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## Making “The Case against the ‘Reds’”

*Racializing Communism, 1919–1920*

*Julie M. Powell*

On November 15, 1919, readers opened the latest weekly edition of the *Literary Digest* and settled in for an evening of entertainment and edification. On the front page, they read of the impending failure of a coal strike that had been characterized by President Woodrow Wilson as “wrong both morally and legally,” a stand—the article heralded—endorsed by the US Congress. Four pages into the magazine, then-governor of Massachusetts Calvin Coolidge proclaimed a “Victory for Law and Order” against the “threats and intimidation of the Reds.” On page seventeen, preceding an article titled “To Stop Race Suicide in France” and the weekly feature “Education in Americanism: Lessons in Patriotism,” readers were treated to a political cartoon (figure 6.1), borrowed from the pages of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. The caption, “The Red: ‘Let’s Go to the Bottom First,’” accompanied an image of a man struggling near a shoreline, who represented “civilization” and was reaching for “solid ground” but was being pulled into the murky depths of “chaos” by the bearded, menacing figure of “Bolshevism.”<sup>1</sup> The cartoon (which visually, allegorically, and discursively marked “Bolshevism” as non-white) was standard fare during America’s first Red Scare and served a very specific purpose for those people who kept such images in circulation.

The communist Red Scare of 1919–1920 came in the midst of the redefinition of whiteness in the United States. As D. H. Lawrence once observed, Americans have always defined themselves by what they are *not*. As so-called new immigrants poured into the country from southern and eastern Europe, the established stock



**FIGURE 6.1.** "Bolshevism" drags "Civilization" into "Chaos." Originally published in the *Brooklyn Eagle*; republished in the *Literary Digest*, November 15, 1919. Courtesy, Red Scare (1918–1921), an Image Database (#79).

of Anglo-Saxons sought to consolidate their power by creating distance between themselves and the new arrivals.<sup>2</sup> Their solution was a eugenic restructuring of the racial state. This change scrapped the black/white binary. They created instead a racial caste system. This system relegated immigrants from southern and eastern Europe to an inferior racial status that was viewed as not-quite-white by the Anglo-Saxons who laid claim to the state and its levers of power. This relabeling of ostensibly "white" immigrants had significant implications for the reception of foreign ideologies, namely communism, which would become so entwined and associated with the eastern and southern European "type" as to become inextricable. This association formed the explosive nucleus of domestic anticommunism and was by no means accidental. The manner by which it was constructed is the focus of this chapter.

Dispensing once and for all with threadbare notions of a grassroots *hysteria*, it can be posited, rather, that Red Scare anticommunism (an expression of racist nativism) was deliberately deployed by white business interests to cripple unionized labor. Souring American citizens on working-class solidarity required an appeal to fear—not of the dangers of an intangible ideology but of the threat of

the not-quite-white outsider. In 1919, elites and business interests inaugurated a campaign of racializing communism, drawing on the rampant nativism of early twentieth-century Americans and a new racial hierarchy to ensure that the ideology and its attendant union collectivism gained no ground stateside. Ultimately, what elites needed to maintain the social order—and what emerged during the Red Scare—was a closed chain of signification that equated unionized labor with the not-quite-white “Other” and the vague specter of communism. This closed chain forced immigrant Americans to abjure all forms of collectivism—marked as “non-white”—and to adopt anticommunism, its binary opposite. Political cartoons from the Red Scare era serve as extant links in this chain (evidence of the racialization of communism) and are examined at length for their role in the early twentieth-century anticommunism campaign. This racial campaign inaugurated a shift in the nature of American anticommunism in which conservative opposition gained ground through fear and hatred of a racialized Other.

#### RED SCARE ANTICOMMUNISM

Anticommunist historiography characterizes postwar anticommunism as either a continuity of American political and social traditions or a discrete event, a hysteria, which defies historicization in the American narrative. Analyses of the latter approach are few and dated—typically shaded by the fury of the McCarthy era. These analyses view domestic anticommunism as a reaction to the Russian Revolution. From this vantage, anticommunism begins and ends with the rise and fall of Soviet communism, its reason for being.<sup>3</sup> Such analyses, for all their empirical value, suffer from a myopia that isolates the postwar manifestation of anticommunism from the framework of nativism, xenophobia, and racism in which *longue durée* analyses have situated it. (*Longue durée* means to look at the “forest” of broad historical structures over the “trees” of events.) In my view, when properly historicized, the contours of the first Red Scare become all too clear. Instead of a popular genesis of domestic anticommunism, historicized accounts of the Red Scare have unanimously identified a reverse transmission, orchestrated from above.<sup>4</sup> Regin Schmidt writes that Red Scare anticommunism was “at bottom, an attack on . . . movements for social and political change and reform, particularly organized labor, blacks and radicals, by forces of the status quo.”<sup>5</sup> William M. Wiecek argues similarly that “government, civic, business, labor and religious groups leagued themselves in a crusade to stamp out radicalism as they variously defined it . . . Seeing their opportunity, all those hoping to shore up the status quo made the most of it, using patriotism as a cover for their differing agendas of control and suppression.”<sup>6</sup> M. J. Heale contends that as early as the 1870s, “anticommunism was being

developed as a weapon to isolate labor organizations and control the untamed urban masses. Invoking republican values . . . it mobilized public support behind the business community."<sup>7</sup>

A mechanism for this mobilization was racism, sometimes coded as "nativism"—though such a term inserts notions of ethnicity into an analytical space where they do not belong (an anachronism to which I will soon return). While "nativism" serves as the portmanteau of "racism" for John Higham and Heale, others are more direct. For example, Joel Kovel argues that white America originally united around hating Native Americans and exerted a similarly vehement organizing power with the enslavement of Africans, a tradition of Othering that supplied anticommunism with its racist dimension.<sup>8</sup> "Drawing upon their profound hatred and using the voices of the press and politicians," he writes, "the elites transmitted fear to the populace by arousing a dread of the dark outsider, whose symbol was assigned to Communism."<sup>9</sup> Wiecek likewise writes plainly of the "obvious racial and ethnic slants" of the countersubversive movement and of the "racial, ethnic and religious hostility [that] . . . drove anticommunism and its antecedents."<sup>10</sup>

Establishing racism as a mechanism by which elites mobilized anticommunist sentiment opens an intellectual space in which to explore the question of how such sentiments were accessed and exploited. Schmidt asserts, "The Red Scare was not *caused* by popular nativism or political intolerance, but it might be argued that they *made it possible* for the elite to pursue such a repressive line for a time during 1919 and 1920."<sup>11</sup> An analysis of Red Scare editorial cartoons can serve to expose the manner by which communism was racialized, thereby preventing working-class cohesion and repressing labor collectivism.

#### RACE IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

To understand how communism was racialized, one must first appreciate the nature of race in early twentieth-century America and the relative position of Slavic peoples in the racial hierarchy. The articulation of racial identities is understood here as a product of "the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories."<sup>12</sup> Understanding racial ideology as a historicized construction allows one to avoid the dangerous pitfall articulated by Matthew Frye Jacobson in which "American scholarship . . . has generally conflated race and color, and so has transported a late-twentieth-century understanding of 'difference' into a period whose inhabitants recognized biologically based 'races' rather than culturally based 'ethnicities.'"<sup>13</sup> Race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, at bottom, an expression of national origin, which—according to pseudo-scientific theories of eugenics, then in their ascendancy—asccribed to the

foreign national a corresponding set of fixed, biological traits. Mae M. Ngai reminds scholars that early twentieth-century nativism “articulated a new kind of thinking, in which the cultural nationalism of the late-nineteenth century had transformed into a nationalism based on race . . . *Race, people, and nation* often referred to the same idea.”<sup>14</sup>

The nation-based, eugenic view of humanity created a racial hierarchy in which not-quite-white peoples from southern and eastern Europe were seen as innately inferior to their northern and western European peers. According to Thomas Borstelmann, this hierarchy—delineating varying degrees of whiteness—consisted of “Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, Latins, Celts, and so on, down to Slavs, who were seen as partly Asian.”<sup>15</sup> The Asianness of eastern Europeans was an enduring concept—Truman foreign policy adviser George Kennan claimed that Soviet despotism was a by-product of its peoples’ “century-long contact with Asiatic hordes . . . [and] its attitude of Oriental secretiveness and conspiracy.”<sup>16</sup> The allusion is significant in assessing the perceived relative whiteness of eastern Europeans; the Chinese constituted the only group explicitly barred from US citizenship, having been singled out as racially unassimilable outsiders.<sup>17</sup> The Dillingham Commission on immigration—which met from 1907 to 1911—had begun the pseudo-scientific work of redefining whiteness in a legal sense. Attributing the perceived intellectual and social deficiencies of southern and eastern Europeans to biologically degenerate racial stock, the committee assessed them as unfit for citizenship in white America and recommended a literacy test that was aimed at keeping them out. The targeted immigration provision passed Congress in 1917.

While the commission laid the legal groundwork for the racialization of formerly “white” Europeans, it was the continued, racially charged clamor for immigration restrictions—borne out in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924—that is perhaps most revealing about Anglo-Saxon opinions of their Mediterranean and Slavic contemporaries. Madison Grant’s book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, achieved significant popularity in the early 1920s. It cautioned Americans against the dangers of diluting their Anglo-Saxon stock with that of the racially inferior immigrants who made up the second wave of European immigration. According to Grant, the “new immigration” consisted of “the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with hordes of the wretched, submerged populations of the Polish Ghettos.”<sup>18</sup> His racial characterization of southern and eastern Europeans was not unique. In a June 1896 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, census superintendent Francis Walker espoused his belief that the recent wave of immigration represented “vast masses of peasantry, degraded below our utmost conceptions . . . beaten men from beaten races, representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence.”<sup>19</sup>

For all the efforts by elites to articulate a more exclusionary meaning of whiteness, it is important to remember that the relationship between racial meaning and the socio-political environment is a reciprocal one and that the racial Othering of so-called new immigrants reverberated through all ranks of society. Jacobson writes that "although it may be tempting in retrospect to identify the likes of Madison Grant . . . as extreme in [his] views, it is critical to recognize that . . . it was not just a handful at the margins who saw certain immigrants as racially distinct; nor did the eugenic view of white races emerge in a vacuum. The consensus on this point was impressive."<sup>20</sup> Particularly at the working-class level, the racial ranking of immigrant nationalities and the indisputable social premium placed on whiteness proved to be predictably divisive. For those people situated in the vague middle ground of the racial hierarchy, creating distance between themselves and those people who were marked as not-quite-white was not just a way to maintain their position in the racial order but, conceivably, an opportunity to improve it. To gain acceptance in a country where citizenship was awarded to "free white persons" and the meaning of "white" was becoming ever more circumscribed, creating a wide berth between oneself and the racialized Other had become increasingly critical. Jacobson writes that for "the various probationary white races . . . whiteness *could* emerge by its contrast to nonwhiteness . . . [but perhaps more important,] immigrants who were white enough to enter as 'free white persons' could also lose that status by their association with nonwhite groups."<sup>21</sup> It was a risk many were unwilling to take.

### RACIALIZING COMMUNISM

As the historiography of Red Scare anticommunism suggests, the ability of elite conservatives and business interests to undermine unionized labor and working-class solidarity was contingent on their capacity to capitalize on the racist notions of workers, largely immigrants themselves, who were keenly aware of the dynamics of the American racial order. Schmidt writes of powerful employer organizations in which "in order to win support for what was at bottom a union-breaking campaign, an extensive propaganda drive was organized . . . to discredit unions as subversive, Bolshevistic and alien to basic American values."<sup>22</sup> Imbedded in these campaigns was a set of pedagogical oppositions that functioned in this way:

American (insider)	White	Conservatism	Free market labor
Foreign (outsider)	Non-white	Radicalism	Unionized labor

The conflation of unionism and Bolshevism signaled a concomitant merging of the communist identity with that of (according to Harry H. Laughlin) the degenerate and unassimilable "mongrel" races of southern and eastern Europe.<sup>23</sup> In his charge

to stamp out domestic communism, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer spoke of “Bolsheviks” and labor leaders interchangeably, writing of the former that “out of the sly and crafty eyes of many of them leap cupidity, cruelty, insanity and crime. From their lopsided faces, sloping brows and misshapen features may be recognized the unmistakable criminal type.”<sup>24</sup> The unapologetically racial overtones were unmistakable. Yet importantly, the racialization of communism was not confined to political rhetoric. It penetrated far into the realm of popular culture, in which working-class citizens picked up on unambiguously racial cues and adopted anti-communism to secure their own purchase on whiteness.

During the Red Scare, newspapers and journals provided fertile ground for cultivating the racial image of communism. Jacobson writes that “notions of variegated whiteness” were “reflected in literature, visual arts, caricature, political oratory, penny journalism and myriad other venues of popular culture.”<sup>25</sup> Past accounts of domestic anticommunism, such as that of Robert K. Murray, have been sabotaged by the tendency to interpret newspaper content as an expression of popular sentiment rather than the manifestation of elite agendas to influence it. Schmidt argues for the latter explanation: “Most of the larger influential dailies . . . reflected the conservative ideological preferences of their owners and followed a clear pro-business and anti-radical line.”<sup>26</sup> The campaign of racializing communism is perhaps most evident in editorial cartoons of the period, which can best be understood by bifurcating them into descriptive and prescriptive expressions of domestic communism, presented in more or less equal measure during the years 1919 and 1920. Descriptive expressions provoked fear of the communist Other, who was racialized as a menacing, savage outsider—un-American in origin, appearance, and comportment. Prescriptive cartoons supplemented such notions, calling on Americans to repel the radical invasion through deportation and violent reprisal. Taken together, anticommunist Red Scare editorial cartoons (of both descriptive and prescriptive hues) provide a window into the comprehensive manner in which communism was racialized in the postwar press.

#### DESCRIPTIVE EDITORIAL CARTOONS

Descriptive anticommunism cartoons drew on allusions to savagery and European origin to racialize communism. Michael H. Hunt writes that cartoons of the period “equate[d] social revolution with indiscriminate death and destruction . . . the threat the ‘Reds’ posed to civilization . . . [was] embodied by a brutal, stereotypically Slavic type.”<sup>27</sup> The savage European, who exhibited all the exaggerated biological features of the “lower races,” was then labeled a “Bolshevik” or a “Red,” thus imbuing communism with a distinctly racial identity. What Borstelmann calls the “traditional



color-coding of savagery in the American National narrative" is indeed a persistent theme.<sup>28</sup> Following the 1867 New York City draft riots, Anglo-Saxons employed references to savagery to assert their whiteness by questioning the comparative racial integrity of the Irish. Jacobson writes that "many non-Irish onlookers and commentators . . . registered their own republican claims by questioning the rioters' full status as 'white persons' . . . The *Times* . . . decri[ed] the 'barbarism' of the riots and . . . characterize[d] the rioters themselves as 'brute,' 'brutish,' and 'animal' . . . The *Tribune* routinely characterized the Irish as a 'savage mob,' a 'pack of savages,' 'savage foes,' 'demons,' and 'incarnate devils.'"<sup>29</sup>

A December 1920 *Literary Digest* sketch embodies the savage type, featuring an imposing uniformed figure with Asian features, baring his teeth amid a nest of facial hair. "Bolshevism" is visible on his sash as he crosses the threshold of "Civilization," shoving the door open with his bloodied palm. Behind him there is darkness and a dead body—presumably slaughtered with the figure's long bloody knife. Themes of knives, blood, and death are used in several descriptive cartoons to signify savagery. Of twenty descriptive cartoons examined, four contain images of knives, three feature deaths, two display blood, and seven augur a physical threat to the viewer. Three of twenty feature the signifying figure of communism positioned outside a space defined as "civilization."

Kovel writes that "fantasies of bearded, filthy alien-radicals plotting against democracy and Western civilization [were] promulgated by the press," and indeed these racialized images of savage outsiders abound.<sup>30</sup> A January 1919 cartoon from the *Atlanta Constitution* includes an anthropomorphized "Bolshevik/Anarchist" storm cloud hovering menacingly over the United States, its dark trail reaching back into the recesses of Europe. Wild hair and a Russian Cossack hat cap the swarthy, snarling face amid the dark billows. Hands grip a bloody dagger and a bomb—the fuse is lit. The lightning bolts that pierce the sky above the United States feature the words "Murder," "Arson," and "Plunder." All of the allegorical elements of savagery are present, as is a clear visual representation of the extra-American origin of communism. At least 55 percent of the descriptive cartoons examined include such an allusion.

Another rhetorical device employed by illustrators of the period to mark the savage as un-American was the use of an oppositional figure. A cartoon from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (figure 6.2) republished in a July 1919 issue of *Literary Digest* shows a greasy, hook-nosed figure with droopy eyes crouched threateningly behind the Statue of Liberty. Wrapped in the cloak of "European Anarchist," the figure, clutching a dagger in one hand and a bomb in the other, prepares to attack Lady Liberty from the rear. Oppositional figures such as Uncle Sam and open-shop laborers provide the "American" or white counterpoint in at least four other descriptive images. Yet what is perhaps most interesting about this image is the placement

**FIGURE 6.2.** The “uncivilized” attack of the “European Anarchist.” Originally published in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*; republished in the *Literary Digest*, July 5, 1919. Courtesy, Red Scare (1918–1921), an Image Database (#16).



of the two figures vis-à-vis one another. Paul A. Kramer reminds us that “within the Euro-American world, patterns of warfare were important markers of racial status: civilized people could be recognized in their civilized wars, savages in their guerrilla ones.”<sup>31</sup> The irredeemable savagery of the anarchist is clear in his unwillingness to engage Lady Liberty head-on.

Perhaps the most frequently employed racializing device in descriptive cartoons of the Red Scare era—embodying the savagery and extra-American origin of the communist—was the rhetorical use of the “Red” designation. What Kovel calls a “transposition of color” works here on two levels. First, “Red” was a direct reference to the revolutionary Russian Red Army, which—beyond representing the racial wasteland of Slavic territories—had become legend in the American popular imagination for its savagery. Congressman Henry L. Myers of Montana “elaborated on the precise meaning of this Soviet-style revolution, saying it augured a government founded on murder, assassination, robbery, rapine, rape, force, violence, and, presumably, other—more unspeakable—crimes against mankind.”<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the *Baltimore American* characterized the Soviet government as “an outlaw of civilization and a stench in the nostrils of humanity,” and a June 1919 *New York*

*Times* headline announced: "Thug with a Rifle: Russia's New Czar; Refugee Tells of Murder and Robbery under Bolsheviki—Rule of Criminals: Bourgeoisie Burned Alive; Men Whose Only Crime Was Decency Herded Together and Drowned to Make a Holiday."<sup>33</sup>

A *Literary Digest* cartoon from October 1919—originally printed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*—features a beady-eyed, bearded figure creeping out from under the American flag. He brandishes a torch that reads "Anarchy" and a dagger that reads "Bolshevism"; his cap marks him as a "Red." "Put them out and keep them out" was the caption. Stereotypical facial features, outsider status, and savagery all come together under the "Red" moniker. A similarly racist sketch, published initially in the *New York Evening World* and subsequently in the *Literary Digest* in January 1920, highlights the efficacy of the "Red" device. The unkempt, shifty communist spreads his arms wide, proudly displaying a desecrated American flag. The panel of stars has been removed from the tattered banner, along with all of the white stripes. The remaining streamers are labeled "Red" and the caption reads "All they want in our flag." Without relying on knives, death, or allusions to extra-American origin, the savage un-Americanism of communism resonates. Forty-five percent of the Red Scare descriptive cartoons examined used explicit "Red" language to racialize communism.<sup>34</sup>

"Red" allusions worked on another level by referencing the original "savage outsider" of the American narrative: the American Indian. Kovel argues that such references "were adaptable to social conflicts between groups that had no collective memory of the encounter between Puritan and Indian . . . [and] the national wave of strikes in 1877 signified the transfer of the darkest images of the Indian onto the labor agitator. After Custer's Last Stand, Indian rebellions never again were a real threat to white society. The workers, though, were another story . . . thus was anticommunism officially born, as the prime signifier of the Devil passed from one kind of 'Red' to another."<sup>35</sup>

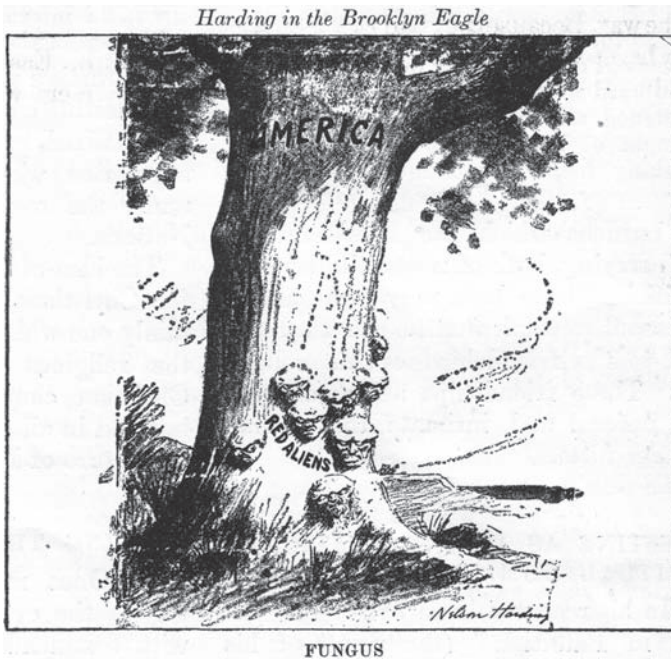
Cartoon depictions that included devils, monsters, wild animals, and nature themes—at least five of the descriptive cartoons—in conjunction with "Red" language were particularly adept at soliciting such connections. A July 1919 cartoon from the *Portland Telegram* captioned "Hell's Masterpieces" provides a striking example. The nude, red Devil—bearing a resemblance to Trotsky with an exaggerated hooknose—sits at an easel putting the finishing touches, with his "Red" brush, on a canvas titled *Bolshevik*. Behind him is a grotesque portrait of the recently humiliated Kaiser Wilhelm II, and at his feet are three completed portraits titled *Nero*, *Judas*, and *Caligula*. Nero's features are somewhat Asian, with the addition of a pig nose; Judas has a wild beard and hooknose; Caligula, for his part, bears a striking resemblance to the modern DreamWorks Studios–animated ogre, Shrek.

The “Bolshevik” snarls at the reader, his hair wild, his teeth rotted, and his eyes glaring past his bulbous nose. The meaning is unmistakable: the “Red,” a savage Bolshevik, represents the racial heritage of the “Red,” a savage Devil, and is cut from the same cloth as the criminals and ne’er-do-wells of the degraded Mediterranean and Slavic races.

The transposition of color from the American Indian to the radical, while highly effective in racializing the target, was, like many of the devices used in descriptive Red Scare cartoons, not new. David R. Roediger described the case of radical Finns in a Minnesota mining community who, racially marked as “red Finns,” fell victim to violent attack. He writes that “after 1905, special (anti) Indian agents began a concerted campaign to close saloons and arrest bootleggers on and near the Iron Range. With the Mesabi iron strike of 1915, these ‘Indian bulls’ went after saloons used by ‘red Finns’—the term connoted socialism . . . but also resonated with comparisons to Indians . . . the repression that eventuated on the Iron Range was nothing short of savage.”<sup>36</sup> If savage repression was the remedy for those marked as successors to the “savage” American Indian, cartoons such as the one in a July 1919 issue of *Outlook*—reprinted from the *Brooklyn Eagle*—were setting radicals up as the new targets of the American extermination campaign. The sketch (figure 6.3) features a large tree, “America,” from whose trunk spring the snarling, beady-eyed heads of “Red Aliens.” Their protruding brows recall images of wild, uncivilized Neanderthals. The caption, “Fungus,” leaves little doubt as to what must be done. Once again, white Americans would take the cue to excise the red outsider from the American landscape.

### PRESCRIPTIVE EDITORIAL CARTOONS

Thus descriptive editorial cartoons of the Red Scare marked the communist as a savage. Recall that contact with a racial outsider could cause Americans to forfeit claims to whiteness. So prescriptive cartoons about racial outsiders reminded viewers of the proper way to deal with the Other—with rejection through violent suppression and removal. With racist contempt, inevitably, comes violence. The appetite for violence against the racialized communist during the Red Scare was remarkable in its voraciousness. Kovel argues that “fear had opened the collective mind not only to tolerate state repression, but to demand it; and the sense of horror surrounding radicalism both legitimized and impelled violence on the part of the government.”<sup>37</sup> On January 2, 1920, in a series of raids in more than thirty cities in twenty-three states, Attorney General Palmer and the government complied. Thousands were arrested in a campaign whose hallmark was unmitigated violence. Murray reported that in the New York arrests,



**FIGURE 6.3.** “Red Aliens” bring about the decay of “America.” Originally published in the *Brooklyn Eagle*; republished in *Outlook*, July 2, 1919. *Courtesy*, Red Scare (1918–1921), an Image Database (#12).

brutality was practiced to an excessive degree. Prisoners in sworn affidavits later testified to the violent treatment they had received. One claimed he had been beaten by a Justice Department operative without any explanation; another maintained he was struck repeatedly on the head with a blackjack . . . Still another testified: “I was struck on my head, and . . . was attacked by one detective, who knocked me down again, sat on my back, pressing me down to the floor with his knee and bending my body back until blood flowed out of my mouth and nose.”<sup>38</sup>

Civil liberties were dismissed out of hand as the Red Scare program expanded into warrant-less arrests, illegal searches and seizures of persons and property, and cruel and unusual punishments. The treatment of radicals by federal officers bore all the markings of racial repression. Yet racial violence was not only within the purview of the federal government.

Locally, businessmen, patriot groups, and American Legionnaires were viciously lashing out against unionized labor, which had been conflated in the popular imagination with the radical, not-quite-white outsider. This was the type of racially

charged response that obtained in prescriptive cartoons of the Red Scare years. Depictions of violence represent 45 percent of the prescriptive cartoons examined. In one such image from a September 1919 issue of the *San Francisco Examiner*, a grinning Legionnaire looms large in the foreground, poised with a baseball bat of “100 per cent Americanism” at the ready. From “US” soil, he looks across the ocean, where a “Revolution Maker” prepares to pitch a worker—who is clutching a lunch pail and a sheaf of “Propaganda for US”—onto American shores. There is a mix of satisfaction and pleasure on the batter’s face as he readies to meet the foreign worker with a violent blow. What is noteworthy in this depiction and in at least fourteen other prescriptive cartoons is the novel approach to characterization of the communist. In a departure from the menacing depictions used in descriptive illustrations, these radicals, with their big noses, tattered clothes, wild facial hair, slack jaws, and stupefied expressions, appear inept and imbecilic. As in the illustration of the Legionnaire, the oppositional figure in such images is always above and large, while the radical is below and small. In print as in reality, violence follows diminution and dehumanization.

Oppositional figures play a significant role in prescriptive sketches, modeling the proper response to the racialized communist, who retains many of the trappings of the savage outsider present in descriptive cartoons. Thus the Other deserves the violent reprisal of the civilized, white opponent. Oppositional figures appear in nine of the twenty prescriptive cartoons, often in the form of Uncle Sam or the “American”/white, open-shop laborer. Two such cartoons—both from the summer of 1919—feature the foreign extremist laid low by US labor. The first (figure 6.4), from the *Chicago Tribune*, titled “The Patriotic American,” depicts the figure of “American Labor,” with rolled-up sleeves and a clenched right fist, standing over a dazed “Foreign Extremist” he has just knocked to the ground. The bearded, beady-eyed vagabond is sitting up and feeling for his face. His hat and a “Red” flag are on the ground beside him. “I’m kind of particular about who calls me ‘brother,’” quips the laborer. In point of fact, this was perhaps just as prescriptive as it was reflective, given how rampant racial prejudice against eastern and southern Europeans was within craft unions. According to Roediger, “New immigrants . . . had less access to craft jobs in unionized sectors than did whites of northwestern European origin . . . [partially because of] a hard core of union opinion seeing [them] as mirroring the biological unsuitability of Asians.”<sup>39</sup> Such images reinforced and encouraged workplace segregation. A similar cartoon from the *New York Tribune* features a burly woman labeled “Labor” standing on her doorstep; a radical (so identified by his facial hair and “Red” flag) is crumpled at the foot of the steps. “Capital” stands behind her as she proclaims, “Who told *you* I needed any help to manage my husband!” Both cartoons prod laborers to legitimize their Americanness, their



**FIGURE 6.4.** “American Labor” takes down the Reds. Originally published in the *Chicago Tribune*; republished in the *Literary Digest*, June 28, 1919. Courtesy, Red Scare (1918–1921), an Image Database (#9).

whiteness, by rejecting the “Red” outsider, often through violent means that are justified by the communists’ racial inferiority.

Depictions of deportation were other prescriptive means used to remind Americans that the communist was a racial outsider, unfit for citizenship in a country in which “free and white” were the only requirements to legitimization. A cartoon from the *New York Evening World*, republished in January 1920 in the *Literary Digest*, features the American bald eagle engaged in “Cleaning the Nest!” Five comically flailing radicals, their papers, and “Red” flags are shown suspended in an endless sky—tossed out like garbage, unfit for the American aerie—presumably to descend on baser lands. At least half of the prescriptive cartoons examined reference deportation explicitly or implicitly. A December 1919 sketch from the *New York Tribune*, titled “Deporting the Reds,” features Uncle Sam plucking miniature,

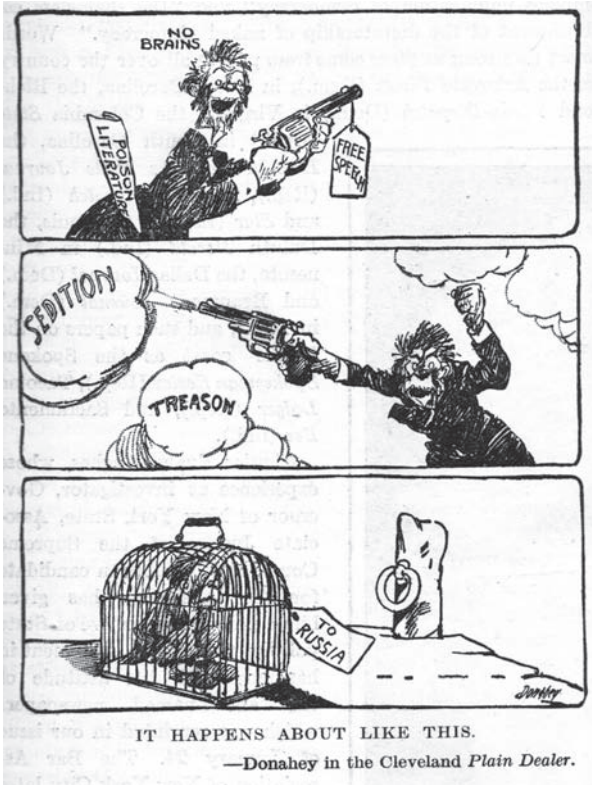
bearded communists from his feet and sending them down a chute that terminates at an ocean liner marked “Deportation.” In an allusion to the unstemmed tide of racially “new” immigration, the “Bolsheviki,” “Reds,” and “Revolutionaries”—as their banners identify them—just keep coming, frustrating the efforts of the bigger, stronger, whiter Uncle Sam. Another appearance by the oppositional figure in a March 1919 image from the *Columbus Dispatch* has Uncle Sam skimming the indigestible “Scum” from “The World’s Melting Pot.” The foul froth he ladles from the American stew is composed of the “Red Flag,” the “I.W.W.,” “Bolshevism,” “The Mad Notions of Europe,” “Anarchy,” and “Unamerican [*sic*] Ideals.” The cartoon uses the melting pot—which represented the assimilation of immigrants into white America—to mark out Wobblies, Bolsheviks, anarchists, and Reds as decidedly unassimilable, not-quite-white outsiders of the rankest sort.

The dehumanization that impelled and underwrote the racial violence of the Red Scare period also made its way into prescriptive cartoons as a validation of the deportation of alien agitators. November 1919 raids by the US Department of Justice had culminated in the deportation of 249 alleged communists and radicals, who were sent to sea aboard the USS *Buford*. The vessel became known as the “Soviet Ark” or “Red Ark,” and its cargo was allegorically reduced to mere animals. Prescriptive cartoons of the period reflect the theme. An April 1919 sketch from the *New York Tribune* features a crate of howling, wild radicals awaiting deportation on the dock. Arms, legs, and wildly maned heads push their way through the gaps between the planks of the crate. The side of the shipping crate reads “Disloyal Aliens. Violence Advocates and I.W.W. Leaders.” A shipping label declaring “Not Called For: Return to Sender” is affixed with a nail. When the radicals were racialized as caged beasts, who could protest their removal? Another such cartoon, originally published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (figure 6.5) and later featured in a February 1920 issue of *Literary Digest*, depicts a wild-eyed animal in a suit and tie. He carries “Poison Literature” in his pocket and a gun in his hands, tagged with the label “Free Speech.” The suited animal, it is suggested, has “No Brains,” and in the second of three panels we see that the shots from his gun create bursts of “Sedition” and “Treason.” The final panel shows the mad radical confined inside a cage on the dock. The tag “To Russia” leaves little doubt as to the creature’s lowly, Slavic racial identity.

## CONCLUSION

Descriptive and prescriptive cartoons—just a part of the Red Scare arsenal used to racialize communism—proved spectacularly effective for the white business elites of America in whose papers they were featured. Kovel argues that “ordinary citizens, the working people whom the radicals wanted to emancipate, had learned that they





**FIGURE 6.5.** Dehumanizing the foreign radical. Originally published in the *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*; republished in the *Literary Digest*, February 7, 1920. Courtesy, Red Scare (1918–1921), an Image Database (#126).

could avoid estrangement through anticommunism. For to hate and fear communism was the sure way of proving one's American identity.<sup>40</sup> With the rise of eugenics and the racial ranking of immigrant nationalities, working-class Americans sought to assert their own claims to whiteness by distancing themselves from the racialized outsider. If, as suggested by the historiography of domestic anticommunism, the racial Othering of organized labor was meant to marginalize and destroy the threat to the social order, its efficacy is indisputable. Even as the *Wall Street Journal* reported that "never before . . . has a government been so completely fused with business," working-class solidarity remained an elusive chimera.<sup>41</sup> So successful was the fusing of the "degraded" Slavic and southeastern European racial identity with that of the communist ideologue that business elites were forced to confront an unintended consequence of the campaign: the persistent stigmatization of alien workers and radicals augured immigration reform and an end to cheap labor.<sup>42</sup> The damage was done.

The racialization of communism would exhibit a peculiar staying power, even as the Red Scare subsided and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 passed, granting immigrants from southern and eastern Europe institutional access to the path toward whiteness. The act, while ranking all nationalities on a eugenically based scale of desirability and assigning immigration quotas accordingly, *did* serve to define all Europeans as racially white. While immigration from Russia and Italy was reduced by the national origins quota system to 7 percent and 9 percent of their previous allowances, respectively, the generational assimilation—the whitening—of southern and eastern Europeans meant that the racializing power of Red Scare rhetoric, extant in political cartoons of the period, would progressively diminish. Yet as anyone familiar with the modern American political landscape can discern, cries of “communist” are still an effective means of Othering one’s opponent, marking him or her at once as un-American, opposite, and unequal.

## NOTES

1. *Literary Digest*, 11–96.
2. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 3.
3. This historiographic view is best represented by Robert K. Murray. See Murray, *Red Scare*, 15; Powers, *Not without Honor*, 426.
4. Heale, *American Anticommunism*; Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Kovel, *Red Hunting*; Schmidt, *Red Scare*; Wiecek, “Legal Foundations.”
5. Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 26.
6. Wiecek, “Legal Foundations,” 385.
7. Heale, *American Anticommunism*, 27.
8. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 220–221.
9. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 16.
10. Wiecek, “Legal Foundations,” 390, 384.
11. Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 40; emphasis added.
12. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 61.
13. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 6.
14. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 23; original emphasis.
15. Borstelmann, *Cold War*, 13.
16. Cited in Borstelmann, *Cold War*, 50.
17. This was done in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.
18. Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 87.
19. Cited in Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 30.
20. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 88–89.
21. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 57, original emphasis.

22. Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 33.
23. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 24.
24. Palmer, "Address of A. Mitchell Palmer," 619.
25. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 41–42.
26. Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 37.
27. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, 120.
28. Borstelmann, *Cold War*, 185.
29. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 54–55.
30. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 21.
31. Kramer, *Blood of Government*, 90.
32. Cited in McNiece, "Un-Americans," 59.
33. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 14.
34. Based on my examination of forty editorial cartoons.
35. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 226–227.
36. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, 64.
37. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 19–20.
38. Murray, *Red Scare*, 214.
39. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, 82.
40. Kovel, *Red Hunting*, 22.
41. Cited in Miller, *New World Coming*, 88.
42. Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 39.

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