orders for the next sizable slacker raid in the October 5 issue of *The Spy Glass*, the APL's official news bulletin. The state of Washington "will have the honor of conducting the first state-wide canvass for draft delinquents."²⁴⁵ The war had yet to be won, meaning the radical slacker still stood between the United States and total victory.

²⁴² B. Jones to E.H. Crowder, Sept. 11, 1918, *ibid*.

²⁴³ T.W. Gregory to A.M. Briggs, Sept. 21, 1918, American Protective League, Correspondence with Field Offices, box 7, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (College Park, MD).

²⁴⁴ E.A. Rushmore to C.D. Frey, Sept. 25, 1918, *ibid*.

²⁴⁵ "First State-wide Slacker Drive is Ordered," *The Spy Glass*, Oct. 5, 1918, American Protective League, Correspondence with Field Offices, box 1, *ibid*.

Although not the most violent means of suppression of radicals and unskilled labor the federal government employed during the First World War, the urban slacker raids were significant not only because of the extensive civil rights violations perpetrated against those caught in the dragnet. The most important aspect is the incorrect perception that all those assumed to be skirting service were in some way pro-German and radical. This was especially the case in terms of aliens. It is significant that federal officials did not order slacker raids in large southern cities such as Atlanta, Birmingham, or Houston, where European immigrants and socialist rhetoric were rarities. Federal agents, APL operatives, and military personnel presumed that the faceless slackers their superiors ordered them to apprehend were guilty and deserving of rough treatment. By September 1918 the notion that aliens were politically radical and, thus, a menace to society was an attitude that had become institutionalized. The vast majority of the men apprehended in the New York City, Chicago, and other slacker raids were the victims of these nativist class and ethnic tensions that, at times, became uncontrollable. The stresses of total war and the intensified fears of radicalism exhibited in the urban raids foreshadowed the postwar Red Scare and the extralegal raids and deportations Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer ordered in January 1920.

CONCLUSION: The Price of Eternal Vigilance

“No other nation came through the struggle with so little disorder and with so little interference with civil liberty of the individual as did the United States. The Constitutional guaranties have been maintained unimpaired, and we continue to be a country of laws and not of men.” – Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory, 1919²⁴⁶

“Thus, a high level of strain and dissent will tend to increase the anxiety of political authorities and incline them towards a policy of repression, and the existence of suitable target groups and the lack of opposition to repression by key elites will tend to make adoption of a strongly repressive policy politically feasible and successful.” – Robert Goldstein, political scientist²⁴⁷

The present study has reviewed and analyzed the underlying motivations behind the Wilson Administration’s policing of anti-draft activity during the First World War. The rural slacker raid in Cobb and Cherokee counties, Georgia, and the New York City dragnet reveal that the motivation behind the suppression of anti-draft activity was to combat radical working-class dissent, regardless of where it appeared. The Wilson Administration, through its anti-radical and anti-immigrant rhetoric before and during the war, intensified longstanding class and ethnic tensions to hysterical levels. The decades before the war revealed that minor threats to social stability easily spooked the federal government and a large portion of the American people. This held true during the war as well. The Wilson Administration’s response to anti-war dissent was disproportionate to the severity of the threats, particularly the federal response to anti-draft activity.

²⁴⁶ “How the Rear of our Armies Was Guarded During the World War,” speech, 1919, box 26, Thomas W. Gregory Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, DC).

²⁴⁷ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, p. 559.

The north Georgia and New York City raids were similar in many ways, most obviously in the use of federal troops to intimidate and coerce suspects. The rhetoric that federal authorities believed inspired men in both places to evade conscription evoked the anti-capitalist theme of the rich man's war and poor man's fight. Most importantly, though, is that federal authorities overstated the actual threat in both instances. Although Watson had inspired draft evasion and anti-draft dissent throughout the rural South, resistance was not coordinated and a Populist revolt did not loom on the horizon. Neither Chicago nor New York City was the American equivalent of revolutionary Moscow or St. Petersburg. The use of soldiers in both instances also indicates that the federal perception of the menace of dissent and political radicalism was distorted.

Several factors led to differences between rural and urban raids. In north Georgia, authorities believed the hidden slackers were armed, making the deployment of federal troops reasonable. In contrast, urban raids were considered safe because federal officials did not deem slackers to be physically dangerous to raiders. Without having information on individual slackers, the Department of Justice employed citywide dragnets in hopes of catching as many draft evaders as possible. Rural raids targeted small bands of known slackers. The ethnic composition of the urban detainees was diverse while the slacking mountaineers in north Georgia were all white. Community involvement also differed. In north Georgia, it appears some members of the local community supported and protected the deserters and delinquents in Cherokee County. Several witnesses to the New York raids, on the other hand, described city dwellers as contemptuous of the men authorities apprehended. Yet the similarities override the differences. The federal government's

exaggerated fear of all forms of lower class dissent was the motivating factor behind both raids.

Who was responsible for the hysterical wartime atmosphere and the federal government's extreme reaction to anti-draft activity? The evidence suggests that Provost Marshal General Enoch H. Crowder, although he loathed dissenters as much as the next official, was interested primarily in the task given to him – raising a powerful American Army. Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory appears to have been proud of his work fulfilling his assigned duty. In a postwar speech, Gregory boasted: “I doubt if any country has ever been so thoroughly and intelligently policed in the history of the world.” Gregory continued to praise his Department of Justice, claiming that by autumn 1917 “it would have been difficult for 50 persons to have met for any purpose, in any place...in the United States without at least one representative of the Government being present.” “The price paid,” he concluded, “was *eternal vigilance*.”²⁴⁸ The U.S. during the First World War, then, was a police state. Gregory and the DOJ made sure war opponents, aliens, and suspected draft evaders experienced this first hand.

Ultimately, however, Woodrow Wilson was responsible for stoking the decades old flames of prewar class and ethnic tension that resulted in the excesses of his subordinates. His prewar calls for complete loyalty, his distrust of “foreign” political ideologies, and his disparaging attitude toward ethnic minorities were known and accepted. This mindset of intolerance, coupled with the fact that at no point did he interfere with the oppressive activities of his subordinates, implies Wilson gave at least tacit support to federal repression – including the slacker raids of 1918 – during the war.

²⁴⁸ “How the Rear of our Armies Was Guarded During the World War,” speech, 1919, box 26, Thomas W. Gregory Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, DC). The italics are Gregory's.

Despite the lack of unanimous opinion within the cabinet on how to handle dissent – likely exacerbated by intradepartmental rivalries and political power plays between department chiefs – little could have occurred without, in the very least, Wilson’s tacit approval. Yet because of his focus on foreign policy issues, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution and throughout 1918, historians often exonerate Wilson from blame for the actions of his subordinates. Although he may or may not have been aware of the metro area New York raids before they commenced, the atmosphere of fear and intolerance in which both the rural and urban raids occurred were partly his creation.

Robert Goldstein argues that “the most important” variable that affects levels of political repression “is the attitude of policy-making authorities with regard to political dissidents.” Based on this logic, subordinates’ perceptions of their superiors’ attitudes toward dissent determine the lengths to which the subordinate will go to fulfill the perceived desires of the superior.²⁴⁹ In general, this appears to have been the case in the U.S. during the First World War. In the early hours of April 2, 1917, Wilson may very well have felt extreme anxiety over the prospect of guiding the United States down a road he knew would lead to oppression. His desire to free the world from the same brand of cruelty his Administration would practice at home, however, overcame his unease. The north Georgia and New York City slacker raids exemplify how national prejudices and ethnocentricities, trickling down from the upper levels of society, can explode into acute episodes of violence and bigotry.

²⁴⁹ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, pp. 558-559.

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