“Philosophers of despair”: *Harper’s Weekly* and the criminalization of American anarchism, 1877-1920

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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ABSTRACT

Anarchists were one of the great enigmas of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. They were terrorists, drunks, misfits, and blood-hungry deviants. They were dirty, long-haired, and shadowy figures that loomed over the American psyche. Did Americans know how to spot an anarchist or were they relying on unreliable stereotypes? In this thesis, I examine the depictions of anarchists within *Harper's Weekly*, one of the most widely read magazines at the turn of the Twentieth century. Through its luxurious illustrations and scathing commentary, *Harper's* provides an important insight into what Americans thought anarchists were and where they thought anarchists were hiding. This thesis argues that Americans' fear of anarchists was exaggerated. Anarchist acts of terror were few and far between. Yet, Americans were constantly afraid. This fear of anarchists led American legislators to try and legislate away the anarchist problem. These depictions and strategies to combat anarchism were refined over the decades and, after World War I, were applied to a new threat, Russian Bolshevism.

"PHILOSOPHERS OF DESPAIR": *HARPER'S WEEKLY* AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF AMERICAN ANARCHISM, 1877-1920

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Anarchists seemed to be everywhere and nowhere in Gilded Age America and were cause for deep concern. One of the leading journalists of the era, John Gilmer Speed, stoked the curiosity of readers of *Harper's Weekly* with a visit to Justus Schwab's saloon, a prominent anarchist meeting place in New York. "It is a loathsome place in itself," he wrote, "and there is one thing very certain, that these rabid reformers who are trying to destroy the serenity of all existing society are not having much fun while they are about it. The men were shabby, and from the appearance of their hands not acquainted with hard labor."[1]

Americans' descriptions of anarchists varied greatly. They were bombers, troublemakers, misfits, and terrorists. They were dirty, unkempt, and greasy. Dangerous these "philosophers of despair" certainly were, but picking out these criminal types from such vague, contradictory descriptions seemed hopeless. Did anarchists lurk everywhere? Americans believed that they could spot an anarchist in a crowd. Yet, almost no one knew an anarchist of that sort personally – certainly not the police. Though law enforcement tried, successfully or otherwise, to identify and

[1] John Gilmer Speed, "Anarchists in New York," *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, August 20, 1892, 799.

crack down on anarchist plotting between 1877 and 1920, they often just raided immigrant neighborhoods and common gathering places to no purpose, redoubling fear.

The prominence of anarchist plots was overblown. Those who plotted terror were disaffected young men who often carried out "lone wolf" attacks or conspired with a small group. Undercover law enforcement devised other plots, where they served as *agent provocateurs* who pushed lower-class radicals to act on terroristic ideas.[2] Still, anarchist terrorism was extremely uncommon, especially in the United States.[3] Although membership numbers are hard to calculate accurately, anarchists were surely a minority, even within radical circles.[4] The anarchist that Americans thought they knew was the one written about in local, regional, and national papers and magazines. This imagined extremist contributed mightily to American perceptions of anarchists as foreign-born agitators striking against American interests.

The anarchist has long been a niche character within American historiography. Few historians have studied American anarchism thoroughly. Paul Avrich's work examined the broader scope of anarchism in Europe and America from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. In the United States, though, he especially researched well-known incidents, such as the Haymarket Affair and the Sacco and Vanzetti trial. In 1994, he compiled an oral history of American anarchism, interviewing the family members of anarchists and those who grew up in anarchist households.[5] Decades of research here, however, culminated in a group portrait of fifty-

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[2] Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934.* New York: Cambridge University Press (2014), 30-45.

[3] Ibid, 1-10.

[4] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. London: HarperCollins *Publishers* (1992), ix.

[5] Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1994), 3-8.

three elderly, mostly forgotten, "discouraged" idealists. Avrich developed the baseline for new studies into American anarchism's place within American historiography. Since his death in 2006, however, the topic has been mostly ignored.

More recent work has treated the anarchist as a shadowy archetype. *The Day Wall Street Exploded*, Beverly Gage recounts a forgotten terror attack, the Wall Street Bombing of 1920. Gage examines anarchist terrorists and the evolving economic and social conditions which created them.[6] But like the police who investigated the crime, she fails to tie any anarchist to the crime – or even anarchists in general. Richard Bach Jensen expands on Gage's premise in *The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism* internationally. Here, Jensen explains how anarchists came to adopt their violent tactics, how Western governments responded, and how the anarchist became a staple of sensationalist Victorian era newspapers.[7] Julia Rose Kraut briefly explores some of these questions in the American context. Her book, *Threat of Dissent*, analyzes how Americans used immigration policy to suppress and deport dissenters and critics, including Progressive Era anarchists, socialists, and communists.[8] Together, these studies recognize that anarchists were perceived as serious threats to society. Yet, they do not fully address the place of Americans' fears of anarchists within broader intellectual developments of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

Other older studies have tried to tackle those fears more broadly. Robert Wiebe's *Search for Order* argued that American life after 1877 evolved from local "island communities" toward

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[6] Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror*. New York: Oxford University Press (2009), 1-5.

[7] Jensen, *The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism*, 47-49.

[8] Julia Rose Kraut, *Threat of Dissent A History of Ideological Exclusion and Deportation in the United States*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (2020), 30-68.

a national consciousness. He described fears surrounding the Haymarket bombing as a perceived challenge between order and anarchy, which is to say lawlessness.[9] Writing a generation later, Nell Painter rejects the irony of Wiebe's progressive liberalism. *Standing at Armageddon* argues that this period was driven by upper-class efforts to prevent Paris Commune-style uprisings from taking root in America. Elite fears spiked with the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, cascading through a series of violent and flawed efforts to repress class, racial, gender, and ethnic conflicts over the succeeding half century.[10] And all for nothing: by 1920, America was awash in race riots, militant feminists, a wave of national strikes, and a homegrown Communist Party. Yet Painter sidelines the issue of anarchism in favor of broader discussions of organized labor and radical politics. Painter condenses American fears of anarchists to a stereotype. For Painter, anarchists were another subsection of labor radicals, indistinguishable from Communists, socialists, and trade unionists to American elites. But millions of Americans voted socialist in this period; almost no one cheered on anarchists.

Other historians have tackled the issue of Progressive Era fear in terms of race. In *Manliness and Civilization*, Gail Bederman analyzes the relationship between American ideas about race and masculinity at the turn of the century, rooting fears of industrialization in men's changing gender roles and pervasive racism. While her study does not provide much analysis of anarchists, it offers an important framework for thinking about how race and gender must have intersected with images of anarchism in this period.[11]

[9] Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang (1967), 1-5.
[10] Nell Painter, *Standing at Armageddon, the United States 1877-1919.* New York: W. W. Norton (1987), 1-15.

[11] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1995), 1-16.

Likewise, David Roediger analyzes the whitening of ethnic immigrants from "near-white" outsiders to their assimilation in the American suburbs at the end of World War II. While he explains the condition of ethnic white immigrants at the turn of the century, his work does not tackle the anarchist problem either. Roediger's evidence, such as secret American government plans to deal with domestic threats during World War I, provides new directions for research but he remains silent on the clearly "non-white" anarchist.[12]

Daniel E. Bender's *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* also connects fears of racial degeneration to anxiety about American labor. From fascination with prehistoric humans to eugenics rhetoric, Bender analyzes apocalyptic American visions of their racial future through American labor's ties with immigration and radicalism. Exploring contemporary metaphors used to describe industrialization, immigration, and other turn-of-the-century developments, he notes how, Americans feared that immigration represented colonization of American cities through "immigrant 'invasion.'"[13] The International Workers of the World and the culture of tramping galvanized such fears, he shows.[14] Yet his study has little to say specifically about how such fears intersected with anarchism.

The study of anarchism and its place in the American historiography then is far from complete. Many historians have tried to understand the successes, failures, and perceptions of American radicals broadly. Some, such as Aileen S. Kraditor argue that radical ideologies were simply not convincing to American workers. Her *Radical Persuasion* rejects the claim that

[12] David R. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. New York: Basic Books (2005), 143.

[13] Bender, *American Abyss,* 5.

[14] Ibid, 215-216.

repression and the hegemonic power of American liberalism and capitalism played any part in the failure of American radicals to gain "converts." American radicals, she believed, were just unpersuasive, out-of-touch, and despising and despised by the American worker. Their ideas were unpopular because American workers preferred American liberalism.[15] Perhaps it was so, but why, then, did mainstream Americans fear anarchism so much?

Setting aside the merits of such arguments, historians need to take radicals and the reactions to them seriously. Upper- and middle-class fears of radicalism explained their decision-making, especially their suppression of anarchists. Even if American workers did not take the theories of anarchism seriously, elite Americans did. Why else would they hire Pinkertons to defend their property against striking workers? Why did mainstream papers, such as *Harper's Weekly* and *The Independent,* think it necessary to push workers away from radicals? American journalists, politicians, and intellectuals feared anarchism deeply. Studying why may also help us understand why radical movements failed in America. Was anarchism unconvincing to American workers or was the barrel of a Pinkerton's gun just more convincing? Certainly, fear of anarchists was a driving force of the American political imagination.

Before 1920, Americans were so infatuated with spotting anarchists that they hardly bothered to define them beyond slogans. As a theory, anarchism came into existence in response to the rise of the modern nation State and capitalism in the eighteenth century. Many figures were charged with "founding" anarchism. Yet those who popularized it in its modern form were Peter Kropotkin and Michael Bakunin. These figures meshed the individualism and anti-State beliefs of earlier anarchists with other contemporary forms of left-wing politics, such as Marxian

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[15] Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (1981), 1-15.

socialism. Anarchism also clashed with these contemporary ideas. In 1872, the split between Marxists and Bakuninists during the First International of the International Workingmen's Association was a crucial turning point in European class politics. The consequence was a near-constant squabbling over theory and method which lived on in the work of immigrant and native-born American anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, Johann Most, and William "Big Bill" Haywood.[16] The wonder is that American journalism clumped these warring visions and characters under a unified banner. Anarchists themselves never saw such homogeneity in their ranks.

A close examination of the anarchist as seen in America's dominant media, newspapers and magazines, has yet to be written. American views of anarchists were more complex, varied, and important than historians have shown. Journalists, columnists, editors, and other thought-leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had distinct and variant opinions on anarchists. Depending on biases, these opinion-makers described shifting and inventive versions of the anarchist as assassin. By chasing the shadowy anarchist through the pages of *Harper's Weekly*, this evolution becomes clearer. Examining differences between media voices enriches understanding of American concerns about anarchists and demonstrates their relation to broader anxieties.

Harper's Weekly offers a wonderful test case for American opinions and perceptions on a host of topics. *Harper's* was the foremost weekly magazine in America across the late nineteenth century. Known for its rich illustrations and striking political cartoons, *Harper's* shaped American opinion from its founding in 1857. While the publication eventually merged with the

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[16] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 5-11.

New York-based *Independent* in 1916, its importance carried into the modern era. To understand what middle-class, native-born Americans were reading and to understand what they believed, *Harper's Weekly* offers a superb starting point.

For readers of *Harper's*, the anarchist was a faceless threat seeking to destroy American progress and place himself atop the ashes of civilization. This image intersected with a web of contemporary theories aiming to explain the overblown prominence of anarchists. American liberals viewed anarchists as a pestilential subset of criminals and moral degenerates. American conservatives took this view further, focusing on anarchists' harmful effects on America's racial makeup and family construction, plus their unwillingness and inability to assimilate with American values. Both viewed the anarchist's tactics, violent and nonviolent direct action, as acts of mob violence and mob rule.[17]

Yet, such beliefs did not remain static throughout the forty-seven-year period this study covers, and occasionally specific individuals came to personify anarchism. As different social theories rose and fell in popularity, the language to explain the anarchists' threat changed. Social perceptions of crime changed from a moral fault to an environmental or psychological fault. The language used to describe anarchists as a criminal class changed, too. Still, from the 1870s to the 1920s, American fears of the anarchist remained strong.

At the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the troops of the New Third Republic brutally suppressed the Paris Commune, Europe's first worker's State. "The Bloody Week" left Paris drowning in blood. While short lived, the Commune roused the middle and upper classes of Europe and North America with apocalyptic fears of retribution at the hands of working

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[17] "The Anarchists," *Harper's Weekly*, August 13, 1892, 770.

people.[18] As Americans dealt with the aftermath of their own bloody civil war plus new waves of immigrants from Central and Northern Europe, they worried about downtrodden populations filling American cities, especially those who fled for political reasons.

The 1870s were a turbulent decade for social and political change. The American economy collapsed in 1873 and had lasting negative effects for the remainder of the decade, including wealth inequality and high unemployment.[19] In the South, Reconstruction faded, and the Ku Klux Klan terrorized and intimidated black Southerners and their allies. When a general strike erupted in the summer of 1877, panic ensued. The Great Railroad Strike was the first instance of nationwide labor action in American history.[20] In the weeks following its suppression, the pages of *Harper's Weekly* were filled with images of fiery urban landscapes and descriptions of utter destruction.[21]

The Great Railroad Strike invoked comparisons with the Commune in the minds of American elites. Many of *Harper*'s columnists used language that strengthened ties. One reporter wrote that, "The *reign of terror* inaugurated by the railroad strikers in Baltimore on the morning of the 16th of July is unexampled in the history of strikes in this country."[22] Others described the strikes as an attempted revolution.[23] Such comparisons prompted reporters to call for better

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[18] William A. Pelz, "From the Revolutions of 1848-49 to the First People's Democracy: Paris Commune" in *A People's History of Modern Europe*. London: Pluto Press (2016), 15-17.
[19] Nicholas Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics." *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, no. 4 (October 2011), 407.

[20] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon,* xii.

[21] "The Great Strike," *Harper's Weekly*, August 11, 1877, 620-621.

[22] Ibid, 626.

[23] Ibid, 626.

funding for the National Guard or to warn readers to prepare to defend themselves and their property from future disorder. One columnist recommended that "the State Militia must be an army trained for war, or the security of order is gone."[24]

Such views both shaped and reflected common sentiments. Allen Pinkerton, infamous for his paramilitary strikebreaking agency, wrote extensively on the idea that labor unions threatened to become a disastrous "Commune of America."[25] Communists and their ideology, he argued, turned American workers from content and "noble" into enemies of "law, order, and society."[26] Likewise, John Hay, a prominent Republican politician, in *The Bread-Winners* described strikers as the foes of civilization. Hay described strikers as "the laziest and most incapable workers in town." Likewise, he had little sympathy for union organizers, whom he depicted as manipulative demagogues.[27] Born of frustration and anger – Hay was a railroad boss himself – *The Bread-Winners* became the most popular novel inspired by the strike.[28]

Such Social Darwinism was a common among critics of labor agitation, who abhorred union organizers. Some critics argued that they were malevolent agents of Communism, misfits one and all. Others believed they were involved in twisted secret networks, plotting the downfall of society in the shadows. Even fraternal labor organizations, like the Knights of Labor, open,

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[24] "The Riots and Their Lesson," *Harper's Weekly*, August 11, 1877, 618.

[25] Allen Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and detectives*. New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., *Publishers* (1878), 84.

[26] Ibid, xii.

[27] Scott Dalrymple, "John Hay's Revenge: Anti-Labor Novels, 1880-1905." *Business and Economic History* 28, no. 1 (Fall 1999), 135-136.

[28] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 26.

moderate, and fraternal like many other men's clubs of the age, were perceived as suspicious.[29] These had developed out of necessity to avoid industry blacklists that targeted strikers and organizers and to aid their brother workers and their kin, not to destroy society.[30] Americans' fear of labor activists spawned conspiratorial myths of powerful Communist organization and manipulation.[31]

Novels such as *The Bread-Winners,* played a significant role in growing fears surrounding American labor. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *Stillwater Tragedy* also embraced this discourse surrounding unions, strikers, and immigration. Like his contemporaries, Aldrich employed the trope of the "noble workingman" through the protagonist, Richard Shackford. After returning from abroad, Richard asks his wealthy cousin for assistance and shelter. Turned away, shamefully, Richard seeks employment at the local marble yard. Where his coworkers soon become discontented with their positions. These are mostly unionized immigrants, of course, and the upshot is a general strike with other industrial unions in town. Through his depiction of a general strike, Aldrich argued that striking was ineffective and only led workers to waste resources on alcohol. As well, he aimed to show that strikes had profound negative effects on local homes and industry. He painted labor unions as troublemakers, comprised of nothing but discontented foreigners.[32] The solution to social decline was as clean as its causes.

The anti-labor novels of Hay, Aldrich, and others only replicated the prejudices Americans imbibed in the pages of liberal magazines like *Harper's*. These commonly pitted the

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[29] Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*. New Haven: Yale University Press (1991), 1-7.

[30] Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives*, 87-88.

[31] Bender, *American Abyss*, 15-20.

[32] Thomas Bailey Aldrich, *The Stillwater Tragedy*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company (1880), 86-285.

subversive labor agitator against the "honest workingman."[33] This idea was popular throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, especially within *Harper's.* The famed Harper's cartoonist, Thomas Nast, regularly commented on American radicals with bitter hatred. One of his many famous characters was a communistic skeleton named "Dead-Head," often used to depict ideas he found absurd, evil, or brainless. In one cartoon [Figure 1], Dead-Head, complete with a "free love" button affixed to his hat and a communist sash, invaded the home of a hard-pressed working family. The undead menace waves away their pain inhumanly: "Home ties are nothing. Family ties are nothing. Everything that is – is nothing."[34] Another famous cartoon showed a freed black man standing in shock to see a white laborer "enslave [himself]" under the "Iron Grip" of the Knights of Labor.[35] How could a man be so misled? Throughout this period, *Harper's* argued that strikers, rioters, and agitators were harming everything from working families to the relationship between labor and capital entirely. The labor ongoings, then, were virtually synonymous with anarchism and social ruin.[36]

Before anarchism, before labor union ongoings, American writers blamed labor strife on tramps. Migratory labor was as old as Benjamin Franklin and as thoroughly American, but in the pages of newspapers and magazines from the 1870s onwards, tramps were a class of roaming working-class people usually depicted as poor, unemployed men. They were homeless, by circumstance or choice, roaming the country without destination or purpose. They survived on their own efforts, the generosity of strangers, or by crime. Increasingly, Americans saw tramps as

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[33] "Socialism and Assassination", *Harper's Weekly*, June 22, 1878, 487.

[34] "Home Sweet Home! There's No Place Like Home", *Harper's Weekly*, June 22,1878, 487.

[35] Thomas Nast, "Wilful Slavery Makes Woful [sic] Suffering.," *Harper's Weekly,* April 17, 1886, 253.

[36] Figures may be found at the end of the thesis text.

roaming bands of beggars and blamed them for strikes. They often exaggerated the presence of tramps at strikes, or simply mistook working-class strikers to be useless, treacherous tramps.[37] Economic dislocation here became moral failing and political danger.

The dirty anarchist stereotype originated with media depictions of tramps. These bands of the unemployed were drawn not entirely unrealistically as dirty men with scruffy beards, tattered clothing, and a drunken stare. The tramp's inability or refusal to participate in American capitalism marginalized them from honorable working-class men, who were often shown with their families, clean clothes, and well-groomed facial hair.[38] From tramp to bum to anarchist was an easy progression. When anarchists became the labor scapegoat, journalists dressed them in the tramp's clothes and mannerisms. Worrisome foreigners were also depicted in similar fashion.

Associations between labor agitation and immigration were common throughout this period. Pinkerton decried strikes as an "institution of Europe."[39] In their coverage of labor strife, *Harper's* often highlighted the foreign nature of strikers and rioters. "The communistic element was largely represented [at Chicago's Turner Hall]," one writer noted in 1877, "many of the lowest classes of Poles and Bohemians being on hand."[40] These immigrant and exile revolutionaries carried subversive dreams with them to the United States, sentiments that threatened middle- and upper-class stability. As Nell Painter argues, "labor violence reminded nonworkers of the very existence of the poor whose presence they otherwise ignored."[41] Even

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[37] Thomas Nast, "Riots are Expensive Luxuries," March 8, 1879, *Harper's Weekly*, 196.

[38] "Tramps and Their Ways," May 4, 1878, *Harper's Weekly*, 348.

[39] Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives*, 20.

[40] "The Great Strike", *Harper's Weekly*, August 18, 1877, 647.

[41] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, xxix.

more than this, it allowed magazines like *Harper's* to paint agitators as foreign, loathsome, and un-American.

None of these misfits was more feared than Johann Most. Once a member of the German Reichstag, Most belonged to the camp of anarchists which advocated for a tactic known as "the Propaganda of the Deed." In their view, violent attacks on public officials, buildings, and events were key to activism, believing that those would further class consciousness among the working class and lead to revolution. Most's beliefs forced him into exile to England, where he eventually served a year-long prison sentence for celebrating the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. By the time he landed in New York, however, Most was the perfect anarchist symbol for Americans. As Avrich describes him, Most was "the cartoonist's stereotype of the bewhiskered, foreign-looking anarchist, with a bomb in one hand and a dagger or pistol in the other."[42] He was the foreign tramp reborn, rearmed, and looking for vengeance.

Prior to 1886, anarchists were hardly mentioned in *Harper's* or elsewhere in the American press. During this period, disparate fears focused on Catholics, weird-looking immigrants, Southern Democratic mobs, thieving tramps, and the generic category of rioters.[43] All ingredients in the disagreeable stew that bred anarchists. The word "anarchy" appeared instead in *Harper's* to describe a spectrum of social disfunction and disorder. Anarchy conjured corruption, chaos, and death in many forms. Anarchy appeared in various illustrations, often

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[42] Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1984), 61.

[43] "The Enemies of Knowledge," *Harper's Weekly*, February 3, 1877, 90.; Thomas Nast, More Bravado?" *Harper's Weekly,* March 3, 1877, 172.

signified in the billowing smoke of a mob's torches.[44] Even before the age of anarchist terrorism, anarchy was associated with disorder and social strife, imagined fully before it stepped onstage.

Eventually, this specter of terrorism erupted in the United States. On May 4, 1886, labor demonstrators and law enforcement clashed in Haymarket Square, Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods. Radical spectacle roused the crowd. The police appeared. A bomb was thrown. The cops fired into the crowd. Mayhem ensued – a riot, the papers called it. This confrontation resulted in the deaths of several workers and police officers, days after Chicago police killed several workers advocating for their "radical" demand of an eight-hour-workday. The Haymarket Affair was many Americans' first experience with anarchism and the trouble it caused. Many workingmen had spoken that day, but it was Johann Most's dynamite that triggered bloodshed. While violence between labor and capital had existed for decades, Haymarket became a byword for anarchy and heightened fears of the terrorism it sponsored.

American newspapers sensationalized the Haymarket Affair and its trial. Articles shrieked about crime waves led by Chicago's "Bohemian" during the summer of 1886. In one instance, anarchists had robbed a drug store in search of alcohol, only to find various drugs to consume, which made them vomit wildly.[45] Their fate was predictable and deserved. "Practically," *Harper's* agreed, "[anarchists] are pests of society, to be disposed of in the most summary manner."[46] Much like the reaction to the Great Strike, *Harper's* promoted judicial and extrajudicial violence against anarchists and all who fell under their sway. Many writers justified

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[44] Thomas Nast, "Social Science Solved," *Harper's Weekly*, April 10, 1880, 225.

[45] "Their Own Medicine," *Chicago Inter-Ocean,* May 7, 1886, 4.

[46] "The Labor Question," *Harper's Weekly*, May 22, 1886, 353.

mob violence in response to the anarchists' threat to the core values and institutions of the United States.[47] Rats deserved rat poison.

After Haymarket, Americans drew upon preconceived notions of anarchists to comprehend the threat they faced. American writers' most common criticism of the anarchist was their simple incompatibility with American values. Atheism, anti-capitalism, and anti-republican beliefs, Americans thought, put them at odds with the nation's core values. Their arguments also served to justify the suppression of radical labor movements broadly. Across decades of *Harper's* coverage of labor, such sentiments dominated, influenced, and sold magazines.[48]

In the aftermath of Haymarket, American fears of anarchists did not prevent them from mocking anarchists. Americans were still able to make jokes about Haymarket's perpetrators. The most repeated event of Haymarket news coverage was an embarrassing encounter between Most and New York police. Raiding Most's home, cops allegedly found Most hiding under his bed. As a consequence, many publications briefly changed their caricatures of Most from menacing anarchist to cowardly fraud. Thomas Nast depicted Most conducting "Socialistic War" drills where his soldiers practiced diving under their beds.[49] Soon enough he was back to mocking anarchists' uncleanliness and tramp-like appearance. Taking a note from the anti-tramp playbook, Nast depicted nameless anarchist hordes similar to the nameless, wandering tramp. This was most obvious in a cartoon that showed anarchists outside a locked-out laundry.

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[47] "A Question of the Hour," *Harper's Weekly*, May 29, 1886, 338.

[48] Ibid, 338.

[49] "Anarchists' Drill, New Tactics," *Harper's Weekly*, May 29, 1886, 351.

Ironically, "The Hardest Blow Yet to the Anarchists," Nast argued, was being deprived of clean clothes, "a privilege of which they were never known to avail themselves."[50] Once disarmed, anarchists were simply ridiculous and repulsive.

As with Most in New York, the police hunted down anarchists in search of the bomb-thrower, eventually, producing eight prominent anarchists within Chicago's radical scene. With the exclusion of Albert Parsons and Samuel Fielden, these men were German by birth or heritage. None was the bomb-thrower, but that was not so important to the police, judiciary, or citizens of Chicago. These men looked like anarchists, spoke like anarchists, and behaved like anarchists. What Americans feared most about the anarchist was his potential to spread dangerous ideas to the uneducated and criminal masses. To justify the court's judgement of death against the Haymarket Eight, *Harper's* journalists argued, "In the commission of such crimes it is those who instill the idea in more ignorant minds, those who justify the deed, who point out the criminal means, and who influence murderous passions to the utmost, who are morally guilty."[51] To *Harper's*, anarchism was a deadly, un-American, communicable disease. The propagation of anarchism was just as morally reprehensible as throwing the bomb. Public speech and the doctrine of "Anarchy [was] on trial."[52]

The American press, too, made the Haymarket Trial about the preservation of "law and order." Overwhelmingly, disruptions of the status quo disturbed Americans more than transgressions against the rights of marginalized groups, such as striking workers. They believed

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[50] Thomas Nast, "The Hardest Blow Yet to the Anarchists," *Harper's Weekly*, June 5, 1886, 363.

[51] "The Anarchists At Chicago," *Harper's Weekly*, October 1, 1887, 702.

[52] "Mr. Grinnell's Case," *Chicago Inter-Ocean,* August 20, 1886, 9.; "The Trial – Verdict of the People," *Chicago Inter-Ocean,* August 20, 1886, 4.

that progress would eventually come if Americans trusted their social and political systems. Thus, politicians and writers often used "anarchy" to describe forces working against "natural" progress. One Reverend Pentecost told *Harper's* that anarchism "[was] simply the bloody subversion of society, and this is something which every humane, wise, and beneficent effort of society will endeavor to settle unmistakably in the interests of the highest common welfare."[53] Throughout this period, anarchism came to represent the violent overthrow of law and order and the onset of chaos. In the eyes of Americans, political theories of anarchism sought to transfer control from the upper and middle classes into the hands of the uneducated and "lesser" classes of society. Preaching "the rightfulness and necessity of immediate and universal anarchy," Pentecost argued, promoted "*the destruction of all law*, and the hand of every man against every other man whom he calls his enemy."[54] Christianity, the Constitution, and the family were at stake. Upholding order meant convicting and executing the Haymarket anarchists. The prosecution achieved this goal with one suicide, three imprisonments, and hangings by November 11, 1887.

Fear of anarchism did not waver after the Haymarket anarchists' bodies went cold. Rather, it went mainstream. In *Harper's*, the anarchist was anywhere and anyone. Americans witnessed anarchists attack royalty, businessmen, and their President from 1887 to 1901. This led *Harper's* journalists to try to identify the anarchists and chase them down.

Chicago police captain Michael J. Schaack's account of Haymarket set the tone for this period, arguing that the nation must stay vigilant. Anarchists were organizing to revive their

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[53] "The Lesson of Chicago," *Harper's Weekly*, November 26, 1887, 850.

[54] Ibid.

influence, he claimed, through "the force of education, the force of agitation, and the force of arms."[55] The creation of anarchist Sunday schools and clubs, he feared, would be crucial to anarchism's spread. If their numbers seemed few, he warned, that was all the worse: doubtless they were operating in secret cells.[56]

Harper's writers agreed with Schaack's assessment and searched high and low for anarchist suspects. From reading *Harper's*, Americans saw countless anarchists lurking in the shadows. One cartoon brought readers "a warning from the past."[57] This image [Figure 2] used the wisdom of President George Washington to alert readers to the existence of "combustibles in every state."[58] A single "spark might set fire" to the Union itself, Washington warned. In this case, the arsonist was a black demonic figure, holding a torch and dagger while sitting atop a powder keg of "anarchy" and "discontent."[59] The slightest misstep might ignite an explosion at any point, destroying all. Unmasking the criminal anarchist seemed like the highest patriotism.

Americans soon came to suspect that anyone they disliked might be an anarchist. For *Harper's*, this list included Democrats, Populists, labor agitators, and much more. *Harper's* journalists turned minor political disagreements into accusations of anarchist beliefs. One common target was socialist Eugene V. Debs. "King Debs," as he was depicted, was branded an anarchist nuisance worthy of contempt.[60] Throughout the 1890s, Debs was *Harper's* prime

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[55] Michael J. Schaack, *Anarchy and Anarchists*, New York: Arno Press (1889), 660.

[56] Ibid, 662-663.

[57] "A Warning From the Past," *Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1894, 625.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] W. A. Rogers, "King Debs," *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1894, 649.

anarchist suspect. They believed he ruled over all strikers and blamed him for the Pullman Strike of 1894. *Harper's* expressed his villainy in a cartoon, where Debs rests on a railroad interchange, stalling legitimate commerce.[61] A week later, Debs was pictured leading a procession of anarchists, complete with an anarchist flag, which covered a mob of black demons with torches. Homegrown though he may have been, Debs was thoroughly un-American, leading a "vanguard of anarchy" itself.[62] With Debsites turning workers against their bosses, Americans felt the hour of class war was near.

Harper's readers encountered strikes like Homestead and Pullman as if they were battlefields. In 1892, the magazine introduced the Homestead Strike with a front-page cartoon showing groups of men armed with rifles while buildings burned in the background. This battle image featured well-dressed Pinkerton troops squaring off against shabby, wild-eyed workers. One journalist described the Pinkerton's defense of capitalist property as "private war."[63] Strike coverage offered Americans an inside look into a supposed war against anarchists.

Showing anarchists as enemy combatants allowed *Harper's* to justify violent and authoritarian suppression of anarchists' activities. *Harper's* writers often justified the suppression of anarchists' right to speech and press. One article recognized the legal difficulties that came with suppressing anarchist newspapers, yet it insisted that anarchists should be punished for "actual incitement of crime."[64] Another *Harper's* writer argued that violent strikers

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[61] Ibid.

[62] W. A. Rogers, "The Vanguard of Anarchy," *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894, 673.

[63] "The Pinkerton Men," *Harper's Weekly*, July 23, 1892, 698.

[64] "The Anarchists," 770.

or anarchists should be charged with treason.[65] The supremacy of law was paramount. Here, a point anarchists needed to be "taught promptly, effectively, and to all. If the first lesson must needs be given by the bayonet and the bullet, it will be in every way cheapest and best to administer it in the first clear case of resistance to authority."[66] To *Harper's*, anarchists were nothing more than "gloomy philosophers of despair," misleading American to their peril.[67] Anything less than enthusiastic approval of capitalism was treasonous behavior.

Such rhetoric intensified with the assassination of President William McKinley by the Polish American Leon Czolgosz, a self-proclaimed anarchist. For Americans, McKinley's killing represented the anarchists' most devastating blow to law and order. "It was not only the President," *Harper's* argued, "it was not only the headship of the republic; it was the sacred majesty of the law" that was shot down.[68] McKinley's death made the anarchist threat to American civilization more urgent. It was more crucial than ever for readers to recognize anarchists, round them up, and stamp them out.

Much of *Harper's* coverage of anarchists at the end of the century provided Americans with an anarchist-spotting instruction manual. Following McKinley's assassination, Czolgosz became the new anarchist archetype. Media coverage of Czolgosz branded him insane and his characterization stuck immediately. The rabid, drunken, rambling anarchist became a shabby, foreign-looking, insane menace. One reporter compared anarchists to "insane patients."[69] "The

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[65] "The Law of Treason," *Harper's Weekly*, October 22, 1892, 1010.

[66] "Suppress the Rebellion," *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1894, 650-651.

[67] "The Anarchists," 770.

[68] "The Shooting of the President," *Harper's Weekly*, September 14, 1901, 908.

[69] "The Red Flag," *Harper's Weekly*, March 4, 1911, 5.

sight of red objects inflames them," he described, "often to an unmanageable degree. Where the red flag is flaunted in assemblages and processions there will be individuals of unstable and excitable minds to whom the sight of the emblem will not be soporific."[70] Down with the Red flag, then, a much-needed measure.

These fears were not restricted to *Harper's* and the *Independent*. American works of literature and film mimicked the sentiments expressed throughout these magazines. Dynamite novels were a popular genre of literature internationally and drew inspirations from real-world anarchists. Richard Savage's *The Anarchist: A Story of To-Day* was an American interpretation of dynamite novel anarchists. Dr. Carl Stein and his anarchist associates aim to steal a rags-to-riches capitalist's fortune to fund the destruction of the United States. In the process, Stein tries to corrupt the capitalist's daughter, Evelyn.[71] To Savage, anarchists were underground labor agitators, plotting to remake American life and corrupt white American families.

Some writers also tried to explain the actions of mobs, strikers, and radicals in psychiatric language. *Harper's* featured a guest article called "The Psychology of Revolution" by Dr. John B. Huber. Huber introduced readers to the inner workings of the human mind in crowds, citing Gustave Le Bon's "epochal work," "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind."[72] This work argued that, "in the crowd the mind of the unit is as that of the savage or of the child; it is basic, primeval, impulsive: he, in the crowd, does things at which, immediately on becoming free of its dreadful contagion, he is amazed... he is precisely as one who has been hypnotized."[73] *Harper*'s

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Richard Savage, *The Anarchist: A Story of To-Day,* New York: F.T. Neely (1894), 33-150.

[72] John B. Huber, "The Psychology of Revolution," *Harper's Weekly*, January 17, 1914, 11.

[73] Ibid.

used this scientific-sounding language to justify Americans' fears of rambunctious anarchist mobs.

The immigrant anarchist archetype played into contemporary concerns about immigration and insanity. After McKinley's assassination, *Harper's* questioned whether anarchists should be allowed into the United States at all. Americans had long debated the viability of immigration, stretching back to the first half century of the Republic. Increasing immigration numbers worsened these fears and some Americans reached their tipping point after the assassination of the President. For *Harper's* especially, there was no room for these insane, murderous anarchists and their kin any longer. This view was best expressed in a cartoon showing Uncle Sam dangling a hideous anarchist off the side of a ship labeled "United States."[74] Americans believed that anarchists had overstayed their welcome. Now tramps became bums became anarchists became immigrants. Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1903 in response to these fears. "The Anarchist Exclusion Act," as it was also known, made anarchists, or belief in anti-government ideas broadly, a deportable offense. It also allowed immigration officials to exclude anarchists from entering the United States.[75]

Following the Anarchist Exclusion Act, the anarchist threat should have faded into the background. It did not. Americans still had to contend with the rising threats of the Socialist Party and the International Workers of the World, the syndicalist labor union open to all except gamblers and bankers. *Harper's* coverage of these radicals borrowed directly from their view of anarchism. The I.W.W., or "Wobblies," were also seen as anarchists and still treated as such. In

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[74] "No Room On This Ship," *Harper's Weekly*, October 5, 1901, 995.

[75] Immigration Act of 1903. Pub. L. No. 162, § 2, 1012 Stat. 1903.

Harper's, Americans were introduced to the Wobbly menace through the trial of two of their members, "Big Bill" Haywood and Charles H. Moyer, for the assassination of Frank Steunenberg, an ex-governor of Idaho in 1906.[76] *Harper's* depicted I.W.W. men as worse than western "bad men," using murder as a labor weapon.[77] The lack of law enforcement in the Western United States, they argued, allowed the I.W.W. to act with abandon, holding "tyrannical sway" over western towns, such as Tonopah and Goldfield.[78] Further thickening the plot, *Harper's* claimed that I.W.W. anarchists were also "Debs socialists."[79] Worse still, Wobblies were boastful menaces to decent workers. *Harper's* showed readers a Wobbly threat to four Tonopah workers, required to join the I.W.W, leave town, or suffer the consequences. The circular boasted the headline, "Come on You Cowardly Curs."[80] Would Americans yield to such insults?

Still, not every anarchist was a threat to *Harper's*. The magazine had a soft spot for Leo Tolstoy. He was wise, well-spoken, well-read. Alas, Tolstoy, also looked like many of the anarchists Americans feared. He lived among Russian peasants and adopted their costume. His long, silver beard covered his contemplative expression. Yet, *Harper's* believed that, "Tolstoi is, by temperament, an extreme individualist; a Teuton or Anglo-Saxon born in a Russian body."[81] These odd beliefs represented an artificial split between anarchists and something else.

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[76] "Murder as Labor Weapon," *Harper's Weekly*, June 2, 1906, 766-768.

[77] "How the West Dealt with One Labor Union," *Harper's Weekly*, June 22, 1907, 908.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid, 909.

[81] "Count Tolstoi on the War," *Harper's Weekly*, August 13, 1904, 1245.

Americans believed that there were violent anarchists, such as Czolgosz, yet, also recognized the existence of so-called philosophical anarchists, who posed less danger than their violent brethren. *Harper's* expressed this view covering the execution of Spanish philosophical anarchist Francisco Ferrer. *Harper's* saw Ferrer, first and foremost, as an educator and teacher. His role in establishing common schools outside of Catholic and Spanish governmental control was admirable by the standards of *Harper's*.[82] They recognized that, "it is unpopular for a government to shoot a schoolmaster, even a dangerous one."[83] While *Harper's* feared anarchists greatly, there was some distance between an educator and a bomb thrower.

American fear of anarchists burned bright across the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Yet, by the end of World War I, anxiety focused on Bolshevism. Readers of *Harper's* did not see much difference between anarchism and Bolshevism. Emma Goldman and John Reed were one and the same.[84] During the Russian Revolution, journalists from *The Independent*, the spiritual successor of *Harper's Weekly*, described conditions in the new Soviet Union as "anarchy."[85] Anarchists remained central to Americans' assessment of Marxist revolutions in Europe.

The ultranationalism of World War I worsened Americans' view of radicals. Anarchists participated in anti-war and anti-conscription movements, further marginalizing them. Tactics that Americans had developed to identify anarchists were now applied to Bolsheviks.[86]

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[82] "Professor Ferrer," *Harper's Weekly*, October 23, 1909, 5.

[83] "Shooting a Schoolmaster," *Harper's Weekly*, October 23, 1909, 5.

[84] "The War on Anarchy," *The Independent*, July 21, 1917, 93.

[85] "Anarchy Reigns in Russia," *The Independent*, November 17, 1917, 313.

[86] Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press (2015), 36-37.

Throughout the years of the first Red Scare, 1917-1921, these comparisons remained. Some events, such as the Kronstadt Rebellion and the Bolshevik suppression of Russian anarchists, made some journalists briefly question these associations.[87] Yet, despite these cases of infighting, *The Independent's* journalists and artists continued to link anarchists, the I.W.W., and Bolsheviks together. In their alarmist article, "Wake Up Americans," *Harper's* described the radical threat as a class war. "They include Bolsheviki; I.W.W. orators, Germans, pro-Germans and near-Germans; anarchists and socialists," they wrote, "grafters and profiteers; drones and failures; kickers and pessimists."[88] That list encapsulated one of the primary problems of the Red Scare: their targets were so broad and had many identifiers. Over four decades, Americans had created a threat with many faces.

During the Red Scare, Americans lacked a unity of vision in their hunt for anarchists and radicals. Unlike the Haymarket bombing, American officials were not able to swiftly produce definite suspects. They resorted to mass arrests of immigrants and those who fit the stereotype of anarchist. Americans faced an overblown threat of their own making. "We don't know how to judge the army of attack," American liberals admitted.[89] Anarchism and its stepchild Bolshevism lurked everywhere.

Thomas Dixon Jr. was another author concerned about radicals. Best known for his novel *The Clansmen* and its film adaptation *The Birth of a Nation*, Dixon wrote frequently about the decline of American civilization. In *Comrades: A Story of Social Adventure in California,* Dixon

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[87] "Bolsheviki and Anarchists," *The Independent*, June 8, 1918, 399.

[88] "Wake Up Americans," *The Independent*, June 7, 1919, 362.

[89] Ibid.

criticized socialism. The novel's protagonist, Norman Worth ventures into a local socialist meeting and becomes entangled in a social experiment to prove socialism's effectiveness. However, this experiment is a ploy devised by the scheming German leader of the socialist club. Under socialist rule, it soon devolves into an authoritarian, polyamorous hell.[90]

After World War I, Dixon's *Comrades* was modified to fit the new radical threat. *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919) warned movie-goers about the dangers of Bolshevik Communism. The plot of *Bolshevism on Trial* remained identical to *Comrades.* However, the final scene was modified to fit with contemporary fears. In this iteration, Wolff, the German conspirator, was revealed to be a Russian spy named Androvich.

Promotional material for the film played into Americans' lasting fears of anarchists. The promotional poster [Figure 3] is bathed in red with shuttered factories looming in the background. The studio, Select Pictures, placed a caricature of Leon Trotsky at the center of the poster. Covered in red and black, Trotsky suffocated the white worker and American industry. Like other racialized groups, Trotsky was depicted as an animal, specifically, a spider. In American contexts, dominant racial groups have depicted marginalized groups in animalistic terms.[84] Animalistic characteristics, among others, ostracized undesirables in American society. This promotional poster also played into anti-Semitic stereotypes. Trotsky was selected as the Bolshevik archetype likely because of his Jewish heritage. On this poster, Trotsky was given a

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[90] Thomas Dixon Jr., *Comrades: A Story of Social Adventure in California*, New York: Grossett and Dunlap Publishers (1909), 173-175.

pronounced nose, ear lobes, and fingernails, which echoed depictions of goblins.[91] This film, like many other media portrayals, linked contemporary fears of anarchism, Bolshevism, and Jews.

The looming threat of social collapse continued to hang over the heads of Americans through the early months of 1920. The First Red Scare ended only after the Red-hunting regime was discredited. After a bomb threat on May Day in 1920 failed to materialize, Americans came to question the validity of a grand anarchist or Bolshevik plot. Unceremoniously, *The Independent* declared the rumored attacks "The Revolution That Was Not."[92] Others though that danger had simply gone underground. The Red Scare did not end without casualty. Many immigrants perceived to be radicals were jailed, harassed, and deported. *The Buford,* sometimes nicknamed the "Red Ark," was the most infamous of these deportations. One film from the period depicted New York police officers waving gleefully as the anarchist menace was shipped off to Russia.[93] Prominent anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were among the hundreds of immigrant radicals deported under the anti-Red regime promoting "normalcy."[94]

After 1920, American fears of anarchism largely vanished. For fifty years, American elites had constructed archetypes of anarchists and used them to suppress anything they thought matched those archetypes. These images were not stagnant and often borrowed from other contemporary fears, such as fears of immigrants, tramps, or militant workers. Readers of

[91] "Bolshevism on Trial", directed by Harry Knoles, written by Harry Chandlee and Thomas Dixon Jr., featuring Robert Frazer, Leslie Stowe, and Howard Truesdale, (1919; Fort Lee, New Jersey, Select Pictures Corporation), 1:07:50.

[92] "The Revolution That Was Not," *The Independent*, May 8, 1920, 213.

[93] Stewart Bird and Debora Shaffer, dirs. *The Wobblies*, 1979, 1:21:52.

[94] Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Young J. Edgar: Hoover, the Red Scare, and the Assault on Civil Liberties*, New York: Carol and Graf Publishers (2007), 155-159.

Harper's Weekly chased these shadowy anarchists through the decades. While their fears of anarchists varied, they persisted in the American mind. The scripts Americans developed to identify anarchists were also applied to others, such as Bolsheviks and the I.W.W.

The First Red Scare, one historian argues, was "the result of wartime developments."[95] Yet this study has shown that the rhetoric of the Red Scare developed slowly as the war between labor and capital in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era raged on. American fears of left-wing radicals were constantly rationalized and reshaped as the "threat" morphed and changed throughout the period. The First Red Scare marked the escalation, not the birth, of anti-leftist radicalism in American politics – a threat to democracy that persists down to today.

This study is merely a first step to understanding American fears of anarchists leading up to the Red Scare and how those beliefs inspired later moral panics. In that sense, it is as much about fear, public backlash, and the construction of narratives as it is about anarchism itself. In his book "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Richard Hofstadter addresses the role fear plays in the politics of "more or less normal people."[96] Paranoia remains a common through line in American political life he contends. As Hofstadter argues, the "Paranoid Style" is not limited to one time, place, or event.[97] Paranoid politics have been integral to American political processes since the nation's founding. To study American politics, historians must engage with this fear and paranoia. American political life has rarely existed without the influence of a self-

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[95] Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade Against Radicalism*: *New York During the Red Scare, 1914-1924,* Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press (1972), 1.

[96] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1965), 4.

[97] Ibid, 6.

made monster, breathing down its neck. That makes understanding the anarchists and their adversaries not marginal, but central, to understanding the American project itself.

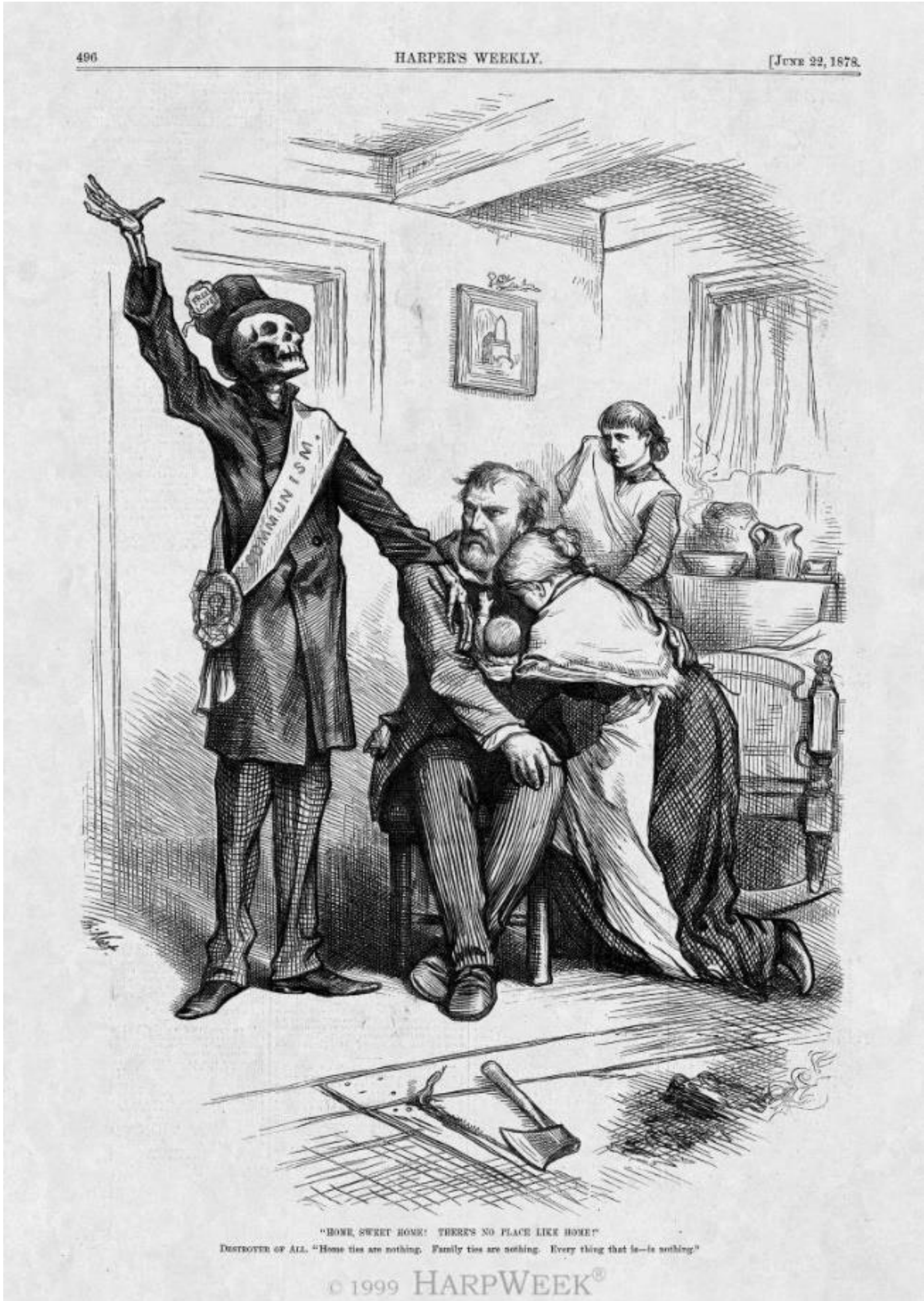

Figure 1: Thomas Nast cartoon appearing in *Harper's Weekly*, June 22, 1878.

HARPER'S WEEKLY

A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

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NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 7, 1894.

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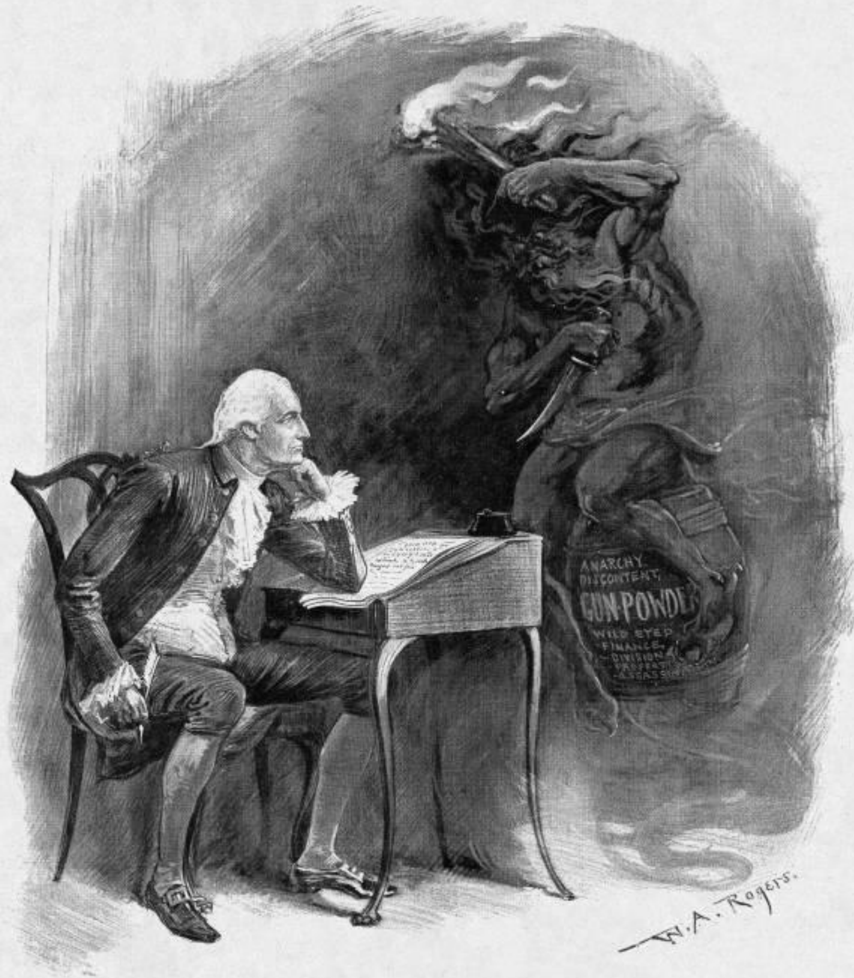

A WARNING FROM THE PAST.

"THERE ARE COMBUSTIBLES IN EVERY STATE which a spark might set fire to . . . . We ought not, therefore, to sleep nor to slumber. Vigilance in watching and vigor in acting is become, in my opinion, indispensably necessary."—*Extract from a Letter of George Washington to General Henry Knox, December 26, 1786.*

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Figure 2: W.A. Rogers cartoon appearing on the front page of *Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1894.

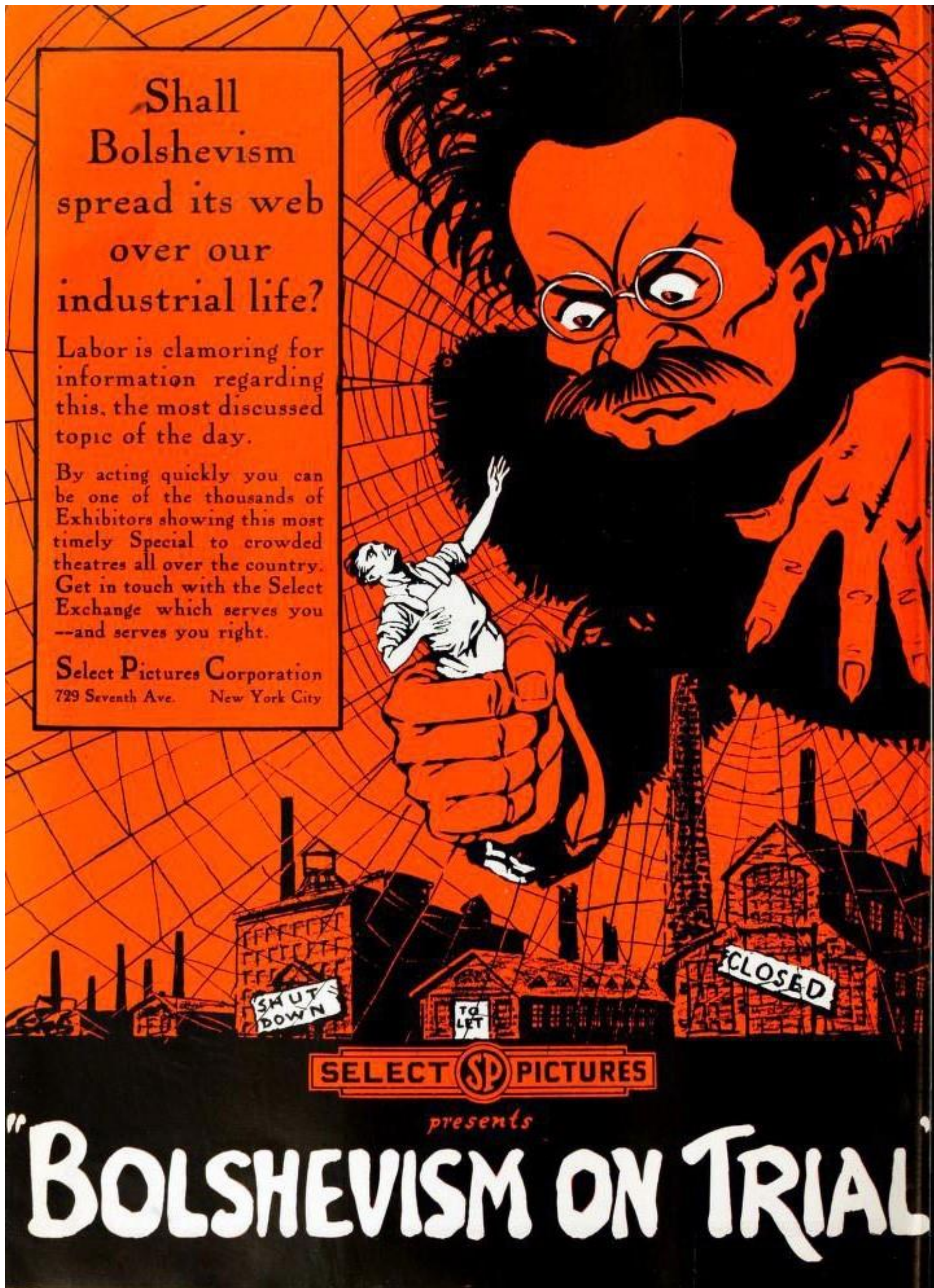

Figure 3: Promotional poster for the 1919 film "Bolshevism on Trial."

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