

## FOREWORD

Lunching in Paris with Emma Goldman, Theodore Dreiser pleaded with her, “You must write the story of your life, E.G.; it is the richest of any woman’s of our century.” It had not been the first time a friend had suggested that she chronicle her life. With the assistance of her comrades, she heeded the advice, collected the necessary funds, and began to write her remarkable autobiography, *Living My Life*. Goldman wanted very much to share her life, thoughts, and struggles with the people she had sought to influence and change, and she hoped the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, would charge a minimal sum for the book. “I am anxious to reach the mass of the American reading public,” she wrote a friend, “not so much because of the royalties, but because I have always worked for the mass.”

Emma Goldman succeeded in a variety of ways in reaching “the mass,” both a reading and listening audience. *Living My Life* went through several editions, her life has been portrayed on film and in song as well as on stage, and numerous biographies have been written. None of these, however, is as critical as the publication of the four volumes of selected letters, speeches, government documents, and commentaries from the Emma Goldman Papers Project, making that vast and invaluable resource available to scholars, students, and a reading public throughout the world.

This is a truly remarkable achievement, the culmination of several decades of collaborative work, including an international search for documents, the identification of correspondents, and the preparation of biographical, historical, and bibliographical guides. To appreciate the magnitude of this task is to know that Goldman’s papers were as scattered as her scores of correspondents, in private collections and archives here and abroad, even in places like the Department of Justice, whose agents had seized a portion of her papers before ordering her deportation. Only the commitment of many friends and comrades over many decades, and the untiring efforts of librarians, scholars, and archivists, have made these volumes possible.

In closing her autobiography, Emma Goldman reflected over her tumultuous years on this earth: “My life—I had lived in its heights and its depths, in bitter sorrow and ecstatic joy, in black despair and fervent hope. I had drunk the cup to the last drop. I had lived my life. Would I had the gift to paint the life I had lived!” It will now be left to scores

of scholars, students, artists, and dramatists to use this extensive collection to enrich their accounts of an extraordinary career. This is more, however, than material for future biographers; it is an indispensable collection for studying the history of American social movements. That is clear from the moment one scans the list of Goldman correspondents and finds the names of some of the leading cultural and political figures of her time, alongside the names of less known but no less important men and women who shared—and did not share—her commitments.

Emma Goldman came out of a unique and expressive subculture that flourished in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The participants included some of the nation's most creative and iconoclastic artists, writers, and intellectuals, most of them libertarians, some of them revolutionaries. What drew them together was their rejection of the inequities of capitalism and the absurdities of bourgeois culture and politics. That led them to embrace such causes as the labor movement, sexual and reproductive freedom, feminism, atheism, anarchism, and socialism. They represented everything that was irreverent and blasphemous in American culture. In their lives and in their work, they dedicated themselves to the vision of a free society of liberated individuals. They were too undisciplined, too free-spirited to adapt to any system or bureaucratic structure that rested on the suppression of free thought, whether in Woodrow Wilson's United States or in Vladimir Lenin's Soviet Russia. "All I want is freedom," Emma Goldman declared, "perfect, unrestricted liberty for myself and others."

The economic depression of the 1890s introduced Americans to scenes that contradicted the dominant success creed—unemployment, poverty, labor violence, urban ghettos, and, in 1894, an army of the unemployed marching on the nation's capital. In that spirit, Emma Goldman engaged herself in these struggles, employing her oratorical powers to stir audiences and awaken them to the perils of capitalism and the violence of poverty. According to newspaper accounts of her address in 1893 to a crowd of unemployed workers in New York City's Union Square, Goldman implored them, "Demonstrate before the palaces of the rich, demand work. If they do not give you work, demand bread. If they deny you both, take bread. It is your sacred right." That statement was Goldman at her oratorical best, and it did not go unnoticed. For her exhortation she was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. It would be only one of many arrests, whether for lecturing on anarchism, circulating birth control information, advocating workers' and women's rights, or opposing war and the military draft.

The life of Emma Goldman is a forcible reminder that the right to free expression in America has always been precarious. Intellectual inquiry and dissent have been perceived—often for good reason—as subversive activities, and they have, in fact, been known to topple institutions and discredit beliefs of long standing. To be identified as public enemies, to be hounded as disturbers of the peace, was the price Goldman and her comrades paid for their intellectual curiosity, expression, and agitation. During her lifetime, Emma Goldman was denounced for godlessness, debauchery, free thinking, subversion, and for exposing people within the sound of her voice to radical and uncon-

ventional ideas. Her life provides a unique perspective on the varieties of anarchist and feminist thought, radical and socialist movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the causes championed, the position of women in American society (and within radical organizations), and the political repression that followed the outbreak of World War I and the imprisonment and political exile of dissenters. In 1919, Goldman was deported to Soviet Russia, where she found something less than a revolutionary utopia. Her stay in Moscow provides an intimate glimpse of both the promise of the Russian Revolution to American radicals and their subsequent disillusionment with its betrayal. Her exile continued in Germany, France, Britain, and Canada, bringing her finally into the Spanish Civil War and still another chapter in the turbulent history of radicalism in the twentieth century.

Since the birth of the United States, Americans have struggled to define the meaning of freedom. That has often been a difficult and perilous struggle. For Emma Goldman, freedom required individuals to shake off the “shackles and restraints of government.” The price of freedom, she came to recognize, was eternal vigilance, a wariness of those who in the name of protecting freedom would diminish freedom, and resistance to rules, codes, regulations, and censorship (no matter how well intended) that would mock free expression by restricting or penalizing it. Free speech meant not only the right to dissent but more importantly the active exercise of that right in the face of attempts to suppress it. And, perhaps most important of all, it insisted on the right of others to speak out on behalf of what the majority believed to be wrong, freedom for the most offensive and disturbing speech. That was the true test of freedom of speech. “Free speech,” Goldman declared, “means either the unlimited right of expression, or nothing at all. The moment any man or set of men can limit speech, it is no longer free.”

What Emma Goldman said provoked controversy, both within and outside the radical movement, and not all radicals were enamored with her political positions. Margaret Anderson, a radical editor and literary modernist, appreciated Goldman’s sheer presence more than her ideological commitments: “Emma Goldman’s genius is not so much that she is a great thinker as that she is a great woman.” But whatever one might think of Emma Goldman’s political views, actions, blind spots, and vision, few individuals in American society so exemplify the tradition of dissent and nonconformity. Few brought more passion, intensity, exuberance, perseverance, and self-sacrifice to the causes she espoused. Even when she failed to convert people to her positions, she compelled many of them to reexamine their assumptions and to question the accepted wisdom and elected leadership.

For much of her life in America, Emma Goldman defined the limits of political dissent. True loyalty to a nation, she believed, often demanded disloyalty to its pretenses and policies and a willingness to unmask its leaders. To Goldman, liberty was more than an ideology, it was a passion, to be lived and breathed each day. “Liberty was always her theme,” said Harry Weinberger, her lawyer and close friend: “liberty was always her dream; liberty was always her goal . . . liberty was more important than life itself.” And,

as he went on to suggest, free expression has always led a precarious existence. “She spoke out in this country against war and conscription, and went to jail. She spoke out for political prisoners, and was deported. She spoke out in Russia against the despotism of Communism, and again became a fugitive on the face of the earth. She spoke out against Nazism and the combination of Nazism and Communism and there was hardly a place where she could live.”

It must be said, however, that Goldman did not speak out with equal fervor about the most repressive and violent denial of human rights in her lifetime. She identified with the struggles of oppressed workers, and the New Declaration of Independence she issued in 1909 proclaimed that “all human beings, irrespective of race, color, or sex, are born with the equal right to share at the table of life.” But in a time of racist terror and severe racial subjugation (political, social, and economic), far more severe than any of the violations of civil liberties she so courageously deplored and fought, Emma Goldman avoided the South and mostly ignored the struggle for black rights and racial equality, a struggle that involved not only black Americans but a coterie of progressive white allies. Perhaps she was trying to appease the racism pervading the labor and socialist movements. More likely, she was unconscious of this contradiction in her life’s commitment to “the wretched of the earth.” Whatever her personal feelings about these matters, they would occupy little space in her writings or speeches, and hence are mostly absent from these volumes.

The Emma Goldman Papers Project at the University of California at Berkeley, in selecting, editing, and annotating the documents for this valuable series under the direction of Candace Falk, has brought into our historical consciousness a most extraordinary woman, whose passion, spiritual qualities, and commitments illuminate a certain time in our history, even as the lesson she taught remains timeless: that social and economic inequities are neither unintentional nor inevitable but reflect the assumptions, beliefs, and policies of certain people who command enormous power over lives. Her life forces us to think more deeply and more reflectively about those men and women in our history—from the abolitionists of the 1830s to the labor organizers of the 1890s and 1930s to the civil rights activists of the 1960s—who, individually and collectively, tried to flesh out and give meaning to abstract notions of liberty, independence, and freedom, and for whom a personal commitment to social justice became a moral imperative. No better epitaph might be written for Emma Goldman than the one composed in 1917 by A. S. Embree, an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World imprisoned in Tombstone, Arizona: “The end in view is well worth striving for, but in the struggle itself lies the happiness of the fighter.”

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