

Introduction

In April 1920, the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities released its final report on radicalism in New York State, implicating Frederic C. Howe and his wife, Marie Jenney Howe. More commonly known as the “Lusk Committee,” so named for its chair, Senator Clayton Lusk, this notorious body investigated radical organizations, raided them, seized literature and information, and worked to compile a list of “all parlor bolsheviki, IWW, and socialists.”¹ The committee included Marie, a feminist activist and pacifist, and Fred, a progressive lawyer and reformer, on that list. But unlike many other radicals at the time, neither went to jail. In fact, neither was officially charged with a crime. Still, the Red Scare that began in 1919 dramatically shifted the possibilities and assumptions governing their worlds in different ways, and these shifts are the focus of this book.

The Red Scare imperiled the career of Frederic C. Howe, marking the post–World War I period as a time of increasing conservatism. A prominent progressive reformer and then commissioner of immigration at the Port of New York, Howe found himself under surveillance in early 1919 upon returning home from Paris. President Woodrow Wilson, his former professor and someone he much admired, had appointed Howe to a post with the American peace delegation. Fred’s liberal leanings and his willingness to stand up for social justice, whether on Ellis Island or in revolutionary Russia, placed him in a vulnerable position as a government employee. In May 1919, he chaired a Justice to Russia meeting at New York’s Madison Square Garden, where he supported self-determination in the new Soviet Union. Resolutions passed

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insisting on the Allies' duty to uphold Wilson's Fourteen Points with regard to Russia's right to self-determination, and while some American radicals did support the more radical brand of Russian communism known as Bolshevism, no one there advocated the overthrow of the American government.

But the Red Scare reached a crescendo that month amid bomb blasts and clashes in the streets, and days after the meeting, the national media led a charge clamoring for Fred's resignation. An editor at the *New York Times* called his actions "especially intolerable" as prominent senators publicly called for his removal from office for presiding over a "pro-Bolshevist" event.² A preacher from Brooklyn quoted in the *Atlanta Constitution* condemned the meeting and urged Fred and his friends, "men who hate this country," to "go to the land of Bolshevism."³ Fred defended himself, arguing that he believed simply in justice for Russia, and he pointed out that adherence to Wilson's points could hardly be conceived as un-American. But by the end of the hot and tumultuous summer of 1919, there was no room in American popular discourse for such logic. The scare would cost Fred his government career, and it would shake his faith in his nation.⁴

Fred's belief in a certain kind of America, where the government acted in the best interests of the people, became dislodged. He joined other disillusioned liberals and radicals in the years following World War I in their indictment of capitalist Americanism, an effort that produced a virulent anti-radicalism in response. A few years later, Fred wrote, "For months I lived in a state of fear. I feared something impending, something mysterious that hung over me. . . . It was not my America, it was something else. And I think I lost interest in it, just as did thousands of other[s] . . . whose love of country was questioned." Howe, once a naïve progressive reformer—one with profound faith in his own class and its ability to do good—found himself awed at the power of capitalism while living in fear "of the state and all that it signified."⁵

Fred's fears were well grounded. A Secret Service agent working to uncover radicalism seized Marie Howe in front of the couple's apartment building in New York City as the Red Scare coalesced in January 1919. The Howes' friend Robert La Follette relayed the "very ugly story" to his family and noted that Marie was prevented from contacting her husband or a lawyer during her detainment. Apparently, no charges were filed, and there is little historical record of the incident, but American reactions to radicalism after the Russian Revolution would affect Marie Howe in ways that went beyond the outcry against her husband and her own harassment by government agents.

Marie Jenney Howe's world in many ways was a female-centered one, and antiradicalism reframed that world by contributing to what one historian called the "heterosexual counterrevolution."⁶ From a well-to-do family in Syracuse, New York, Marie Jenney went to seminary and trained as a Uni-

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tarian minister. She worked for several years at the First Unitarian Church in Des Moines, Iowa, before marrying the idealistic, reform-minded lawyer Fred Howe in 1904. Marie gave up her career at that point, choosing to work for suffrage and advocate for workers and consumers in the National Consumers League. The pair moved to New York in 1910, where they immersed themselves in the bohemian world of Greenwich Village. Marie spoke at rallies for women's rights, held membership in the National Woman's Party, and helped lead the militant and confrontational Woman's Peace Party. Fred remembered those years fondly, saying, "Brilliant young people, full of vitality, ardent about saving the world, floated in and out of our apartment."⁷ While their contacts became diffuse and included an astonishing number of liberal and radical activists and writers, Marie longed for an organization for women. In 1912, she founded her beloved Heterodoxy Club, a women's luncheon club for a "little band of willful women" on the vanguard of feminism in New York's Greenwich Village.⁸

Here, for more than a decade, Marie cultivated and celebrated diversity and activism every other Saturday. The group began with twenty-five members, each paying dues of \$2 per year, and by 1920 their numbers had more than doubled. Literary luminaries such as Amy Lowell and activists such as Helen Keller addressed the club; members themselves also made presentations or led raucous discussions. As a rule, no members of the press were allowed.⁹ The club provided a space free of constraints and taboos, supporting every kind of feminist life, including those of its relatively open lesbian members, such as Dr. Sara Josephine Baker, the educator Elisabeth Irwin, the biographer Katharine Anthony, and the fiction writer Helen Hull.¹⁰

However, by the late 1920s, powerful forces in American culture and politics—most notably, antiradicalism—began to narrow the feminist world. These forces manifested within Heterodoxy, challenging a significant tradition of women's separatism that circumscribed not only feminist politics but also sexual possibilities in the 1920s. While scholars often attribute this process to the fragmentation of the women's movement, the popular embrace of psychology, or the rise of consumer culture, this study demonstrates the power of antiradicalism in mobilizing and contributing to a new discourse on sexuality.

By 1927, the Heterodoxy Club reflected this narrowing of the boundaries of feminism and sexual expression in America, as the "true feminist life" became accessible primarily to married heterosexual women. An invited guest witnessed an illuminating group discussion about what constituted the "true feminist life." In a letter to the Heterodite Ruth Pickering, the guest, her sister-in-law, noted that Helen Hull, a lesbian, seemed particularly horrified by the substance of the conversation:

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One thing interested or rather bothered me terribly in that meeting. I wonder whether you noticed it. . . . It seemed to me that something awfully cruel was done to her at that meeting—and I felt she was going through hell all the time. . . . When Doctor Hollingworth included in her definition of perfect feminist a woman happily married and with children, it shattered all Miss Hull’s defense mechanism. Did you notice how she turned to the . . . others, and hoped they would back her up—and when they did not, did you see her face and notice that she never spoke again?¹¹

Leta Hollingworth, a renowned psychologist and feminist, implied in her comments that a true feminist was a married woman with children, effectively placing Hull outside the boundaries of the feminist circle she was sitting in at that very moment. Pickering’s sister-in-law had perceived a conflict between two competing discourses on sexuality.

By the late 1920s, even in Marie’s Heterodoxy Club, a more conservative definition of feminism narrowed the space available for lesbians by celebrating married, reproductive heterosexuality, a shift that went beyond feminist circles to color American society as a whole. An expression of sexuality, “with heterosexual experience,” had become “essential to women’s freedom.”¹² Feminist women’s relationships with family and the “home” were complicated and individual, but a general consensus of dissatisfaction emerged at the end of the decade. Many expected to blend marriage and career and found the arrangement unsatisfactory, while others, like Hull, felt alienated by this twentieth-century iteration of feminism that prioritized relations with men. In 1927, Marie published a biography of George Sand in part, she told a close confidant, to prove she could be more than “poor domestic Marie.”¹³ As the discourse on sexuality shifted, even Marie, a vaunted feminist, found her marriage personally and professionally confining.

What forces in American politics and culture led Hull to feel like an outsider in Heterodoxy and Howe to feel like “poor domestic Marie” by the late 1920s? And what did this have to do with the Red Scare? How does Fred’s experience with antiradicalism connect with Marie’s and Hull’s? In what ways did antiradicalism use and contribute to a burgeoning discourse on sexuality? These are the guiding questions that drive this analysis.

The central argument of this book is that cultural and political reactions to the Red Scare in America contributed to a marked shift in how Americans thought about sexuality, womanhood, manhood, and family life. While Marie Jenney Howe could not, in all likelihood, look back in 1927 and say the Russian Revolution narrowed sex and gender norms in America, it did play a role in that process. Prompted by a wide range of factors, anxious Americans saw in radicalism a threat to the social order, and they positioned the

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heterosexual, monogamous family as a bulwark against radicalism. These contributions, made by antiradicalism to an increasingly heterosocial world in America, have been largely overlooked.

Fred Howe's story fits comfortably within the historical narrative of Red Scare America, but Marie Howe's experience does not. The establishment of a communist government in Russia created a seismic shift in world politics and had a profound impact on the political situation in the United States—in the 1920s and for almost a century after. Historians have long recognized this impact. What they have not explored, or even acknowledged to any great degree, is the significance of the Russian Revolution in relation to sexual and social mores in the United States. Scholars have, of course, targeted the years around World War I for just this purpose, highlighting the emergence of sexual modernism, which thrust sexuality into the public eye and finally dismantled separate spheres for women and men. This book draws clear connections between these two major developments—the experiences of Fred and Marie Howe, the former ostensibly political, and the latter cultural—to shed new light on the period immediately following World War I. The history of antiradicalism, marking Fred's world, and the history of antifeminism and heteronormative reaction, evident in Marie's feminist world, are deeply intertwined.

To understand these connections, we have to appreciate that Americans in the postwar decade reacted to frightening and bewildering threats, both foreign and domestic. Horror at the reality of World War I, a raging debate over the desirability of internationalism, and the Russian Revolution all framed the way Americans reacted to the reach of federal power, labor radicalism, immigration, feminism, youth culture, and sexual modernism. A tension grew up between progress and tradition, between reform and reaction, giving rise to antiradicalism, a precursor to the modern conservative movement. Bearers of the native, white, Protestant middle-class order articulated deep anxiety over the chasm developing “between Americans still devoted to a national identity defined by late-nineteenth-century Victorian values and those tied to the increasingly pluralistic cultural forces of the twentieth century.”¹⁴

Business elites, social conservatives, “super” patriots, antifeminists, nativists, antistatists, antimodernists, and antipluralists formed a loose conservative consensus in the 1920s, espousing a flexible, defensive, and ideological nationalism, often referred to at the time and in this study as *Americanism*. This conservative ideology stemmed from widespread beliefs about American superiority, racial superiority, patriarchy, free enterprise, evangelical Protestantism, moral purity, and the nation as a city on a hill in which democracy and capitalism secured freedom and opportunity for all citizens.¹⁵

The primary forces fueling postwar Americanism were antiradicalism,

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antimodernism, and antifeminism, although antiradicalism—fueled by official and popular American reactions to the Russian Revolution—was the most evident of the three. At first, many observers viewed the overthrow of the Russian tsar in 1917 with a glimmer of hope for democracy, but by 1919, the Bolshevik takeover and call for a worldwide revolution had shifted many Americans toward a fierce anticommunism. President Wilson and other world leaders genuinely feared the spread of Bolshevism around the globe, but Wilson legitimately worried about disorder at home, as well. The anti-war socialists, unrelenting progressives, picketing suffragists, striking workers, unassimilated immigrants, and restless African Americans challenged the national myths upon which Wilson had staked the Great War, and while this troubled him greatly, he resented them for it.¹⁶ In response, Wilson, once a progressive, once a believer in industrial democracy, became a crusading antiradical. He sent fourteen thousand American troops to engage in the Allies' secret war on Russian soil between 1918 and 1920, and he approved of his government's wartime and Red Scare repression. In speeches throughout the country on his ill-fated tour in support of the League of Nations, Wilson assailed Bolshevism as more than just communism, calling it a "negation of everything that is American."¹⁷

To a range of conservatives, progressives, government officials, and economic elites, and even to average Americans caught up in propaganda, the Russian Revolution changed the nature of radicalism in the United States. Attempts to hold the line against change, to safeguard civilization and the status quo, became irrevocably more challenging. Editors at the *Saturday Evening Post* explained this logic to their readers in 1922 when they argued, "The struggle has become far more severe, a hundred times more difficult, since those who would destroy have before them the maddening vision of the Russian proletarian dictatorship."¹⁸ Whereas socialism was tolerated, even if barely, before the war, by 1919 the danger presented by radicalism seemed overwhelming.

Furthermore, the glare of the revolution colored the American nation's most cherished myths. America's own radicals visited Russia and called the revolution the "real deal." This, and the fact that it was a workers' state, dealt a blow to American revolutionary notions of self-grandeur. The meaning of progress, the goal of civilization and of all Americans, was in question. Capitalism, and the American way of life it enabled, was no longer viewed as the only feasible economic model. In addition, the treaty talks in Versailles and the public debate over the League of Nations forced Americans to imagine their nation and their nationalism in a wider context, highlighting a significant divide between isolationists and internationalists.

Yet Americans also interpreted the larger importance of the Russian Revolution in ways that were personal and intimate. They saw the Soviet experi-

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ment as they wanted to, in ways that related to their own anxieties at the time, and their fear of Bolshevism reflected their real apprehensions about a rapidly changing domestic society.¹⁹ Antiradicals concerned themselves with labor and immigration, but they also worried mightily over changing sexual and gender norms.

By 1919, the rejection of Victorian sexual norms inherent in modernism was apparent in the United States, and reactions to it helped foster the powerful force of antimodernism. Americans' views on sexuality and gender in the 1910s reflected a drastic break from the past; by the postwar period, anxious traditionalists feared that these changed values and behaviors might have dire political and cultural implications. In the years leading up to World War I, Americans witnessed major challenges to Victorian culture.²⁰ Working-class youth mixed with members of the opposite sex in urban amusements, and sex education reformers gave up a formal silence on the subject of sex in favor of social investigations; overt efforts to combat venereal disease; and some sex education through industrial organizations, films, and college programs.²¹ In cities such as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, building on the ideals of activists such as Emma Goldman, sexual radicals sought out a new philosophy appropriate for an increasingly modern world. Political radicals, artists, journalists, feminists, and other bohemians rebelled against the constraints of Victorian sexuality, making their rejection of genteel Victorian middle-class culture a new kind of identity politics based on sexuality. As Mari Jo Buhle explains, "Sexual love in many forms, inside or outside marriage, between men and women or between individuals of the same sex, must, they insisted, be allowed to flourish without restriction."²² Thus, some Americans loudly criticized sexual reticence, advocated for birth control, and, perhaps most significant, demanded that women's sexuality be acknowledged and expressed. The 1910s presented a unique period of opportunity in matters sexual, as people reformulated sexual ideology to fit a fast-changing world.

The new discourse on sex permeated American culture, marking the start of the 1920s as a period of sexual liberalism.²³ Popularized interpretations of Freudian psychology linked sexuality firmly to notions of identity and the self. Postwar youth who grew up in an atmosphere of sexual reform were encouraged to integrate with members of the opposite sex at an early age, and they became aware of ideas about deviance and inversion. Unmarried men and women engaged in sexual experimentation, while divorce rates rose.

Such behavior was all the more disconcerting because of the newly prominent movement to legalize information about birth control, begun in earnest in 1912.²⁴ The movement started in New York City, among Greenwich Village radicals seeking to allow women reproductive and sexual freedom. It spread throughout the 1910s, thanks to the support and agitation of activists such as Margaret Sanger and radical groups, including the Industrial Workers of

the World (IWW) and the Socialist Party. The possibility of birth control also allowed for the articulation of regulatory reforms such as companionate marriage, stressing early marriage, birth control, easy divorce for the childless, and equality between the sexes. This inherent challenge to tradition only fanned the flames of antimodernism.²⁵

The last “-ism” to play a role in fueling postwar reaction was antifeminism, which made gender central to understandings of healthy Americanism.²⁶ Antifeminism, in broad terms, grew out of the already established antisuffrage movement in America. In 1917, that movement underwent a change in strategy and in leadership. The movement’s message evolved. Due to the mounting pressure for suffrage, the link between wartime pacifism and feminism, and the Russian Revolution, the group transitioned from a single-interest social movement to a broadly based reactionary force struggling to maintain the pre-war status quo. Suffragists, feminists interested in more than the vote, pacifists, socialists, anarchists, and any other challengers to the old order now fell under their purview. Antisuffrage activists moved away from political lobbying and instead focused their efforts on infiltrating popular discourse. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in the summer of 1920, these groups did not give up and go home; rather, they became outspoken antifeminist organizations—often at the heart of the antiradical movement—fostering a political culture hostile to gender equality and progressive women’s activism.²⁷

This rise in militancy in the antisuffrage movement was due in part to the rise in militancy in the suffrage movement itself in the 1910s, which served to heighten anxieties about women as political actors in the public sphere. By 1916, both the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association and the National Woman’s Party (NWP) battled vigorously for the vote. Agitation by both groups and the experience of the war made suffrage a realistic goal for the first time in the 1910s, something antisuffragists sensed keenly. Furthermore, the apparent youth of NWP members, along with their British-inspired acts of civil disobedience and their socialist bedfellows, heightened the degree of anger and frustration many conservatives felt toward the suffrage movement.²⁸

Still, that the suffrage victory came in 1919 matters very much here. In this postwar moment, one marked by antiradicalism and by a debate over women’s changing role in the public sphere, Americans engaged in a reformulation of the meaning of citizenship. The right to vote marked people as citizens endowed with civic status; it initially included propertied white men, then white men of all classes and then, in 1870—at least, theoretically—all men regardless of color. In reality, Jim Crow laws in the South and discrimination in the North kept many African American men from voting and, eventually, African American women, too. But the last vestige of exclusivity propping up civic status seemed ready to disappear during the Red Scare. The

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passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, as Nancy Cott put it, signaled the end of the “marital model in which the individuality and citizenship of the wife disappeared into her husband’s legal person.”²⁹ In the view of elite men, men of power and wealth, hierarchies of citizenship inscribed with patriarchal power and authority had been rocked by uncertainty.³⁰ Suddenly, elite male citizens had no *other*, no dependent group to define themselves in opposition to.

To battle the rise in women’s independence, antiradicals and traditionalists breathed renewed life into the notion that the family constituted the fundamental democratic unit of American society. Since the nineteenth century, the antisuffrage campaign had operated on two basic beliefs: that women were represented in the polity by male heads of household and that the traditional family unit should remain free from government interference. Even after the notion of citizenship shifted in the 1800s to embody the rights of individuals rather than those of a patriarchal household, antisuffragists persisted in asserting the family unit as the *de facto* political entity in the United States. Antiradicals and antifeminists both amplified this idea in the 1920s, which, given the remaining limits on married women’s independence at the time, was not difficult to do.

Thus, antiradicalism, antimodernism, and antifeminism reinforced one another in the Red Scare, helping to constitute the defensive nationalist ideology of Americanism. All three forces drew on changes at home and abroad, and all three implied political and cultural disorder, allowing for Fred and Marie Howe’s experiences of the scare. In a wide array of galvanizing issues, these campaigns connected a diverse range of groups and individuals under the banner of Americanism.

This study traces popular discussion of Americanism throughout the 1920s, demonstrating that some Americans responded to foreign and domestic threats to national strength in a way that privileged the family, traditional gender roles, and sexuality as primary sites for the expression of proper nationalism. In many cases, the voices come from the right or the far right, from bearers of the old order desperately seeking to stem the tides of radicalism and change; in others, those contributing to this discourse are progressives, accepting capitalism and democracy with an overt mission to improve the lives of Americans within these systems. Both groups were rocked with uncertainty by the idealism and agitation of socialists, communists, and anarchists on the left and by dramatic changes in American culture. Really, Americanism worked as a cohesive ideological stance because it allowed people with disparate political motivations and concerns to join together in crafting a coherent message. Varied ideological concerns fit neatly and simply under the banner of Americanism, and people found safety and promise in

their effort collectively to restore social and cultural values, morals, and traditions threatened by recent upheavals.³¹ These groups focused on bolstering the strength of the private family unit, orderly womanhood and manhood, and monogamous heterosexuality.

Antiradical conservatives and some self-styled progressives struggled to mediate change by positioning the family as a barometer for national health. They targeted a wide range of groups for various reasons but always highlighted the potential for both political and cultural radicalism. The call for a definitive cultural identity led conservative and progressive Americanizers to focus rather easily on unassimilated immigrants, not only as unfit citizens, but also as uninformed parents and rebellious children. Conservatives framed working-class men as radicals, and promoters of Americanism tallied the social costs of that radicalism, emphasizing the way they might damage their families. Feminists, social welfare activists, and marriage reformers often had progressive or radical leanings; however, although their efforts sometimes challenged the traditional family hierarchy, at times they reinforced it. And right-wing antiradicals criticized a range of middle- and upper-class intellectuals who consistently pushed against the status quo, all the while publicizing how those intellectuals' actions might demoralize the young.

Many of these groups espoused different, even contradictory, political and economic beliefs, but they all drew on the ideology of a white, Anglo-Saxon Americanism to consolidate their power and influence in postwar society. Their use of a popular nationalism constituted in part by ethnicity and race aligned their work in often surprising ways.³² The nativism of "100% Americanism" in the 1920s sanctified white Protestant elites as the standard-bearers of the American tradition, in opposition to disorderly outsiders, asserting the superiority of American values. And expressions of Americanism emanating from the resurgent Ku Klux Klan rested on a blatantly racist understanding of national identity. While the antiradical and progressive groups in this study rarely targeted African Americans specifically, the spate of southern lynching and urban race riots in 1919 demonstrate the tenor of white reaction to left-wing black rumblings in the immediate postwar period. The existence of a recalcitrant "New Negro" helped heighten the sense of crisis felt by conservatives and elites just as it swelled the sense of possibility felt by some workers and radicals. For this reason, Red Scare Americanism unified a range of individuals in an impulse to foster national stability through support for a racial hierarchy of white over black.³³

But as this study contends, supporters of Americanism also privileged sexuality and gender in their formations of popular nationalism. The ideology of Americanism, relying on the hegemonic discourse on sexuality, facilitated numerous and diffuse efforts to refashion fading Victorian gender roles and exert social control over modernizing sexual desires and behavior. Analyz-

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ing the related entity of Cold War nationalism, Jane Sherron De Hart writes that the “threat [of communism] generated pressure to conform to founding paradigms of sexuality, gender, and nationhood as part of a new construction of national identity and purpose.”³⁴ These pressures existed decades before the 1950s, and constructions of nationalism and national identity in the 1920s proscribed a similarly specific set of gendered and sexual norms as appropriately patriotic.

In an era governed largely by conservative reaction, Americanism exerted a profound influence on politics and culture. Yet many Americans undoubtedly remained focused on their own personal struggles and joys. Employment, family life, security—these practical concerns dominated the daily lives of average American men and women in the United States in the decade after the Red Scare, just as they did in the years before it.³⁵ But a multilayered and expansive Americanism existed, conjured by anxious elites promoting stability and order. Conversations about radicalism and proper Americanism permeated popular culture, framing people’s responses to cultural and political change while shaping the nature of popularly conceived “truths.”³⁶

The ways that gender and sexuality helped constitute Americanism are complex. Those who genuinely feared the political challenge posed by the success of the Russian Revolution harnessed anxiety over changing sexual and gender norms, further sensationalizing the threat of political radicalism. Others who were more concerned about those cultural changes linked them to the development of political revolution, publicizing the multifaceted dangers of radicalism. These strains of Americanism were mutually constitutive, and together they served to further normalize the “heterosexual counterrevolution” of the 1920s.³⁷

This study intervenes in several historiographical discussions about sex and gender, the family, conservatism, and the 1920s. First, let us revisit the situation of the lesbian writer Helen Hull in Marie Jenney Howe’s *Heterodoxy Club*. Hull’s apparent alienation was the end result of a larger shift in ways of knowing and talking about sex in the Western world. Women had sex with women, men had sex with men, and women and men had sex with each other for centuries, but homosexuality—and, even more important for this study, heterosexuality—emerged as concepts, as identities, only in the late nineteenth century.³⁸ Sexuality is, as one historian phrased it, a “‘fictional unity,’ that once did not exist. . . . It is an invention of the human mind.” Sexuality, of course, has a tangible and real impact on our lives and on our society, but this study is predicated on the belief that “‘sexuality’ is an historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, and cultural forms.”³⁹ Sexuality, then, and the concept of marriage are socially constructed and historically specific.⁴⁰

Americans in the nineteenth century conceived of sex not in terms of pleasure so much as in terms of procreation. By the 1890s, this thought regime was being eroded by the notion of a pleasure ethic, particularly a “different sex pleasure ethic.” Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the German psychiatrist and pioneering sex writer, theorized about this “sexual instinct” between people of the opposite sex, highlighting a desire unfettered to the procreative instinct.⁴¹ This desire was embodied by the “hetero-sexual,” introduced first to Americans in Krafft-Ebing’s English publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1893. The opposite—a person who desired someone of the same sex—was the “homo-sexual,” an identity cast as perverse due to the lack of procreative potential.

While categories were still somewhat fluid at the turn of the century, more and more American and European writers in the medical and science professions began defining these sexual identities in a binary relationship, labeling heterosexuality normal and homosexuality a form of perversion. Clearly, this process of classifying did not invent homosexual behavior, but it did provide a formal taxonomy, which, along with the language used by state officials, in gay subcultures, and in the popular press, had constructed a recognizable homosexual identity by the early twentieth century. Heterosexuality swiftly went from “normal to normative.”⁴²

Therefore, heterosexuality was invented, too. Jonathan Ned Katz first used this language in his analysis of the social construction of “normal” sexuality, writing, “Heterosexuality, we imagine, is essential, unchanging: ahistorical.”⁴³ Contesting this view of heterosexuality is a central focus of this study. As Katz and others point out, heterosexuality represents a relatively recent historical “arrangement of the sexes and their pleasures.”⁴⁴ This invention took its modern shape in the Red Scare decade. Katz argues, “Heterosexuality began this century defensively, as the publicly unsanctioned private practice of the respectable middle class, and as the publicly put-down pleasure-affirming practice of urban working-class youths, southern blacks, and Greenwich Village bohemians. But by the end of the 1920s, heterosexuality had triumphed as a dominant, sanctified culture.”⁴⁵

More than a practice—more than an identity, even—by the late 1920s heterosexuality had become a social system. It organized fundamental aspects of people’s lives, mediating and ascribing great social and political meaning to physical acts. Heterosexuality assigned value and intelligibility to politics, citizenship, race, class, gender, and family life through language, normative behavior, and hierarchical relationships.⁴⁶ As a rule, this form of social organization is always in flux, changing over time as society’s many needs, values, and desires change.⁴⁷ In the end, as one recent writer put it, “This concept we call ‘heterosexuality’ doesn’t just shape our sex lives; it shapes the ways we understand the world to work and, consequently, the ways it does.”⁴⁸

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In the 1920s, this new sexual ideology was articulated as an aggressive stress on heterosexuality, leading many people to believe that a kind of sexual liberation had occurred. Women, commentators argued, needed to catch up as well as wise up by letting go of the sex-segregated women's culture of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Once women were perceived as interested in sex, those who appeared to reject men no longer had the notion of true womanhood, or women's moral authority, to cloak their actions. Writers expounding on the new sexual ideal correspondingly developed an alternative discourse as a warning. Christina Simmons notes the extensive attention paid to lesbians in popular literature, asserting, "The critical point about this literature is that it treated homosexuality as a condition which developed in specific relation to heterosexuality, namely through the failure or deprivation or rejection of the latter."⁵⁰ In this period, then, homosexuality was understood as an acquired condition; medical understandings moved away from the concept of congenital inversion or complete reversal of gender identity and instead determined lesbians by sexual object choice.⁵¹ The "mannish lesbian" of earlier days was knowable, and therefore containable, but now even passive women who appeared feminine could be lesbians. And homosexuality was no longer a valid expression of sexual desire. As Stephanie Coontz writes, "By the early 1930s tolerance of open homosexual subcultures . . . had pretty much disappeared."⁵²

The costs of the increasingly heterosocial nature of the 1920s demand the close interrogation of heterosexuality as social system. As certain types of gender and sexual behavior were normalized, the ability to express queer sexualities, while never expansive, diminished. Feminist women expressed a palpable sense of disillusionment about their own personal and political lives, and popular understandings of feminism changed. A breakdown in women's culture took place, which has been linked to the decline of organized feminism itself in that decade.⁵³ But how did the sexual discourse, so potentially liberating in the 1910s, become so narrow? How did the focus on heterosocial culture become so aggressive in the 1920s? These are important questions for the historian—no map for sexuality's development, no trajectory, is inevitable. Simmons provides an answer, arguing that the decline of organized feminism "after 1920 must certainly have been one factor allowing the dissemination of such an intensely heterosexual vision of personal life. In the absence of a powerful feminist voice, exponents of companionate marriage tempered the liberating potential of new sexual ideas and judged women's sexuality acceptable only insofar as its energy was channeled into marriage and the service of men."⁵⁴ Marriage reformers "tempered" these ideas by co-opting sexual radicalism. Making matters worse for those living within this potentially diminishing marital model, women no longer had the benefit of a strong feminist network.

Yet there is something else to consider in an attempt to fully understand the narrowing of sexual and gender norms by the late 1920s: the ideology of Americanism, with its intense focus on the family as a bulwark against Bolshevism, with popular beliefs about the Russian Revolution so tightly linked to gender and family disorder, also worked to temper “the liberating potential of new sexual ideas” in the decade that marked the establishment of heterosexuality as a social system. Americanism shaped sexuality and gender behavior through public conflicts between liberals and conservatives, patriotic campaigns, Americanization efforts, and progressives’ attempts to mediate the youth culture’s embrace of sexual modernism.

Connections made between sex and gender radicalism and political radicalism were not new in 1919, but the Red Scare provided a unique environment for these connections to flourish as anticommunism solidified in the United States. The complex interplay established during the Red Scare between antiradicalism, on the one hand, and anxieties about changing sexual and gender norms, on the other, persisted throughout the 1920s because in many ways, the scare continued. While some historians maintain that the Red Scare ended in the early 1920s, in reality the anxieties at the root of the phenomenon were manifestations of enduring uncertainties about the warp and woof of American society and culture. The government may have stopped using overt and heavy-handed tactics in the early 1920s, but Americanism fundamentally shaped the remainder of the decade, framing the public’s easy escapist embrace of popular amusements and consumer culture, the parameters of citizenship, and the trend toward consensus and conservatism.⁵⁵

Warren G. Harding famously called for a “return to normalcy” in American life in 1920, and Americanism undeniably buttressed that call. Americans understood Harding’s election to the office of the presidency in 1920 as a rejection of Wilson’s failed liberalism and a test of American values. Republicans ran a campaign steeped in the rhetoric of Americanism, while Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, likened the significance of the vote to Abraham Lincoln’s election before the Civil War. Butler declared, “The fundamental issue in 1920 is not going to be whether the union will be preserved, but whether the American form of Government will be maintained.”⁵⁶ It was in this political environment that Harding expounded on his view of the binary relationship between order and disorder in America. In a campaign speech on readjustment, he said, “America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration.”⁵⁷ This uncomplicated vision reflected the mood of the public, who overwhelmingly voted for Harding.⁵⁸ But the real meaning of normalcy and its implications beg further analysis. What *was* normalcy exactly? Was it a return to consensus steeped in the past? Was it an attempt to reformulate the status quo? Or was it a new thing altogether?

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Historians often locate the fundamental struggle in the United States by 1920, one between the old order and the new, between religious fundamentalism and modernism, between fading rural farm towns and the exponentially expanding cities. Or in another telling, the revived campaign of the Ku Klux Klan serves as the 1920s example of antimodernism, with the Klan's ugly rejection not only of African Americans but also of Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and feminists.⁵⁹

This story of antiradicalism bolstered by antifeminism and antimodernism demonstrates that antimodernism was more diffuse than often realized, and it places the struggle to maintain the old order on unfamiliar terrain. Furthermore, this study exposes the political significance of the family in the 1920s and, in so doing, reveals the early emergence of conservative "family values" in America. Long before the rise of the so-called New Right in the late 1960s and 1970s, political conservatives established the language and developed the tools to position sexual and gendered values at the center of an economic and political agenda.⁶⁰

In *Red War on the Family*, I argue several main points. First, to Americans, both Americanism and Bolshevism were constructions, ideologies created to serve social and political needs. These ideologies were not necessarily rooted in American or Russian realities. Second, Americans' fear of Bolshevism—and the notion of communism more generally—stemmed from their anxieties over social changes taking place around them throughout the 1920s, particularly regarding women's status and sexual modernism. Third, groups operating under the banner of Americanism as a way to better order American society sought to impose traditional family values on groups such as immigrants, workers, women, and young people, producing a rhetoric that would shape politics in the twentieth century. And, finally, efforts to uphold Americanism in all its variations, in response to the Russian Revolution, did the work of reinforcing heterosexuality as a social system in American life, just as ordered bodies and behavior reinforced democracy and capitalism in the face of communism.

Chapter 1 demonstrates that as uncertainty over the potential implications of the Russian Revolution pervaded American society, a conservative consensus developed among various groups hoping to maintain the status quo. These people worked to boost patriotic capitalist Americanism, which developed in a binary relationship with American perceptions of Bolshevism. Chapter 2 builds on this context by tracing the connections made between feminism and Bolshevism in America. Nervous antiradicals, conservative politicians, social critics, filmmakers, and writers all drew attention to apparent Russian social policies that, like feminism, could turn Americans' expectations of womanhood, manhood, and family life on their heads. Busi-

ness and political interests working to right the economy after World War I developed a movement to revive homeownership among American workers and the middle class. The appropriately named Own Your Own Home (OYOH) movement is the focus of Chapter 3. Proponents of OYOH acted on the belief that the family as a consuming unit reinforced the capitalist system. The capitalist system, in this equation, promised order and prosperity. These advocates of homeownership strongly encouraged certain social and sexual behavior as a way to maintain the status quo and fight off Bolshevism and disorder.

With the arrival of sexual modernism in the 1920s, promoters of Americanism continued to battle the drastic changes evident in American society. Reformers trying to Americanize immigrant groups focused their energy on intimate matters. Chapter 4 demonstrates that both progressive and conservative activists considered immigrants' adjustment to proper family roles and proper sexual behavior a vital part of assimilation. Americanism necessitated certain attitudes about respect for one's elders, sexual expression, and marriage. Chapter 5 traces the development of these trends into the late 1920s, when antiradicals expanded concerns about the effect of radical doctrines to include American youth, particularly those middle- and upper-class college-age men and women society feared to be in "revolt" against old standards. Anxieties about Russian Bolshevism, both its social ideals and its political values, even framed discussions about the sexual revolution of young people against marriage and monogamy. Antiradicals, nervous elites, "super" patriots, and social conservatives saw this disregard for traditional values as a sign of demoralization in American society. Weakened morals, they reasoned, weakened Americans' resolve to defend family and country from radical political doctrines.

Americanism fostered an environment of political conformity in the 1920s, and this conformity was maintained in part through the quest for cultural and social conformity, best exemplified by the celebration of white, middle-class family life. In light of frightening international pressures, some Americans insisted on adherence to traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, along with monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive marriage as a way to ensure stability and order in a capitalist democracy. In the coming pages, this study charts the ways in which Americanism both reinforced and was reinforced by sexual and gender norms in the decade after World War I.