

Emma Goldman: The American Years

Robert Graham

Candace Falk, ed., *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years, 1890-1919, Volume 1: Made for America, 1890-1901* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2003)

Candace Falk, ed., *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years, 1890-1919, Volume 2: Making Speech Free, 1902-1909* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005)

EMMA GOLDMAN: A Documentary History of the American Years, 1890-1919 is an ambitious publishing project of the Emma Goldman Papers and the University of California at Berkeley. When completed, this documentary history will cover Emma Goldman's career as an anarchist agitator, writer, and propagandist in the United States from 1890 until her deportation to Russia in 1919.

Volume 1: Made for America, 1890-1901 begins with press coverage of her early public speeches in the northeastern United States and ends with a letter from her then-imprisoned anarchist comrade, Alexander Berkman, who was serving a 22-year sentence for his attempted assassination of Carnegie Steel magnate Henry Clay Frick in 1892.

Volume 2: Making Speech Free, 1902-1909 begins with one of Goldman's own pieces, an article in the Italian American anarchist paper, *La Questione Sociale*, addressed to striking workers in Paterson, New Jersey. It concludes with one of her letters to her then-manager and lover, Ben Reitman, dealing with speaking tour arrangements and her disappointment with herself and Reitman in failing to live up to her ideal of free love.

Volume 3: Light and Shadows (1910-1916), tentatively scheduled for publication in spring 2007, will cover a period during which Goldman was still very active publishing her *Mother Earth* anarchist monthly, as well as numerous pamphlets and books, including her well-known *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York 1910), and *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* (Boston 1914). Meanwhile, she

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continued her sometimes gruelling schedule of speaking tours despite police harassment and the near lynching of Reitman in San Diego in 1912.

Volume 4: The War Years (1917-1919), scheduled for publication in spring 2009, will presumably focus on her active opposition to World War I and US participation in that armed conflict, leading up to her deportation to Russia in 1919, largely as a result of her campaign against conscription. Goldman was not to return to US soil except for a 90-day lecture tour in 1934, for which she had to obtain a temporary visa.

The first two volumes have the same foreword by Leon Litwack, Morrison Professor of American History at the University of California, Berkeley, which unsurprisingly focuses on the American context of Goldman's career. Candace Falk's separate introductions to each volume are much broader in scope, detailing the different social, political, and intellectual currents that had an influence on Goldman and within which she worked, such as the international anarchist movement, the women's movement, Nietzsche, and Freud. Each volume also includes a helpful explanation of the book's editorial practices, a detailed chronology for the relevant time periods, annotated and detailed directories of the individuals, periodicals, and organizations mentioned, a select bibliography, and a comprehensive index, making these volumes an excellent research tool and a more accessible counterpart to the Emma Goldman Papers' earlier project, the 69-reel *Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*.

The documents for *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years* have been taken for the most part from the *Microfilm Edition*, with some additional documents obtained after the *Edition* was issued. The editors have selected what they believe to be the most important documents from the thousands of documents contained in the Emma Goldman papers, a truly enormous task. Perhaps that is why the book version will end in 1919, as the *Microfilm Edition* covers the entire span of Emma Goldman's career, right up to her death in Toronto in 1940. More likely funding was an issue, as each volume is attractive, hardbound with library binding, and over 600 pages long, including illustrations. These volumes must have been expensive to produce. The retail price of \$60 US per volume is more than reasonable, given the overall quality and length of each volume.

The chief editor, Candace Falk, is the author of *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (New York 1984, and Piscataway, New Jersey, 1990, 1999), a biography of Emma Goldman, focusing on her tortuous relationship with Ben Reitman. Falk had been fortunate to discover a trunkload of correspondence between the two sometime lovers, which then provided the framework for her book and the beginnings of the Emma Goldman Papers Project, which Falk began some 24 years ago. The Project has its own website at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/> where readers can access several of Goldman's books, pamphlets, and speeches, including *Anarchism and Other Essays*. The website also includes a helpful bibliographic essay and an overview of publications and electronic resources.

In the introduction to Volume 1, Falk helpfully correlates the selected documents with Goldman's own recollections in her celebrated autobiography, *Living My Life* (New York 1931). As Falk points out, Goldman had to write much of *Living My Life* from memory, as many of her papers and much of her correspondence had been seized by the authorities. Consequently, Goldman's accounts of some events are not that accurate, while her perceptions of other events changed over time.

Emma Goldman was born in 1869 into a Jewish family in Kovno, Lithuania, then part of the Russian empire. She received some elementary schooling in Koenigsberg, where she learned German, a language in which she became fluent, unlike Yiddish, which she never really felt comfortable with. Her facility with the German language would make her a popular speaker among German-speaking anarchists in the United States, where she emigrated with one of her sisters in 1885. She married, divorced, and remarried one Jacob Kershner, whose own citizenship was later to be revoked by the United States government in order to facilitate Goldman's deportation (a topic covered in some detail in Volume 2). She obtained factory work and experienced first-hand the sweatshop conditions under which many recent immigrants had to labour.

In 1886, anarchists in Chicago had been leading the fight for the eight-hour day. At a demonstration at the Haymarket Square a bomb was thrown, shots were fired, and several demonstrators and policemen were killed. Eight anarchists (the "Haymarket Martyrs") were framed for murder, with four of them being executed on 11 November 1887 (a fifth, Louis Lingg, killed himself on the eve of his execution; the other three had their sentences commuted to life in prison).¹ The execution of the Haymarket Martyrs helped to radicalize Emma Goldman and many others. When she moved from Rochester to New York City, she became active in immigrant radicalism, vowing to avenge the deaths of the Haymarket Martyrs and to work for the attainment of their ideals.

These early years of Goldman's revolutionary career are not well documented. The first entry is a short newspaper article from October 1890 reporting on a Goldman speech in Baltimore. Falk notes in the introduction that the German anarchist Johann Most had sent Goldman on the tour, and that she echoed many of the sentiments expressed by Most and many of the Haymarket Martyrs in their 1883 Pittsburgh Proclamation. Unfortunately, the Proclamation is not reproduced, nor is a citation given for it.² Falk indicates that Goldman's lectures covered, among other things, the contradictions in the demands for an eight-hour day, a topic favoured by Most, but fails to indicate that other anarchists, including several of the Haymarket Martyrs, such as Albert Parsons and August Spies, supported the campaign for an eight-hour day, seeing it as part of the fight "against class domination" and a step to-

¹The definitive history of the Haymarket affair remains Paul Avrich's *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton 1984).

²It is reproduced in Frederic Trautmann's biography of Most, *The Voice of Terror* (Westport 1980), 253-257.

wards revolution.³ During the tour, Goldman herself came to support the campaign for the eight-hour day after an elderly worker indicated he could not wait until the revolution for some respite from his onerous daily toil.⁴ Goldman felt ashamed that she had been parroting Most's ideas without thinking about their practical consequences.

The next documents are from 1892. Apparently, Goldman's papers covering the 1890-1891 period were either seized by the police or destroyed. Many of Goldman's papers from subsequent periods met a similar fate, with the result that the editors have had to rely on newspaper reports from both the radical and mainstream press to flesh out Volume 1. Some of the articles from the mainstream press provide ample justification for Goldman's later denunciations of their "yellow journalism," particularly after Leon Czogolosz's assassination of President McKinley in 1901 when Goldman was vilified as the "high priestess of anarchy" for allegedly inspiring the assassination. (Volume 1, 461)

The accuracy of some of the press reports is certainly open to question. Others are lacking in sufficient detail to be of much interest, despite more detailed accounts of the same event being available from the anarchist press. For example, a May 1892 article from the *New York World* regarding a May Day demonstration at which Goldman attempted to speak in the face of socialist and union opposition simply refers to Goldman screaming at the crowd while her cart was hauled away with her on it. (Volume 1, 96-99) In contrast, the Yiddish anarchist paper, the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, apparently reported Goldman's address in great detail, yet its account is not included.

The remaining selections from 1892 deal with Alexander Berkman's attempt to assassinate Frick and its aftermath. Goldman's involvement in Berkman's attempt is not made very clear from these contemporaneous documents, as Berkman did his best not to incriminate her. Many of the letters from Berkman to Goldman included in this volume are taken from his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, which Goldman's Mother Earth Publishing Association was to publish in 1912, after Berkman's release from prison. Additional details regarding the assassination attempt are provided in the introduction and the footnotes, as many of the details did not come to light until much later.

Readers of *Living My Life* or biographies of Goldman will no doubt be familiar with Goldman's notorious horsewhipping of Most for deprecating Berkman's attempt on Frick. Volume 1 includes the first English translation of Most's article on Berkman's attempted assassination, so readers can finally see for themselves what so enraged Goldman. (119-120)

The documents show Goldman's ongoing efforts to support Berkman while he was in prison and to work for his early release through the Alexander Berkman Defence Association. These efforts included a short-lived and misguided attempt to

³Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, 183.

⁴Emma Goldman, *Living My Life, Volume One* (New York 1970), 52.

enlist the aid of the foremost American anarchist, Benjamin Tucker, in seeking the support of Andrew Carnegie himself for a pardon of Berkman. Volume 1 includes Tucker's draft letter to Carnegie, an obsequious entreaty in which Tucker sanctimoniously takes it upon himself to renounce Berkman's act in the name of both Berkman and the Berkman Defence Association. (349-351) Needless to say, Goldman found the letter unacceptable and withdrew her request, as Tucker had anticipated she would. (352) That he published the exchange in his paper, *Liberty*, after the request was predictably withdrawn, demonstrates his lack of sincerity in offering to approach Carnegie in the first place. It would appear that the main purpose of his offer was to take the opportunity to yet again lecture the socialist anarchists on morality as part of his more general campaign to discredit them as "pseudo-anarchists" for their support of revolutionary violence.⁵

These and other debates within the anarchist milieu and the broader socialist and trade union movements are brought to life throughout these volumes. Despite her own very firmly held beliefs, sensitivity to criticism, and the police repression which she faced, Goldman worked very hard and sometimes very successfully to take her message beyond radical immigrant enclaves to a much wider public. She began to communicate more and more in English in order to reach an American audience (with all of her grammatical and spelling errors now preserved for posterity in these volumes' pages). She also began to attract some more favourable press coverage and was occasionally able to publish some of her own writings in the mainstream press, despite her imprisonment in 1893 for inciting to riot. The *New York World* actually published the speech that Goldman was to deliver at her sentencing hearing but withdrew at the last minute, possibly on the advice of her lawyer. (Volume 1, 179-182)

Some of the correspondence, particularly in Volume 1, is of little interest except for prospective biographers interested in the minutiae of Goldman's life. Perhaps the editors thought this kind of material would help shed some more light on Goldman's personality by enabling people to see behind her public persona. Goldman's speeches and articles are much more interesting. Her advocacy of sexual equality and freedom for women was to become a common theme in her lectures and essays. Female reporters seem to have been much more sympathetic to Goldman as a result, presenting her ideas in a fairer light (as in Nelly Bly's 1893 interview of Goldman for the *New York World* and the 1897 Miriam Michelson interview of Goldman for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*).

Another common theme was Goldman's rejection of patriotism and militarism, which she saw as going hand in hand. The military authorities found this particularly threatening. A US soldier who attended one of Goldman's lectures in uniform was court-martialled and sentenced to five years of hard labour for shaking Goldman's hand. (Volume 2, 328-331) Political violence was a topic Goldman

⁵For a selection of Tucker's writings, see his self-published collection of essays, *Instead of a Book: By a Man Too Busy to Write One* (New York 1893).

could not avoid, whether it was the officially sanctioned violence of the state or the violent resistance and rebellion of workers and revolutionaries. The use and legitimacy of assassination was a much debated topic with respect to which Goldman carefully tailored her views depending on her audience. In her interviews with the mainstream press she would deplore violence in general, whereas in her writings in the anarchist press she would extol the heroism of individual assassins, who invariably paid with their lives for striking down a presidential or royal tyrant.

One of the assassins she held up for admiration was Emile Henry, a French anarchist who threw a bomb into a Parisian cafe, killing one person and injuring many others. (Volume 1, 226, 238) However, by the time of the McKinley assassination in September 1901, Goldman had developed a more nuanced view of political violence. Although she still portrayed the assassins as brave freedom fighters willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good, she argued that they were the inevitable products of the violent societies in which they lived, and denied that anarchist doctrines were the cause of their actions. Thus, Goldman refused to either condone or condemn these acts of violence, but rather sought to provide an explanation for them.

These subtleties were of course lost on the mainstream press and the general public, particularly after the assassination of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz, a self-proclaimed anarchist. Although Czolgosz had been denounced in the anarchist press prior to the assassination as a possible spy or agent provocateur, and after as mentally unbalanced, Goldman refused, despite great risk to herself, to condemn him. Instead, she tried to explain his actions in terms of his individual psychology and the violence and inequality of the American society in which he lived. ("The Tragedy at Buffalo," Volume 1, 471-477) Alexander Berkman, on the other hand, questioned the usefulness of Czolgosz's act, arguing that in a republic despotism is not embodied in one man but "is far deeper, more insidious, because it rests on the popular delusion of self-government and independence" and therefore "cannot be reached with a bullet." (Volume 1, 487-488) Goldman was shocked that the attempted assassin of Frick could make such a "cold-blooded" statement. (Volume 1, 488 n. 12)

An article from the *San Francisco Chronicle* reproduced in Volume 1 purports to set forth Czolgosz's statement to the police, in which he claims that he had heard Goldman advocate the extermination of all rulers and describes himself as one of her disciples. (460-463) A careless reader may be left thinking that this story at least sets forth what Czolgosz told the police, even if what he said may not be true. However, in the Introduction, Falk indicates that the Hearst newspaper may have simply fabricated the interview with Czolgosz, and that in his actual statement to the police he said that although he had heard Goldman speak against the government, "She didn't tell me to do it." (Volume 1, 75-76) It is unfortunate that Czolgosz's statement to the police is not reproduced in this volume, as this less accessible source appears to contradict the *Chronicle's* account. Furthermore, unlike other entries

where explanatory notes are helpfully repeated, in this case the editors have failed to include a note with the *Chronicle* article indicating its doubtful provenance. Anyone who does not read the Introduction carefully may be left thinking that the *Chronicle* article is accurate.

Goldman's literary abilities become more apparent in Volume 2, as does her ability to work across sectarian lines on issues with respect to which people with diverging views could find common ground, such as free speech and the fight against autocracy in Russia.

In a passage from her 1902 address to the striking workers of Paterson reminiscent of other anarchist writings, Goldman writes that the authorities "might as well attempt to sweep back the rushing waves of the ocean with a broom, as to stop the current of discontent and long suffering" manifested by the strike. (Volume 2, 93) Some 1,600 years earlier, the Chinese dissident Bao Jingyan had written that to try to stop the people from revolting against tyranny was "like trying to dam a river in full flood with a handful of earth."⁶ During the Mexican Revolution, Goldman's *Mother Earth* was to publish an essay by another American anarchist, Voltairine de Cleyre, in which she referred to "sweeping out the sea with a broom" when describing the government's half-hearted attempts at land reform.⁷

In her greetings to the newly founded Italian American anarchist paper, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, Goldman vouches for a former minister turned socialist, even though he was not strictly speaking an anarchist, because "Mother liberty caresses with generous affections all the sons who, armed with the weapons of high-minded honesty, fight against oppression and tyranny for a future in which there will be neither masters nor slaves, neither rich nor poor, neither oppressors nor oppressed." (Volume 2, 104) She developed a long-standing friendship with the Russian Socialist Revolutionary, Catherine Breshkovskaya, and enlisted the aid of many liberal reformers in the fight for free speech, despite the fact that neither supported the anarchist cause.

Emma Goldman had to fight not only for her own freedom of expression, but also for the freedom of many others to express their ideas without restriction, harassment, and prosecution. Goldman worked with the Free Speech League (a precursor to the American Civil Liberties Union) to secure the release of the English anarchist John Turner, who was arrested under anti-anarchist laws in 1903 in order to prevent him from undertaking a speaking tour. She joined with the Industrial Workers of the World in their famous free speech fights, where they would paralyze the courts by filling up the jails. She continued to face her own problems, with the police and authorities often preventing her from speaking by shutting down her lec-

⁶Bao Jingyan, "Neither Lord Nor Subject," in Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume 1: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE-1939)* (Montreal 2005), 4.

⁷Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Mexican Revolution," in Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume 1*, 254.

ture halls, intimidating their proprietors, or threatening to arrest her. In Chicago, 200 policemen turned out to shut down one of her talks, prompting Goldman to compare conditions in the United States to Czarist Russia, a theme she was often to return to in the face of continuing harassment. (Volume 2, 97-99) When she was run out of Everett, Washington, she put forward a resolution to the local press that Everett be turned over to the Czar, as they had already adopted Russian methods there. (Volume 2, 392-393)

Partly as a way of getting around these obstacles, Goldman began publishing her anarchist monthly, *Mother Earth*, in 1906. Volume 2 includes several of Goldman's essays from *Mother Earth*, from her better known and often reprinted essays, such as "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," to lesser known works, such as her reports on her speaking tours and their effective suppression by the authorities. However, Volume 2 does not provide a representative sample of the broad range of topics addressed by Goldman in *Mother Earth*. Missing are such essays as "The Child and Its Enemies" (1906) and "La Ruche" (1907), Goldman's article on Sebastien Faure's anarchist free school in France. Her obituary for the Spanish anarchist and pedagogue, Francisco Ferrer, who was executed by Spanish authorities in October 1909, is included.

Volume 2 also includes Goldman's report on the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in 1907, but inexplicably fails to include any bibliographic reference to the published proceedings or to their recent republication as *Anarchisme & Syndicalisme: Le Congrès Anarchiste International d'Amsterdam (1907)*, introduced by A. Miéville and M. Antonioli (Paris 1997). It would have been helpful if Volume 2 had included some excerpts from the proceedings, such as the resolutions Goldman herself put forward. Thankfully, Goldman's own report is fair and comprehensive.

Goldman's emotionally needy personality becomes apparent in Volume 2, particularly in her correspondence with Berkman and Reitman. Berkman was released from prison just three months after *Mother Earth* began publication in 1906. Goldman tried both to rekindle their relationship and to help him adjust to civilian life. Despite her efforts, Berkman suffered a breakdown and disappeared from view for a time, which Goldman had to explain to the readers of *Mother Earth* when rumours began circulating that he had been kidnapped. (Volume 2, 196)

After it became clear that Berkman would not be resuming his role as Goldman's lover, she became involved with Reitman, the so-called "King of the Hobos," who became her tour manager and lover.⁸ Volume 2 includes a more than representative sampling of her letters to him in which she goes from discussing the prosaic details of her tour schedules to melodramatically expressing her hurt and

⁸For more on Reitman, see Roger Bruns's biography, *The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman, Chicago's Celebrated Social Reformer, Hobo King, and Whorehouse Physician* (Urbana 1987).

disappointment with him. I would have preferred more of her essays from *Mother Earth*.

For those more interested in Goldman as a political figure than as a larger-than-life personality, a facsimile reprint of *Mother Earth* is still available at better university libraries (New York 1968). There is also Peter Glassgold's excellent collection, *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Washington 2001), which covers the entire span of the publication, including the *Mother Earth Bulletin*, which replaced the *Mother Earth* monthly magazine after Goldman and Berkman were imprisoned in 1917 for their anti-war and anti-conscription activities. The most representative collection of Goldman's political writings remains Alix Kates Shulman's expanded edition of *Red Emma Speaks: The Selected Speeches and Writings of the Anarchist and Feminist Emma Goldman* (Amherst, NY 1996).

As with Volume 1, Volume 2 contains articles from the mainstream and socialist press. Ironically, at times it was the capitalist press that provided Goldman with the better opportunity to accurately communicate her ideas, as when the *New York World* published her essay, "What I Believe," in July 1908, which Goldman later issued as a pamphlet. In contrast, the May 1908 report of the socialist newspaper, *Common Sense*, on a debate between Goldman and the socialist, Kasper Bauer, is hopelessly biased in Bauer's favour, caricaturing Goldman's ideas as badly as any Hearst newspaper.

That Goldman is still capable of generating debate and controversy is illustrated by an incident recounted by Falk in the Acknowledgements to Volume 2. As the manuscript for Volume 2 was being prepared for publication, the University of California peremptorily removed two Goldman quotations from the Emma Goldman Papers Project website. The first was from a speech included in Volume 2, "Free Speech in Chicago," in which Goldman wrote, "We shall soon be obliged to meet in cellars, or in darkened rooms with closed doors, and speak in whispers lest our next door neighbors should hear that free-born American citizens dare not speak in the open." (98-99) The second quotation was from her 1915 anti-war essay, "Preparedness: The Universal Road to Slaughter," in which she urged people "not yet overcome by war madness to raise their voice of protest, to call the attention of the people to the crime and outrage which are about to be perpetrated on them." (Volume 2, 583) The University thought these quotations had been posted in order to make a statement against the impending war in Iraq. That Emma Goldman still remained subject to censorship over 60 years after her death became front-page news, forcing the University to back down, an apt testimonial to the continuing power of her ideas.

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