

CHAPTER 23

DOCUMENT SET 1

Total War and the Boundaries of Dissent: The Response from the Heartland

Chapter 23 describes the origins of World War I and the role of the United States in determining its outcome. Extensive attention is devoted to the impact of the war on American institutions. The following documents stress the problem of dissent, with emphasis on the resistance mounted by both Socialists and German-Americans. Moreover, they explore the enforcement of conformity in the name of national unity. Using these materials you can reconstruct the social environment of a nation at war.

Beginning with the words of songwriter George M. Cohan's popular *Over There* (1917), the documents reveal the enthusiasm and militance of the popular response to President Woodrow Wilson's leadership. Yet your textbook acknowledges that the administration confronted a recently isolationist nation less unified than the popular rhetoric implied. The documents therefore include samples of the government propaganda drive, including sharp visual images of the enemy. Similarly, the committee-sponsored testimony on "German-American Loyalty" by a German immigrant underscored the government's concern over the possibility of internal division.

In no area was the perception of a threat greater than in the nation's midwestern heartland, where

German-Americans actively resisted the pressure for political conformity and cultural unity. As the documents indicate, Socialism was one means of expressing resentment against the widespread criticism of all things German. Clear evidence of the social climate is found in Socialist Oscar Ameringer's biting reminiscences of rural Wisconsin "patriots." Note Ameringer's emphasis on class differences in his description of the wartime bond drives. Examine the activities of such citizen groups as the Wisconsin Defense League in the context of total war.

Finally, the last group of documents reveals the limits of dissent in a society at war. The first statement is an excerpt from Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs's Canton, Ohio, address (1918), which ultimately resulted in its author's imprisonment for violation of the Espionage Act. As a follow-up, review the Supreme Court's landmark Schenck decision (1919) with regard to the boundaries of wartime dissent.

As you review these materials, consider the social impact of total war, including the pressure exerted against traditional civil liberties. Analyze the documents as evidence of governmental mobilization of public opinion, and note the consequences of the Wilson administration's actions.

Questions for Analysis

1. What evidence do these documents provide concerning the political impact of total war? How were traditional constitutional and civil liberties affected by World War I? What justification was offered for the limits placed on dissent?
2. How did government agencies portray the enemy, allies, and Americans in materials disseminated throughout the United States? What evidence of government image making can be found in these documents? What were the social consequences of government efforts to mobilize public opinion?
3. What did the activities of the Wisconsin Defense League reveal about the social impact of war? What was the relationship between government agencies such as the Committee on Public Information and citizen volunteer organizations? What did the involvement of private citizens reveal about the social meaning of total war?
4. What do these documents reveal about the influence of ethnic and cultural factors in American politics from 1914 to 1919?
5. What evidence of class differences can be found in these documents? What do the illustrations from *The Masses* reveal about left-wing criticism of the war? Why were government critics so concerned about the class impact of the war?
6. Why are song titles, lyrics, and illustrations particularly revealing as evidence of public perceptions of World War I? What special insights can be gained from such documents?

7. What actions or steps were the various propaganda appeals intended to promote? What responses did they produce? What did the wartime management of domestic opinion reveal about Wilsonian liberalism?

1. A Musical Call to Arms from George M. Cohan, 1917

OVER THERE

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Take it on the run, on the run, on the run;
Hear them calling you and me;
Every son of liberty.
Hurry right away, no delay, go today,
Make your daddy glad, to have had such a lad,
Tell your sweetheart not to pine,
To be proud her boy's in line.

Chorus:

Over there, over there,
Send the word, send the word over there,
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming,

The drums rum-tumming everywhere.
So prepare, say a prayer,
Send the word, send the word to beware,
We'll be over, we're coming over,
And we won't come back till it's over over there.

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Johnnie show the Hun, you're a son-of-a-gun,
Hoist the flag and let her fly,
Like true heroes do or die.
Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit,
Soldiers to the ranks from the towns and the tanks,
Make your mother proud of you,
And to liberty be true.

2. Friendly Words for the Foreign Born, 1917

... There is no such thing as half treason. Any treason is all treason. And let no foreign-born man, who is to-day in the United States, comfort himself that, because he has not become a naturalized citizen, he owes no allegiance to the United States, and that he cannot be punished for treason to the United States. That is not the case, and it is well for us all—whether native-born, naturalized or unnaturalized—to understand just where we each stand with relation to the Government in the crime of treason. . . .

And every one who owes allegiance to the Government can be guilty of treason; the *native-born* man, because he was born here; the *naturalized* man, because he took an oath of allegiance; the *unnaturalized* or alien man, because he lives here for the time being. . . .

My advice, therefore, to every foreign-born man and woman who is staying in the United States to-day is to keep clear of any disloyalty; keep clear of any one who counsels or advises it. Indeed, any one, native, naturalized, or alien, who knows of such disloyal plans, purposes, or schemes is already on dan-

gerous ground, although he may not himself have done a thing; for as your friend I should tell you that there is not only treason which consists of overt acts, but there is a lesser treason which consists in knowing of treason by others against the United States and not making it known.

Let me make that very plain, for it may save some people trouble. If a man or woman knows of treason against the United States, and keeps it to himself, it is like receiving stolen goods. So it is with treason, for to conceal treason is to commit treason. Now here is what the law provides about this lesser treason, or "misprison of treason," as it is called, and *it applies to all persons living in the United States, whether native-born, naturalized, or not naturalized, for they all owe allegiance:*

3. Whoever, owing allegiance to the United States, and having knowledge of the commission of any treason against them, conceals, and does not, as soon as may be, disclose and make known the same to the President or to some judge of the United

States, or to the Governor or to some judge or justice of a particular State, is guilty of misprison of treason and shall be imprisoned not more than seven years and fined not more than one thousand dollars.

So in these times the safe path for native-born, naturalized, and the alien is not only to avoid treason one's self, but, if one learns of it, to either go in person or write some of the officers named in this statute and tell him what one knows.

It is not necessary for me to tell you the many forms treason may take, for treason will always find a hundred different secret ways in which it can give aid and sympathy to the enemy. But right can take but one plain course. Be loyal, true, straight, and square to the Government, and you will be sure you are not committing treason. I am not trying to tell people how near they can approach the line of treason without crossing it. I am telling them how far they can keep from the line by simply being loyal to the flag and to America.

When a man is driving along a precipice, he tries to drive as far away from the edge as he can. My advice to every foreign-born man who comes to me will be: Put a flag at your door, another on your coat, and above all keep one in your heart. If you do, you will stand four-square as countrymen of Washington and Lincoln, and no nation has ever loved any leader, be he King or Kaiser, Sultan or Czar, as all nations to-day love George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. In following their loyal footsteps no man of any race can go astray.

THIS PAMPHLET IS AVAILABLE IN
BOHEMIAN, POLISH, GERMAN,
ITALIAN, HUNGARIAN AND
RUSSIAN

3. The Visual Image of the Enemy, ca. 1917–1918



4. A German-American Pledge of Loyalty, 1917

My emotions tell me one thing at this awful time, but my reason tells me another. As a German by birth it is a horrible calamity that I may have to fight Germans. That is natural, is it not? But as an American by preference, I can see no other course open. . . .

It sickens my soul to think of this Nation going forth to help destroy people many of whom are bound to me by ties of blood and friendship. But it must be

so. It is like a dreadful surgical operation. The militaristic, undemocratic demon which rules Germany must be cast out. It is for us to do it—now. I have tried to tell myself that it is not our affair, that we should have contented ourselves with measures of defense and armed neutrality. But I know that is not so. The mailed fist has been shaken under our nose before. If Prussianism triumphs in this war the fist will

continue to shake. We shall be in real peril, and those leas for which so much of the world's best blood has been spilled through the centuries will be in danger of extinction. It seems to me common sense that we begin our defense by immediate attack when the demon is occupied and when we can command assistance.

There is much talk of what people like me will do, and fear of the hyphen. No such thing exists. The German-American is as staunch as the American of adoption of any other land and perhaps more so. Let

us make war upon Germany, not from revenge, not to uphold hairsplitting quibbles of international law, but let us make war with our whole heart and with all our strength, because Germany worships one god and we another and because the lion and the lamb can not lie down together. One or the other must perish.

Let us make war upon the Germany of the Junkerthum, the Germany of frightfulness, the Germany of arrogance and selfishness, and let us swear not to make peace until the Imperial German Government is the sovereign German people.

5. The Wisconsin Defense League Urges a Loyalty Pledge, ca. 1917

TO THE CITIZENS OF WISCONSIN

THE WISCONSIN DEFENSE LEAGUE

Endorses the following

DECLARATION

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

As an American faithful to American ideals of justice, liberty and humanity, and confident that the Government has exerted its most earnest efforts to keep us at peace with the world, I hereby declare my absolute and unconditional loyalty to the Government of the United States, and pledge my support to you in protecting American rights against unlawful violence upon land and sea, in guarding the Nation against hostile attacks, and in upholding international right.

If you endorse these sentiments sign here:

Name.....

Address.....

Do you stand willing to back your country in case of need? If you do fill out the blank below.

Show Uncle Sam where you stand.

This is not an Enlistment. It is your pledge of loyalty.

Present Occupation:.....

Age:..... Weight:..... Height:.....

General Health:..... Married or Single:.....

Previous Naval or Military Experience:.....

1. Are you a Machinist:.....
2. " " Stenographer:.....
3. " " Chauffeur:.....
4. Can you drive a Motorcycle.....
5. Are you a Locomotive or Marine Engineer:.....
6. " " an Electrician:.....
7. " " a Cook or Baker:.....
8. " " Plumber, Carpenter, Coppersmith or Boilermaker:.....
9. " " Horse Shoer:.....
10. " " Packer:.....
11. " " Teamster:.....
12. " " Yachtsman or Boatman:.....
13. " " Aviator:.....
14. " " Blacksmith:.....

Will you volunteer for service in any of the military branches of the United States in case of war:.....

Indicate the branch of service you prefer:

U. S. ARMY	U. S. NAVY
U. S. MARINE CORPS	NATIONAL GUARD

Mail to Army and Navy Recruiting Office, Plankinton Arcade, Milwaukee

6. George Creel Recalls The "World's Greatest Adventure in Advertising," 1920

How We Advertised America

1. The "Second Lines"

... It was in this recognition of Public Opinion as a major force that the Great War differed most essentially from all previous conflicts. The trial of strength was not only between massed bodies of armed men, but between opposed ideals, and moral verdicts took on all the value of military decisions. Other wars went no deeper than the physical aspects, but German *Kultur* raised issues that had to be fought out in the hearts and minds of people as well as on the actual firing-line. The approval of the world meant the steady flow of inspiration into the trenches; it meant the strengthened resolve and the renewed determination of the civilian population that is a nation's second line. The condemnation of the world meant the destruction of morale and the surrender of that conviction of justice which is the very heart of courage.

The Committee on Public Information was called into existence to make this fight for the "verdict of mankind," the voice created to plead the justice of America's cause before the jury of Public Opinion. . . . *In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression. Its emphasis throughout was on the open and the positive. At no point did it seek or exercise authorities under those war laws that limited the freedom of speech and press.* In all things, from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising. . . .

The President went before Congress, a state of war was accepted formally, and even as one army gathered in the cantonments, another went out over the land to watch, to search, to listen. The Department of Justice had already in the field a large, intelligent, and well-trained organization; there was also the Secret Service of the Treasury Department and into being swiftly sprang Military Intelligence, Naval Intelligence, Shipping Board Intelligence, etc.; and, by way of climax, the American Protective League, an organization of *two hundred and fifty thousand* "citizen volunteers" formed with the sanction of the Attorney-General and operated under the direction of the Bureau of Investigation.

Never was a country so thoroughly contra-espionaged! Not a pin dropped in the home of any one

with a foreign name but that it rang like thunder on the inner ear of some listening sleuth! And with what result? . . .

As for criminal prosecutions, 1,532 persons were arrested under the provisions of the Espionage Act prohibiting disloyal utterance, propaganda, etc.; 65 persons for threats against the President; 10 persons for sabotage; and under the penal code, with relation to conspiracy, 908 indictments were returned, the last group including the I. W. W. cases. Even this does not spell guilt in every instance, for there have been acquittals as well as convictions, and many trials are yet to be held. . . .

The State Councils of Defense did splendid work, as a rule, and the country owes much to them, but there were exceptions that aroused far more anger than loyalty, conducting themselves in a manner that would have been lawless in any other than a "patriotic" body. During Liberty Loan drives, for instance, it became a habit, in certain sections, to compel a regular income return from the foreign-born and the poorer classes. Men, claiming authority, would visit these homes, insist upon a statement of earnings, expenditures, savings, etc., and then calmly announce the amount of the contribution that the dazed victims were expected to make. Anything in the nature of resistance was set down as "slacking" and "disloyalty," and some of the penalties visited were expulsion from the community, personal ill treatment, or a pleasant little attention like painting the house yellow. Of all the bitternesses and disaffections reported to us, the majority proceeded from this sort of terrorism, and it had results that will be felt for years to come. . . .

The loyalty of "our aliens," however, splendid as it was, had in it nothing of the spontaneous or the accidental. Results were obtained only by hard, driving work. The bitterness bred by years of neglect and injustice were not to be dissipated by any mere war-call, but had to be burned away by a continuous educational campaign. The *real* America had to be revealed to these foreign-language groups—its drama of hope and struggle, success and blunders—and their minds had to be filled with the tremendous truth that the fight against Germany was a fight for all that life has taught decent human beings to hold dear. . . .

7. *The Masses* Interprets the Great Crusade, 1916–1917

A. "At Last a Perfect Soldier!" *The Masses*, August 1916



Drawn by Robert Minor, July 1916

CAL EXAMINER: "At last a perfect soldier!"

B. Having Their Fling, The Masses,
September 1917



EDITOR

CAPITALIST

POLITICIAN

MINISTER

Having Their Fling

C. Come On In, The Blood's Fine!
The Masses, June 1917



Drawn by R. Kempf, June 1917

Come on in, America, the Blood's Fine!

D. Physically Fit, *The Masses*, October 1917



Drawn by Henry J. Glintenkamp, October 1917

8. Oscar Ameringer Recalls the "Terror" in the Wisconsin Hinterlands, ca. 1917-1918

... When war came it was the small-town and county-seat people that became the "real patriots," while the old-line German farmers were decidedly hostile to the mess. This situation provided the late-comers with a fine opportunity to show the original settlers who the true Americans were. In the pursuit of this worthy aim the riff-raff of the towns organized themselves into "Home Defense Guards," "County Councils of Defense," snoopers, and Liberty-loan strong-arm squads. The leaders in these patriotic drives were the bankers, naturally. It is said that the mortality rate of bankers during that war was even lower than that of generals, and that's saying a lot, because only one of our generals was wounded in action—by the premature explosion of a champagne bottle.

Now the Teutonic ruralists were not against licking [defeating] the kaiser. . . . In the matter of Liberty bonds they always bought their quota and better. You see, the patriotic bankers who headed the Liberty-bond drives knew almost to a penny what those hyphenated Americans were worth.

They'd say, "Mr. Spiegelmeyer, you are down for five hundred dollars. So no back talk. I looked up your account before I came out here." Or, "Mr. Scheibenschieber, your share is seven hundred dollars. I know you haven't the cash on hand, because

you have just bought the forty adjoining your place. But don't let that worry you. Just sign this six-per-cent note for the seven hundred dollars and I'll keep your four-per-cent Liberty bond for security. I know you are perfectly good for the note and so are the Liberty bonds." Or, "Mr. Rauschenbauer, your quota is three hundred dollars. I know you've only got a hundred dollars in my bank. So give me your check for one hundred and sign this six-per-cent note for the balance and I'll see to it the bonds are safe in my safe." In the latter instance, if the balance of two hundred was not paid, as happened in many cases, the banker had the three-hundred-dollar bond and the hundred-dollar down payment of the buyer. In case the buyer had paid in full for the bond or bonds and got hard pressed for money, the bankers would always accommodate the customer by taking his bond or bonds back, at first for sixty-five cents on the dollar and toward the end at ninety-six cents on the dollar. It pays to be a patriot.

In cases where the prospect refused to buy Liberty bonds he would be visited by strong-arm salesmen who brought ropes with them to help the prospect see his duty toward his government. Quite frequently his house was painted yellow to proclaim just what kind of a dog lived there. . . .

9. A Socialist Critique of the War by Eugene V. Debs, 1918

... When the Bolsheviki came into power and went through the archives they found and exposed the secret treaties—the treaties that were made between the Czar and the French Government, the British Government and the Italian Government, proposing, after the victory was achieved, to dismember the German Empire and destroy the Central Powers. These treaties have never been denied nor repudiated. Very little has been said about them in the American press. I have a copy of these treaties, showing that the purpose of the Allies is exactly the purpose of the Central Powers, and that is the conquest and spoliation of the weaker nations that has always been the purpose of war. . . .

The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The

master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, while the subject class has had nothing to gain and all to lose—especially their lives. . . .

And here let me emphasize the fact—and it cannot be repeated too often—that the working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace. . . .

What a compliment it is to the Socialist movement to be persecuted for the sake of the truth! The truth alone will make the people free. And for this reason the truth must not be permitted to reach the

people. The truth has always been dangerous to the rule of the rogue, the exploiter, the robber. So the truth must be ruthlessly suppressed. That is why they are trying to destroy the Socialist movement; and every time they strike a blow they add a thousand new voices to the hosts proclaiming that Socialism is the hope of humanity. . . .

Do not worry over the charge of treason to your masters, but be concerned about the treason that involves yourselves. Be true to yourself and you cannot be a traitor to any good cause on earth.

Yes, in good time we are going to sweep into power in this nation and throughout the world. We are going to destroy all enslaving and degrading capi-

talist institutions and recreate them as free and humanizing institutions. The world is daily changing before our eyes. The sun of capitalism is setting; the sun of Socialism is rising. It is our duty to build the new nation and the free republic. We need industrial and social builders. We Socialists are the builders of the beautiful world that is to be. We are all pledged to do our part. We are inviting—aye challenging you in the name of your own manhood and womanhood to join us and do your part.

In due time the hour will strike and this great cause triumphant—the greatest in history—will proclaim the emancipation of the working class and the brotherhood of all mankind.

10. The Supreme Court Limits Free Speech in Wartime, 1919

Holmes, J.: . . . According to the testimony Schenck said he was general secretary of the Socialist party and had charge of the Socialist headquarters from which the documents were sent. He identified a book found there as the minutes of the Executive Committee of the party. The book showed a resolution of August 13, 1917, that 15,000 leaflets should be printed on the other side of one of them in use, to be mailed to men who had passed exemption boards, and for distribution. Schenck personally attended to the printing. . . .

The document in question upon its first printed side recited the first section of the Thirteenth Amendment, said that the idea embodied in it was violated by the Conscription Act and that a conscript is little better than a convict. In impassioned language it intimated that conscription was despotism in its worse form and a monstrous wrong against humanity in the interest of Wall Street's chosen few. It said, "Do not submit to intimidation," but in form at least confined itself to peaceful measures such as a petition for the repeal of the act. The other and later printed side of the sheet was headed "Assert Your Rights." It stated reasons for alleging that any one violated the Constitution when he refused to recognize "your right to assert your opposition to the draft." . . . Of course the document would not have been sent unless it had been intended to have some effect, and we do not see what effect it could be expected to have upon persons subject to the draft except to influence them to obstruct the carrying of it out. The defendants do not deny that the jury might find against them on this point.

But it is said, suppose that that was the tendency of this circular, it is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. . . . We admit that in many places and in ordinary times the defendants in saying all that was said in the circular would have been within their constitutional rights. But the character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done. . . . The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic. . . . The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent. It is a question of proximity and degree. When a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right. It seems to be admitted that if an actual obstruction of the recruiting service were proved, liability for words that produced that effect might be enforced. The statute of 1917 in §4 punishes conspiracies to obstruct as well as actual obstruction. If the act, (speaking, or circulating a paper,) its tendency and the intent with which it is done are the same, we perceive no ground for saying that success alone warrants making the act a crime. . . .

Judgments affirmed.

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Chapter 23:**Document Set 1 References**

1. A Musical Call to Arms from George M. Cohan, 1917
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3. The Visual Image of the Enemy, ca. 1917-1918
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5. The Wisconsin Defense League Urges a Loyalty Pledge, ca. 1917
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6. George Creel Recalls the "World's Greatest Adventure in Advertising," 1920
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7. *The Masses* Interprets the Great Crusade, 1916-1917
 - a. By Robert Minor, *The Masses*, August 1916.
 - b. By Art Young, *The Masses*, September 1917.
 - c. By R. Kempf, *The Masses*, June 1917.
 - d. By Henry J. Glintenkamp, *The Masses*, October 1917.
8. Oscar Ameringer Recalls the "Terror" in the Wisconsin Hinterlands, ca. 1917-1918
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