

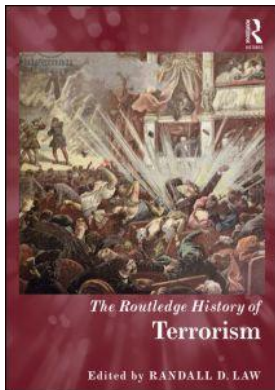
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## **The Routledge History of Terrorism**

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### **Anarchist Terrorism in the United States**

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## ANARCHIST TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES

*Thai Jones*

For Americans, anarchism and terror share an enduring bond. The grenade-wielding anarchist – impoverished, foreign, insane – remains an instantly recognizable cultural construct even today. A century ago it was a central social archetype. “Bombs and anarchists are inseparable in the minds of most of us,” a New York journalist wrote during World War I. “Mysterious destroyers of life and of property, merciless men who have pledged their lives or their knives or their guns to some nefarious cause or another.”<sup>1</sup>

Always small in numbers, anarchists in the United States were brash and active nonconformists and dissenters. Opposed to government and organized religion, their controversial beliefs ensured an outsized presence in national political debates. Though they advocated for the working class, they usually operated outside of the institutional boundaries of labor organizations and often earned hostility from the nation’s most prominent unions.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, a series of spectacular dynamitings and assassinations from 1886 to 1920 elevated these adherents of an egalitarian political philosophy to the level of a fearsome “Red Peril.” Yet, though some of these acts of “propaganda by deed” targeted leading figures or led to significant loss of life, the aggregate death toll of the campaign was paltry when placed in context with the rampant violence of the industrial era. Furthermore, the turn to violence was usually disastrous for the workers’ cause, ushering in severe reprisals and allowing authorities to discredit all local radicals. Instead of sheer numbers or political success, then, it was the continuous din of supposed conspiracies, “discovered” plots, and thwarted actions, drummed up by law enforcement officials and reported eagerly in the newspapers, that made the anarchist in the United States a bugbear par excellence.

Without assaying a formal definition of anarchism, it is nevertheless necessary to specify the field of discourse for this inquiry. While the label “anarchist” was embraced as a positive descriptor by those who identified themselves with the movement and political philosophy of anarchism, the word is also an epithet that has been employed widely and indiscriminately since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Journalists, police officials, and politicians rarely cared to differentiate precisely between radical factions, so that the term “anarchist” was habitually applied to union leaders, socialists, communists, and others. In the popular consciousness, of course, its meaning is even more broad: anarchy is merely a synonym for chaos.

As a result of this undifferentiated use of the term, American terrorists ranging from the libertarian Timothy McVeigh and the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan to the trade unionist Structural Iron Workers and the Leninist Weather Underground have all been described as proponents and practitioners of anarchism.

Adding further to the difficulty of definition is the fact that characterizations of anarchism proposed by the highest authorities make no mention of violence of any sort, let alone terrorist violence. Of these, without a doubt the most famous definition was offered by Peter Kropotkin, a Russian aristocrat who dedicated his life to the cause, in the 1910 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Anarchism . . . the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.

It was only near the end of the 5,000-word-long entry that Kropotkin grudgingly acknowledged that well-publicized attacks by anarchists had “created in the general public the impression that violence is the substance of anarchism, a view repudiated by its supporters.”<sup>3</sup>

But no amount of repudiation could counteract the view – dinned in to the popular mind by constant repetition – that anarchism and terror were inextricably linked. A small minority of violent extremists, and their spectacular actions, shaped the reputation of the entire movement. For those who chose to call themselves anarchists, this would be an insoluble publicity problem. For historians it remains a fascinating paradox: that the very political philosophy that advocates the most humane ideals of equality and self-government should simultaneously possess such a notorious legacy of terror and assassination.

One last problem must be considered before transitioning to an examination of specific events. More perhaps than any other radical movement in history, anarchism was international. Ideologically, anarchists rejected the legitimacy of national governments and often identified themselves as citizens of the world. Leading anarchist organizers found themselves hounded from state to state – Mikhail Bakunin literally circumnavigated the globe in search of asylum – while movement journals were much more likely to discuss foreign developments than to deign to mention local affairs. Though the United States boasted a domestic tradition of individualist anarchism stemming from the thought of Josiah Warren and Henry David Thoreau, the anarchists who would come to be identified with terrorist violence were often European or Russian immigrants. As a result, a discussion of American anarchist terror that restricts itself to the geographic boundaries of the United States inevitably constricts the subject matter in ways that run counter to its history. (Chapter 8 by Richard Bach Jensen examines anarchist terror in these years from a worldwide, particularly European perspective.)

With these caveats in mind, this inquiry will focus on the facts and controversies surrounding the employment of terrorism by anarchists in the United States during the period from the 1880s through the Red Scare of 1919–20. After discussing the most significant terrorist incidents in those years, I will examine the secondary instances – failed attacks, suspected plots, newspaper hysteria, political agitations, and police provocations – that did so much to magnify the sinister reputation of the anarchist movement. Finally, I will consider the legacy of American anarchism’s reign of terror.

The appearance in the United States of anarchists prepared to use bombs and pistols to achieve their ends was neither the first nor the last time in American history when terrorist

violence would be employed as a political tool. Writing at the end of the 1960s, Richard Hofstadter, the eminent historian, had rediscovered a latent aspect of the US tradition. “We are now quite ready to see that there is more violence in our national heritage than our proud, sometimes smug, national self-image admits of,” he wrote. “Americans certainly have reason to inquire whether, when compared with other advanced industrial nations, they are not a people of exceptional violence.”<sup>4</sup>

Though noting a tradition of urban riots stretching back to the colonial era, Hofstadter argued that the vast majority of American violence had been conservative in nature: employed by owners against workers, native-born against immigrants, and – most calamitously – by white supremacists against Indians and African Americans.<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, anarchists in the 1870s and 1880s did represent something new. Rarely had working-class spokespeople advocated so stridently for the forcible abolition of wage labor and even the national state. These anarchists possessed other troubling characteristics, as well. They were armed with a newly invented weapon – dynamite – as well as a mature political philosophy capable of devastating critiques of the system of capitalist production. And, unlike many previous advocates for social change, many of them were recent arrivals to the country agitating among fellow immigrants in suddenly teeming and uncontrollable industrial metropolises.

### **The origins of American anarchism**

As early as 1791, Jeremy Bentham was defining the anarchist as anyone who “denies the validity of the law . . . and calls upon all mankind to rise up in a mass, and resist the execution of it.”<sup>6</sup> By mid-century, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had taken the next step and had identified himself as an anarchist.<sup>7</sup>

But revolutionary anarchism only emerged as an international mass movement in the aftermath of the Paris Commune of 1871. Taking a romanticized view of the events in Paris, anarchists in the United States soon canonized these few stunning weeks as a moment when the proletariat of the French capital conjured up and then defended a democratic free city against the forces of reaction. Though few communards considered themselves anarchists, their legacy was quickly claimed by Mikhail Bakunin in his long-running struggle with Karl Marx for the leadership of international working-class radicalism. As against Marx’s vision of structured, gradual change, Bakunin advocated direct action and immediate insurrection. The Commune, though unsuccessful, was taken as evidence that such methods might succeed.<sup>8</sup>

In the following decades, radicals in Europe and America divided over questions of tactics and strategy. Most socialist parties took the Parisians’ failure as a sign that their insurrection had been premature. Until World War I, socialists and trade unionists of Europe and America would commit themselves to gradual reforms achieved by electoral means and workplace organizing. Anarchists took a different lesson. Although some urged collective action and others proposed to take individual steps, all agreed that the time had come for deeds to further the struggle. The proletarian and peasant masses were ready to rise up, they believed, if only a few courageous anarchists would appear to inspire them to action. To this end, anarchists throughout Europe began engaging in abortive revolts, assassination attempts, and industrial sabotage. “One such act,” Peter Kropotkin wrote in 1880, “may, in a few days, make more propaganda than thousands of pamphlets.”<sup>9</sup>

Anarchist assassinations had begun to roil the capitals of Europe in 1878. The year 1880 saw the creation of the Social Revolutionary Club in New York City, the first anarchist organization in the United States. Though no acts of terrorism were associated with the group, its members committed themselves to self-defense and cheered the successful assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

In the United States, the foremost early advocate of “propaganda by deed” was Johann Most, a former member of the German Reichstag who arrived in New York City in 1882. Though he never personally engaged in an act of terror, the violence of his rhetoric in favor of revolutionary action earned him unparalleled notoriety. In speeches during a nationwide tour, he advocated targeted assassinations of leading politicians and capitalists that would inspire workers to resist the degradations of wage labor. Ominously following up these exhortations by working at an explosives factory, Most would publish a technical booklet on explosives. With a wild black beard grown to mask a disfigured jaw, Most’s visage – more than that of any other individual – would become the inspiration for the archetypal figure of the anarchist bomber.<sup>10</sup>

In 1883, American anarchists held a national convention in Pittsburgh. Johann Most joined others there – including Albert Parsons and August Spies, both of Chicago – in drafting a statement for the movement. Opening with a quotation from the Declaration of Independence, the Pittsburgh Manifesto combined Marxist theory with American radical traditions. But it was most notable for its explicit insistence on the value of deeds. It was “self-evident,” the framers claimed, that “the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie must have a violent revolutionary character.” First among its stated principles was “destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.”<sup>11</sup>

Whether such rhetoric alienated, inspired, or even reached the American audience (considering how few newspapers printed the anarchists’ declaration) is impossible to tell, but it is clear in retrospect that these years were something of a heyday for anarchism in the United States. Adherents numbered in the tens of thousands, vibrant anarchist periodicals existed in several cities, and radicals across the country faced the decision of accepting gradualist socialist party strategies or embracing the call to action embodied by the new faction. Although opponents would perennially brand anarchism as a foreign contagion brought to American shores, it was actually the experience of repression and exploitation in the United States that turned most apolitical immigrants into homegrown radicals. And anarchism seemed to them an attractive doctrine.

This changed dramatically in Chicago in 1886, when mass strikes for an eight-hour workday climaxed in a series of violent confrontations between radicals and authorities. On the evening of May 4, a phalanx of police charged a peaceful demonstration near the city’s Haymarket Square. During the skirmish, an explosive device flew into the midst of the officers’ formation, killing seven policemen. Though authorities could not identify the bomb thrower, they quickly arrested eight leading local anarchists and charged them with conspiracy to murder. Following a six-week trial, the defendants were found guilty. Four were hanged; a fifth evaded the noose by committing suicide in his cell, and the three others were sentenced to long prison terms.<sup>12</sup>

Although working-class animosity against elites and their public servants had grown during the strike wave, this deliberate and deadly attack on individual officers in the Haymarket was itself enough to make many activists forswear anarchism. But the repressions that followed vastly magnified the disaster for radicals. Detectives abandoned all pretense of

civil liberties, raiding apartments without warrants, holding suspects incommunicado, and freely employing “third degree” methods. A prominent social theorist who visited Chicago in the days following the explosion reported witnessing a “period of police terrorism” in the second city.<sup>13</sup> Newspapers around the nation fomented a Red Scare that discovered terrorist plots in every immigrant district. In this sense, working-class organizers realized, the bomb had been a windfall for those who opposed the labor movement.

With Haymarket a rough pattern had emerged: violent acts – either committed by or attributed to anarchists – would be followed by sharp Red Scares, when newspaper sensationalism would foment anti-radical feelings and law enforcement officials would take extraordinary new measures in the vain hopes of preventing future outrages.

### **Anarchist attacks and state responses**

If a majority of Americans accepted mainstream depictions of anarchists as mad bombers, there were others who understood the Haymarket affair differently. In Rochester, New York, a young Emma Goldman – soon to be the most notorious American anarchist of all – was radicalized by the martyrdom of the executed Chicago leaders. Though he had come from a political family in Russia, Alexander Berkman also experienced Haymarket as a catalyst for revolution. In New York City, Berkman and Goldman were influenced by Johann Most to embrace the tactic of “propaganda by deed.”

The 1890s witnessed a massive escalation of anarchist terrorism worldwide, from Europe to Australia, and the United States was not spared. In 1892, when Carnegie Steel locked out its workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, Berkman and Goldman saw an opportunity to put theory into action. After failing to construct a workable dynamite bomb, they procured a revolver and dagger. Berkman traveled to Pittsburgh and gained entry – on July 23 – to the office of Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie’s chief lieutenant. Berkman fired three times and then wrestled his target to the ground, stabbing him repeatedly, before he himself was subdued by some workmen.

Frick survived. Following a two-hour trial, Berkman would spend the next fourteen years in prison. For the *attentat* (the anarchist term for a bombing or an assassination attempt) he was unrepentant. But if he had thought to aid the cause of the workers at Homestead, he had seriously miscalculated. The strikers expressed only disgust for his actions, which had severely discredited their own movement. Within a few months, their union would be broken. Even Johann Most, the longtime apostle of propaganda by deed, decried Berkman’s attempt as an impulsive mistake – a betrayal that would earn him a public horsewhipping at the hands of Emma Goldman.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the 1890s, the campaign of anarchist violence throughout Europe ensured a continuous paranoia among politicians, elites, and law enforcement officials. In 1900, when Italian King Umberto I was assassinated by an anarchist who had lived for several years in Paterson, New Jersey, fear of domestic terror spiked further. This anxiety was then disastrously confirmed on September 6, 1901, when US President William McKinley was shot twice at close range by an assassin during a visit to Buffalo, New York. The killer, Leon Czolgosz, was sentenced to death by electrocution after an eight-hour trial.

The assassination of a president demanded a systemic response beyond merely punishing the individual attacker. Officials insisted that anarchist assassinations were not political acts inspired by economic and social conditions but rather the violent expressions of defective minds or the result of lax immigration policies that allowed entry to foreign radicals.

Within a year of the president's murder, individual states had passed statutes rendering the public expression of anarchist ideas illegal.<sup>15</sup>

Ignoring the awkward fact that Czolgosz had been born in the United States, nativist activists used his deed to further confirm their long-held vision of anarchism as a foreign contagion. In 1903, the US Congress passed sweeping immigration reform. Widely referred to as the Anarchist Exclusion Act, the new law provided:

That no person who disbelieves in or who is opposed to all organized government, or who is a member of or affiliated with any organization entertaining or teaching such disbelief in or opposition to all organized government . . . shall be permitted to enter the United States.

Though enforced on only a handful of occasions (only thirty-eight anarchists were deported in all the years before the Red Scare of 1919–20), the Anarchist Exclusion Act nevertheless represented a landmark in US government policy: it was the first time that immigration restrictions had been set solely on the basis of ideas.<sup>16</sup>

Although the nation's industrial cities would remain the storm centers for anarchism, a kindred movement was growing in western coalfields, lumber camps, and mining districts. Unions in these extractive industries were rough, militant, and casual with violence. Most members had had lifelong experience with rifles and dynamite. Attacks on company property had been commonplace in labor conflicts for decades. Although they tended not to identify themselves as anarchists per se, they embraced key anarchist tactics and concepts, including syndicalism, direct action, and industrial sabotage.

In 1905, representatives of these unions gathered together in Chicago to create a new labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). "Big Bill" Haywood, the delegate from the Western Federation of Miners, called the meeting as "the Continental Congress of the Working Class." For the next decade and a half, the IWW members – or Wobblies, as they were called – would become the nation's most sensationalized and feared working-class organization. Though they would be on the receiving end of far more violence than they ever perpetrated, the Wobblies struck a militant tone from the first sentence of the preamble of their constitution, which stridently declared: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life."<sup>17</sup>

On December 30, 1905, the new organization faced its first test when a bomb killed Frank Steunenberg, a former governor of Idaho with an anti-labor reputation. The bomber, Harry Orchard, was quickly detained and agreed to turn state's evidence. Haywood and other officials of the Western Federation of Miners were arrested and charged with the murder. The Haymarket scenario seemed to be playing out for a second time. Prominent union leaders were being prosecuted for a crime that they had not personally committed. In effect, they were on trial for their beliefs. Representing the defense, Clarence Darrow asserted as much in the courtroom, telling jurors that it was the labor movement itself that was being assailed. The stunning not-guilty verdict was understood to prove the great strides that workers' organizations had taken in the intervening two decades since Haymarket.<sup>18</sup>

Five years later – on October 1, 1910 – an enormous explosion demolished the offices of the *Los Angeles Times*, killing a score of workers and injuring dozens more. Although early suspicion fell on local anarchists, an international investigation eventually resulted in the

capture of labor leaders connected with the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers.<sup>19</sup> Although neither the assassination of Steunenberg nor the attack on the virulently anti-labor *Los Angeles Times* had ended up being the work of avowed anarchists, the associations between working-class organizations and violent tactics no doubt further cemented the association of anarchists and terrorists in the public mind.

Back east, these years had brought several spectacular anarchist failures. March 1908 began with the Chicago police chief opening his front door to discover a ragged-looking assailant poised to attack. In the ensuing melee, the suspected anarchist was killed, the chief received a stab wound, and various bystanders were shot. Later during that same month, a second Haymarket horror was avoided by the narrowest of margins. After NYPD officers had violently dispersed a rally of socialists in New York City's Union Square, an anarchist attempted to toss a grenade into the midst of a formation of police. The device – a brass bed knob crammed with broken nails, nitroglycerine, and gunpowder – detonated a moment early, killing the attacker while leaving his intended victims dazed but unharmed.<sup>20</sup>

These assassination attempts raised calls for stricter enforcement of the Anarchist Exclusion Act and prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to attempt to block radical publications from the mails. “When compared with the suppression of anarchy, every other question sinks into insignificance,” Roosevelt warned in a message to Congress. “The Anarchist is the enemy of humanity, the enemy of all mankind.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the president's warnings, radicals continued to perpetrate propaganda of the word and deed. A huge resurgence of anarchist activity occurred in New York City in 1914, fostered by police brutality and a crushing industrial depression. When news arrived in the metropolis that John D. Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel and Iron Company had been responsible for a military-style assault on striking coal miners in Ludlow, Colorado, radicals in the city demanded revenge. Two women and eleven children had been killed in the coalfields; loud calls for revenge could be heard from around the country. On Independence Day, 1914, a devastating explosion on Lexington Avenue, in East Harlem, panicked the holiday-seeking crowds. A large tenement house crumbled halfway to the street. In the wreckage, police discovered the bodies of three well-known anarchists. Their bomb had gone off accidentally; no one knew for sure what the target had been, but speculation immediately centered on the Rockefeller estate in nearby Westchester County.<sup>22</sup>

Responding quickly to this latest anarchist threat, New York City founded a secret policing unit known as the Anarchist Squad, which was dedicated to combating future acts of propaganda by deed. Special officers insinuated themselves into radical groups using elaborate disguises and subterfuges and the latest surveillance technologies. Despite these efforts, the city soon found itself in the midst of the most virulent bombing campaign in its history. On October 13, 1914, bombs targeted St. Patrick's Cathedral and St. Alphonsus' Church, site of a mass arrest of homeless activists. On November 11, the anniversary of the Haymarket executions, unknown bombers attacked the Bronx County Court House. A few days later, another bomb was disabled before it exploded underneath a seat in a courtroom in Lower Manhattan.<sup>23</sup>

Unable to prevent these attacks or convict any perpetrators, the Anarchist Squad turned to other means. Officers who infiltrated radical organizations usually made themselves the most vocal militants in the group. Their most extreme use of the methods of the agent provocateur occurred in 1915, when a detective convinced two youths – Carmine Carbone and Frank Abarno – to detonate a bomb in St. Patrick's Cathedral. The provocateur planned the attack, provided the explosives, and – according to the radicals – even lit the fuse, only to



have other detectives race in and “prevent the attack.” Despite the obviousness of the frame-up, a judge sentenced the two defendants to six to twelve years in Sing Sing Prison.<sup>24</sup>

### **The first Red Scare**

This offensive was just one front in a national campaign of radical terrorism. In these years, anarchist followers of Luigi Galleani, an Italian immigrant who embraced the ideology of propaganda by deed, were likely responsible for bombs that exploded in Boston, Milwaukee, Washington, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. Like Johann Most before him, Galleani was an ardent proponent of propaganda by deed. His published works included hagiographies of anarchist martyrs and detailed instructions for the construction of dynamite bombs. Unlike Herr Most, Galleani also put these fiery words into practice. In the coming years, he and his circle of followers would be behind the most audacious acts of anarchist terrorism in the nation’s history.<sup>25</sup>

As World War I progressed in Europe, the Anarchist Squad’s mission widened to encompass investigations of German saboteurs and Russian Bolsheviks. When the United States joined the conflict in April 1917, the full force of the US government directed itself at subduing domestic dissent. New deportation laws, as well as the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918, drastically increased the federal bureaucracy’s repressive powers against free speech. Suddenly, it was illegal to use “disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the form of government of the U.S. or the constitution of the U.S.” Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were imprisoned for urging audiences to avoid the draft. Citizen vigilance committees instigated mob justice. Pacifists were attacked and jailed. Radical publications were banned from the mails. Wobbly agitators were tortured and lynched throughout the western states. And even respectable radicals, including Eugene V. Debs – a perennial Socialist Party candidate for the US presidency – found themselves behind bars.<sup>26</sup>

Nor did armistice bring peace to the home front. Instead, 1919 witnessed the apex of industrial conflict in US history, as the dislocations of war, mass unemployment, race riots, and radical militancy involved more than four million workers in strikes and brought the spectacle of class warfare to cities from Boston to Seattle. Combined with the frightening specter of the Bolshevik Revolution, these disturbances themselves nearly ensured a panicked anti-radical reaction.

Then a brazen campaign of bombings all but guaranteed it. Around May Day, a first attempt to send mail bombs to dozens of targets – ranging from prominent politicians and capitalists to minor officials who had somehow earned the anarchists’ enmity – was averted by alert postal workers. A month later, powerful time bombs detonated in seven cities. Among the damaged targets was the Washington, DC, home of US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Communiqués found near each of the explosions were signed by “The Anarchist Fighters,” a clue that they had been set by followers of Galleani. Historians have estimated that the well-coordinated, multi-city attack would have required the work of at least fifty determined conspirators.<sup>27</sup>

In short order, the most notorious anarchists in the United States were all deported. Luigi Galleani was returned to Italy just weeks after the bombings. Six months later, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and hundreds of others were transhipped from New York harbor to the Soviet Union. In December 1919 and January 1920, the attorney general and his protégé J. Edgar Hoover authorized a series of mass arrests on radical groups that netted roughly 10,000 arrests.

### **Anarchism roars into the 1920s**

The Palmer Raids marked the high-water mark in the decades-long conflict between anarchist terrorism and government authorities in the United States. Yet, even as the Red Scare of 1919–20 was reaching its peak, the tide was set to recede. Official obsession was already transferring itself from anarchism to communism: the persistence of the Soviet regime ensured that the newly created Communist Party USA would soon replace the unaffiliated, decentralized anarchists as the red menace of the twentieth century. Relative prosperity in the 1920s would make industrial relations a less central social concern. And a reaction against the severity of Palmer's and Hoover's methods would encourage federal agencies to keep their anti-radical contingency plans safely away from public scrutiny.<sup>28</sup>

In these circumstances, the most devastating pre-9/11 terrorist attack in US history came like an aftershock rather than as a bolt from the blue. At 12:01 p.m., on September 16, 1920, dynamite in a horse-drawn cart detonated halfway between the Wall Street headquarters of the House of Morgan and the federal treasury. The timing was cataclysmic. It was lunch hour and the street was packed. Nearly forty people were killed, another 400 harmed. Historians suspect that the followers of Galleani had perpetrated this attack – as they had the previous year's campaign. But despite a massive manhunt, the actual identities of the perpetrators were never discovered. Perhaps this explains why despite a terrible death toll, the Wall Street bombing was soon forgotten, while another anarchist controversy from the same years has remained a touchstone in the history of the American Left.<sup>29</sup>

Boston had long been a center of anarchist terrorism. That's where Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti settled when they both arrived in the United States in 1908. Their experiences in America had radicalized them into firm devotees of propaganda by deed. Among Boston anarchists they were well known. Those beliefs had undoubtedly drawn them into terrorist conspiracies, but that did not necessarily make them guilty of a fatal payroll robbery that occurred south of Boston on April 15, 1920. Nevertheless, the two anarchists were tried for murder, convicted, and sentenced to death. Evidence for their participation in the robbery was contradictory, and their trial had been poorly handled. Dragging on for most of the decade, their appeals would garner unprecedented worldwide attention. As with the Haymarket defendants forty years earlier, the anarchists were to die for their beliefs rather than for their supposed crime. The weeks leading up to their execution – on August 23, 1927 – were marked by bombings in cities in the United States and around the world.<sup>30</sup>

Although the global anarchist movement would arguably reach the pinnacle of its relevance during the 1930s with the Spanish Civil War, in the United States the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti marked the last notable episode in a long-running drama of terrorism, paranoia, repression, and fear.

### **Anarchist tendencies in the New Left**

Violence continued as a central strain in American life throughout the twentieth century. The labor conflicts of the 1930s were as bloody as anything that had come before. Civil rights activists in the North and South during the 1950s and 1960s faced the threat of beatings and murder. But it was the Black Power and anti-war movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s that carried radical violence to the same pitch – and beyond – that had characterized the anarchist years. According to the Treasury Department, from the start of 1969 to mid-April 1970 there were 40,934 bombings, attempted bombings, and bomb

threats, leading to forty-three deaths and almost \$22 million in damage. Out of this total, 975 had been explosive, as opposed to incendiary, bombings.<sup>31</sup>

This was propaganda by deed on a scale rarely, if ever, attempted by US radicals before or since. And there were certainly those who believed they were seeing another resurgence of the black flag of anarchism. When the Weather Underground claimed credit for setting a bomb inside a women's lavatory in the Pentagon, the *New York Times* was quick to denounce ultra-radicals who hoped to use "acts of terror" to recruit followers into "their anarchist ranks." Others, too, equated this sort of violence with the direct action tactics of a previous era. Fred Hampton, leader of the Black Panthers in Chicago, was appalled by the plans by the Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society to confront the city's police with the militant demonstrations that would come to be known as the Days of Rage. Fearful for the reprisals that would fall on his own constituency, Hampton denounced the protest as "anarchistic, opportunistic, individualistic, chauvinistic, and Custeristic."<sup>32</sup>

There were anarchist factions affiliated with the anti-war movement. In New York City's Lower East Side, a group known as the Motherfuckers embraced direct action with a series of provocative gestures. Most notable among these was the dumping of garbage into the fountain at Lincoln Center in the spirit of "cultural exchange." But their bent was artistic and counter-cultural rather than political and revolutionary, and their methods involved figurative as opposed to literal dynamite. Anarchist foremothers, particularly Emma Goldman, were lovingly resurrected as heroines by the feminist movement of the 1970s. But the Weather Underground and Black Panthers considered themselves to be engaged in a revolutionary nationalist struggle along an ideological axis that encompassed Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao but held no room for the ideas of Berkman or Kropotkin. A saying of the period encapsulated their stance on the matter: anarchist by choice, communist by necessity.<sup>33</sup>

### **Anarchism in the age of neo-liberalism**

In a political milieu still largely defined by a Manichean divide between capitalism and communism, anarchism did not seem to provide most activists in the United States with a practical alternative. This changed dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Beginning in the 1990s, anarchist-identified protest groups emerged once again as a visible radical faction. The 1999 showdown in Seattle between police and demonstrators protesting the globalization policies of the World Trade Organization marked the first time in decades that tactics of direct action had been directly linked to recognizably anarchist ideas. Embracing Internet technologies that could facilitate leaderless, or horizontal, organizing, the new activists reflected the influence of anarcho-feminism and tended to be far more sensitive than their classical forebears to questions of racism and patriarchy. Accompanying the rise of this new breed of anarchist came the inevitable response by authorities. For the first time in decades, Americans regularly began to read about anarchist plotters and the law enforcement officials who were working to thwart them.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning with Henry David Thoreau's experiments at Walden, an ecological critique had always been central to anarchist political philosophy. Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, published in 1912, argued for a revolutionary re-imagining of social spaces that would replace global commerce with self-sufficient regional communes. On the individual level, this new system would have also replaced the drudgery of factory labor with a diversity of employment for every citizen. Writing in the US postwar period, Murray Bookchin

formally placed ecology at the center of anarchist thought, arguing that environmental crises and social conflicts were inseparably linked. But it was the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF) that translated these theoretical leanings into direct action. Since 1979, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, actions by these and other groups have been responsible for more than \$100 million in damage to international corporations, lumber companies, animal testing facilities, and genetic research firms.<sup>35</sup>

The Occupy Wall Street movement of late 2011 and early 2012 represented by far the largest florescence of anarchist thought and action since 1919. From New York City to Oakland, California, and in thousands of cities and towns in between – and, indeed, around the globe – protesters against globalization, corporate ecological depredations, political corruption, and a constellation of other issues joined in a leaderless, decentralized movement that demonstrated all of the vital possibilities – and many of the limitations – inherent to anarchist politics. Although few of the tens of thousands of participants in the Occupy encampments, demonstrations, and related activities would have self-identified as anarchists, they were all nevertheless utilizing anarchist practices and ideas. The decision to occupy and liberate a literal space within a capitalist city harkened back to the days of the Paris Commune. Modes of governance – ranging from the nightly held general assemblies to the volunteer-run kitchens, libraries, and classrooms – were all practical reflections of the most deeply held tenets of anarchist thought. Refusing pressures to nominate leaders or an official platform gave the movement flexibility and a creative spirit, while also drawing frustrated critique from mainstream media.

One tactic of classical anarchism which the Occupy Movement eschewed was propaganda by deed. Although street demonstrations often became confrontational and frequently featured violence against property and police, at no time did participants decide to attempt a terrorist action. Law enforcement officials made several highly publicized arrests during the months-long movement, and news media frequently announced the foiling of anarchist bomb plots. But without a single exception, these supposed terrorist plots had been the work of agents provocateurs. Much like the case of Carbone and Abarno in 1914, undercover police had planned the attacks and supplied the materiel, only to have their colleagues swoop in at the last second to “foil” the plot.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusions

Looking back over the history of anarchist terrorism in the United States, the use by government of agents provocateurs forms one of the most notable themes. This is not to deny the agency of radical anarchists. From Alexander Berkman to the followers of Galleani, there have always been individual anarchists determined to translate the violent rhetoric of bomb talk into the literal employment of explosives. But, even taken together, their actions hardly account for the bloodcurdling reputation that anarchism in America has incurred. To understand anarchism’s place in the nation’s cultural memory, it is necessary also to include the vastly more numerous incidents that were either planned by government agents or invented out of whole cloth by politicians or journalists.

This phenomenon was well understood by anarchists themselves, who were constantly aware of the spies and eavesdroppers in their midst. Furthermore, it is manifested by the fact that the possibility of provocateur action inevitably accompanied an attack that couldn’t be precisely ascribed to the hand of an anarchist. This category includes many of the most notorious acts of anarchist terror in US history: the Haymarket bomb, the Lexington Avenue

explosion in 1914, the Preparedness Day bombing of 1916, and even the Wall Street bombing of 1920. The hand of Pinkertons and other provocateurs was suspected by radicals at the time of all these acts. These claims obviously were self-serving for those who might potentially stand accused of murder, but their existence nevertheless reflects a widespread reality of official provocation, and historians cannot conscientiously reject them out of hand.

The anarchist movement in the United States has always related to the contours of the American scene. Although detractors invariably have seen it as a foreign import – the handiwork of “outside agitators” – in fact, it was shaped to a large degree by domestic economic and political relations. For every Johann Most who came to the United States as a committed European radical, there were numerous Albert Parsons and Emma Goldmans who were radicalized by the iniquities and oppression that they witnessed here. Although the anarchists were deeply connected to international affairs and considered themselves to be citizens of the world participating in a global movement, their politics and activism were local in their goals and tactics.

The anarchist use of terrorism – or propaganda by deed – especially in the years 1886 to 1920, reflected this dichotomy. Political assassinations and the targeting of innocent civilians were prevalent throughout Europe in these years. Numerous attempts were made by radicals on the lives of tsars, kings, and prime ministers. When these same tactics appeared in the United States, it seemed self-evident to American politicians and journalists that the sins of the Old World were being visited on the New. This was not so. Bloodshed and terror were homegrown here, in fields, factories, and tenements. The anarchists were merely participating – spectacularly at times, it is true – in a period in US history that many scholars refer to as the Age of Industrial Violence.

### Notes

- 1 Guidano Bruno, “Anarchists at Close Range,” *Current Opinion* (September 1916): 212.
- 2 For a more detailed discussion of anarchist terrorism in the United States, with a special emphasis on anarchism and policing, see Thai Jones, *More Powerful than Dynamite: Radicals, Plutocrats, Progressives, and New York’s Year of Anarchy* (New York: Walker, 2012).
- 3 Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchism,” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1910–11).
- 4 Richard Hofstadter, *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 5, 6, 11.
- 5 For more on American violence – including against Indians and African Americans – during the colonial and antebellum eras, see Chapter 6 by Matthew Jennings in this volume. For white supremacist violence from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, see Chapter 10 by R. Blakeslee Gilpin. For white supremacist violence in recent decades, see Chapter 21 by Carolyn Gallaher.
- 6 Jeremy Bentham, “A Critical Examination of the Declaration of Rights,” in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1839), 8:498.
- 7 Daniel Guérin, *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 37–126.
- 8 *Writings on the Paris Commune: Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Lenin* (St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Publishers, 2008), passim.
- 9 “The Spirit of Revolt,” in Peter Kropotkin, *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 40.
- 10 Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41–50.
- 11 Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 181.
- 12 James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), passim.

- 13 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 222.
- 14 Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1970), 1:105–6.
- 15 William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 30.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 17 Melvyn Dubofsky, “Big Bill” *Haywood* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987), 160.
- 18 For an exhaustive treatment of the Steunenberg case, see J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
- 19 Howard Blum, *American Lightning: Terror, Mystery, the Birth of Hollywood, and the Crime of the Century* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008).
- 20 Jones, *More Powerful than Dynamite*, 128–30.
- 21 Richard Bach Jensen, “The United States, International Policing and the War against Anarchist Terrorism, 1900–1914,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 1 (2001): 32.
- 22 Jones, *More Powerful than Dynamite*, 248.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 280–2.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 281.
- 25 Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 45–103.
- 26 Jones, *More Powerful than Dynamite*, 294.
- 27 Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 149.
- 28 Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).
- 29 Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded*, passim.
- 30 Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, passim.
- 31 Thai Jones, *A Radical Line: From the Labor Movement to the Weather Underground, One Family’s Century of Conscience* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 213. For more on recent American terrorism, see Chapter 21 by Gallaher in this volume.
- 32 Jones, *A Radical Line*, 204.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 34 Thai Jones, “Occupy Protests Show Radical Potential: Through Decades, Confrontation and Consensus Can Coexist,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, December 2, 2011.
- 35 For more on ALF and ELF, see Chapter 21 by Gallaher.
- 36 Todd Gitlin, “The Wonderful American World of Informers and Agents Provocateurs,” *thenation.com*, June 27, 2013: [www.thenation.com/article/175005/wonderful-american-world-informers-and-agents-provocateurs](http://www.thenation.com/article/175005/wonderful-american-world-informers-and-agents-provocateurs) (accessed August 6, 2014).

### Further reading

- Adamic, Louis. *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*. New York: Viking Press, 1934.
- Avrich, Paul. *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Gage, Beverly. *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
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