

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



## Paterson's Italian Anarchist Silk Workers and the Politics of Race

Salvatore Salerno

february 5, 2011 (put on libcom.org)

Salvatore Salerno

Paterson's Italian Anarchist Silk Workers and the Politics of Race  
february 5, 2011 (put on libcom.org)

Retrieved on October 25, 2011 from libcom.org

This article traces the Paterson Italian anarchist groups and the repression they faced, as well as looking into their views on race in America. **Salvatore Salerno** has written extensively on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He is the author of *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World, Direct Action and Sabotage* and has contributed to anthologies on the IWW. His most recent book, *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, is an anthology he edited with Jennifer Guglielmo. Salerno is currently writing a book on industrial unionism and transnational radicalism in the early twentieth-century Italian anarchist community in Paterson, New Jersey.

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

In the large and sophisticated literature on ethnic consciousness and Americanization among European immigrants, very little is known about how Italians thought about race or about how they came to see themselves and their interests as white. What we know about the period between 1880 and 1920 is largely anecdotal. In his work on Italians and racial identity, Robert Orsi has drawn on folklore as a means of introducing the complexity of the Italian immigrants' experience with race in America. He tells the following story:

*A greenhorn just off the boat who is walking one day down the street in New York when he sees a black man. The poor greenhorn is mesmerized. He has never seen a black person before. What is this? Stumbling to keep up, he trots along side the black man, staring in disbelief at the strange sight. But what can this be? the greenhorn asks himself. Finally, he can't take it anymore. He runs up to the stranger, grabs the startled man by the arm, and starts rubbing his skin furiously to see if the black color comes off.*

Orsi then compares the experience of this racially unconscious Italian immigrant with that of the five Sicilian shopkeepers lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana for violating southern protocols of racial interaction.<sup>1</sup> These two stories portray Italian immigrants as either unconscious of racial difference or oblivious to America's racial hierarchy. Racial unconsciousness, however, does not explain the violent reaction by Tallulah whites to these immigrants.

This image of the Italian immigrant as unconscious of race and the role played by race in America's racial hierarchy is complex and multifaceted. This article looks at just one aspect of this "unconsciousness" by addressing the supposition of an absence of racial discourse among Italian immigrants. The assumption that Italian immigrants were voiceless on the subject of race and racism masks the deeper issues that were behind the lynching of Italians while also positioning them as passive. The history of the Italian immigrant left in America, particularly the anarchist sectors of that movement, challenges this view of southern European immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

The first and second generation of Italian immigrant radicals developed a discourse that was deeply critical of the American racial hierarchy, one that the Justice Department came to view as criminal. This article participates in the recovery of this discourse to argue that it problematizes our understanding of the radicalization process during the period from 1880 to 1920, and adds to our understanding of how the immigration law created a new class of criminals to justify its developing system of surveillance.

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert Orsi, "The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark Skinned in Italian Harlem 1920-1990," *American Quarterly* (1992): 313-347. See also, James Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween People: Race, Nationality and the New Immigrant Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* (1997): 3-44.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolph J. Vecoli, "'Free Country:' The American Republic Viewed by the Italian Left, 1880-1920," in *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty*, ed. Marianne Debouzy (Saint Denis, France: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988).[i]

My exploration of the Italian anarchist movement began in Paterson through the newspapers published by one of the more popular Italian immigrant anarchist groups in the New York metropolitan area: Gruppo L'Era Nuova (The New Era Group). In the first quarter of the last century, this group made Paterson a key center of the international anarchist movement. It was instrumental in bringing unionism to "Silk City" (Paterson's primary industry was the manufacture of silk) and was among the first foreign language locals to join the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

In spite of their importance to the international anarchist community and U.S. labor history, little information exists about the group or any of its members.<sup>3</sup> Early on in my research, I managed to locate a study by Sophie Elwood that explained part of the reason for this lack of information. Elwood looked at the Italian anarchist community in Paterson through oral histories. She found that the movement's descendants and community members no longer remembered those active in the group as anarchists. I found it interesting that she wrote, "today those who were children or adolescents in the early 1900s in the Paterson area almost universally describe their fathers and mothers as socialists in the interviews I conducted. None are portrayed as anarchists."

Only one respondent, Angelena, remembered Paterson's past differently. In the interview, Angelena told of an "unmentionable" event, one that Elwood argued has shrouded the community's radical past in silence. Angelena told Elwood of "three Haledon men,

---

<sup>3</sup>The best history of the Paterson Group, from the inception of *La Questione Sociale* to its suppression, can be found in the following works by George Carey: "The Vessel, the Deed and the Idea. The Paterson Anarchists, 1895–1908," (unpublished manuscript, n.d.); " 'La Questione Sociale', an Anarchist Newspaper in Paterson, N.J. (1895–1908)," in *Italian Americans New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and ethnicity*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1985); and "The Vessel, The Deed, and The Idea: Anarchists in Paterson 1895–1908," *Antipode* 10/11 (1979). For a discussion of the important role played by immigrant anarchists in the origins and development of the IWW, see Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November, Culture and*

her uncle among them, who were arrested in 1920 and taken to Ellis Island. Suspected of plotting to plant a bomb on Wall Street, they were held on the island and threatened with deportation. Angelena recalled that her mother and aunt carried food to her uncle on Sundays, but no other details were ever learned by her.” The three Italian anarchists were held for several months, and then released without ever being formally charged with any crime. Following his release, Angelena’s uncle described the event as “Finito” — finished. Finished meant “no possibility of re-opening the subject.” Elwood discovered that Angelena’s defense of her uncle against the charges of anarchy was echoed in the words of the others who she interviewed. Her respondents were equally traumatized and came to view anarchism as a negative force that would destroy order. “To their children anarchism carried the dread that terrorism does today.”<sup>4</sup>

I then located another study that also commented on Paterson’s historical amnesia. Nina M. Browne found that the city’s radical past had been collapsed into a generalized event meant to equate the community’s labor activism with a generic radicalism that not only failed but also dealt the death blow to Paterson’s silk industry. This event is the 1913 strike. The strike began as a walkout at the Doherty Mill over the introduction of the four-loom system. It soon became a general strike under the leadership of the IWW in which 25,000 workers participated, many of whom were women and children, from almost all of Paterson’s 300 mills and dye houses.

---

*Community in the Industrial Workers of the World.* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), chapter 2. For a discussion of the Paterson Group’s relationship to the IWW, see Salerno, “No God, No Master: Italian Anarchists and the Industrial Workers of the World,” in *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Culture and History*, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>Sophie Elwood, “The Roots and Results of Radicalism among Piedmontese Silk Workers, 1948–1913” (paper submitted for Certificate of Advanced Study, Wesleyan University, April, 1988), 80–83.

New Orleans for his consistent business with the African American community. Unfortunately, the owner had little time for someone from the north asking probing questions. I was greeted with the same silence Elwood had encountered in her oral histories with the descendants of the anarchists in Paterson. I knew that it was the kind of story that would take a great deal of time to unravel.

What unites the histories of lynching with repression against the left is not only the refusal of Italian immigrants to regard blacks as the enemy but also the heavy consequences of their attempts to join forces. Such transgression challenged the foundations of white supremacy at its very core, and for this reason they were attacked, murdered, and silenced.

as a result of the work of federal agents and their team of linguistic experts.

Those Italians that challenged the color line faced not only the wrath of the federal government, but also vigilante whites (which often included political and religious leaders). Italian immigrants were lynched by whites in Louisiana, Mississippi, West Virginia, Florida, and in some western mining towns. Italians were lynched for alleged crimes, which included violating local racial codes.<sup>26</sup> Last summer, I traveled to a small town on the outskirts of New Orleans to interview the aunt of a friend about a lynching of Italians that took place there in the 1920s. “They will kill me if I tell you,” was the first thing that she said when her nephew asked her to tell me the story. “Are you sure that you are Italian,” she asked repeatedly. After many assurances she finally told me the story. There were six. She said one was only a boy. In her version someone in the group had stood up to the Klan and in turn a crime was fabricated — the men were tried twice and all hung in a special prison constructed for the executions. My friend’s aunt as well as other members of the African American community considered the incident a lynching.<sup>27</sup> My friend then took me to a grocery store, down the highway owned by Italian Americans. It was a store patronized by African Americans because the owner had been driven out of

---

<sup>26</sup>Walter White, *Rope & Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929); Richard Gambino, *Vendetta* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977); Edward F. Haas, “Guns, Goats and Italians: The Tallulah Lynchings of 1899,” *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 13 (1982): 45–58; James E. Cutler, *Lynch-Law* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 178–180; James Allen, *Without Sanctuary, Lynching Photographs in America*, (New York: Twin Palms Publishers, 2002), 167–169; Robert P. Ingalls, “Lynching and Established Violence in Tampa, 1895–1935,” *The Journal of Southern History* (November 1987): 613–644.

<sup>27</sup>The case that she referred to involved the judicial execution of six Italians in Amite, Louisiana for the alleged murder of an innkeeper. See Glem G Hearsey, “The Six Who Were Hanged” (n.p., n.d.); John V. Baiamonte Jr., *Spirit of Vengeance: Nativism and Louisiana Justice, 1921–1924* (Baton Rouge, LA: State University Press, 1986).

What happened to the histories of these women who organized the mills? In spite of recent scholarly accounts to the contrary, this strike and the decline of Paterson’s silk industry generally have been linked in the city’s official and unofficial histories. Among Paterson’s local historians and residents, opinions remain varied and often bitter concerning the role of the strike in Paterson’s history. In fact, three public museums that collaborated on the critically acclaimed exhibit “Life and Times in Silk City” entirely avoided confronting the issue of the strike. A documentary video on Paterson recounts the 1913 strike alongside tales of the devastating 1902 fire and the 1903 flood “as if,” in the words of a critic, “it were another natural disaster (Parrillo, 1992).” “Time and chronology,” Browne concluded, “fade within Paterson’s official history, narratives end or skip where bad news begins. Most commonly, details give out around 1920,”<sup>5</sup> the date that coincides with the raids by the Justice Department on Paterson’s Italian anarchist community.

Were the Haledon anarchists that Angelena talked about an anomaly, or were their arrests part of a larger pattern? What was their crime if no charges were brought against them? Following Browne’s lead, I consulted the available histories of Paterson’s Italian anarchist community. The most I found was an unpublished manuscript by George Carey on the Paterson anarchists. His study unfortunately stopped with the suppression of the group’s newspaper, *La Questione Sociale* (LQS), in 1908. My research supported Browne’s conclusions. The historical record no longer accorded a place to the memory of Paterson’s radical past. The record stopped sometime around 1920, and the events that transpired in that year had also effectively erased the years leading up to 1920 and the community’s struggle against fascism.

I contacted the New Jersey Public Library and the State Historical Society only to learn that neither had material on this pe-

---

<sup>5</sup>Nina M. Browne, “Long After Silk: Constructing Civic Identity and History in a Deindustrialized City,” (master’s thesis, New York University, 1992), 42–54

riod. The Newark Public Library's massive clipping files, created by Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers, had nothing relating to the arrests of Italian anarchists. While I was doing this research I also decided to look at the New York newspapers to see if at least there was an article on the Haledon anarchists. To my great surprise I found a story not about the Haledon arrests but about another raid. On February 14, 1920 more than a hundred Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, assisted by volunteers from the American Legion, descended on Paterson and raided the homes of more than thirty members of *Gruppo L'Era Nuova*, as well as those active in another anarchist group called *Gli Insorti* (The Insurgents) and Paterson's Ferrer School.

Armed with deportation warrants and suitcases, FBI agents made arrests, gathered evidence from the homes of these Italian anarchists, and then delivered them to Ellis Island to await possible deportation. The raid had been more successful than Special Agent Frank Stones, who was in charge of covert operation, had imagined possible. In an interview with *The Evening Mail*, Stone speculated that the IWW headquarters in Chicago was in the process of being moved to Paterson. The *New York Call* speculated that in total more than a ton of material was confiscated in the raid. Among the material seized was what the government thought to be "the most complete anarchist library in the United States," a library no one has seen since the raid.<sup>6</sup>

The justice department believed that among other things the Paterson anarchists had been involved in an earlier bombing. On June 2, 1919, there were explosions in eight different cities: New York, Paterson, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Washington, among them. The most sensational and tragic of the bombings occurred at the home of Attorney General Palmer in Washing-

---

<sup>6</sup>"Paterson Raids Give Clues to Palmer Bomb," *The Evening Mail*, February 16, 1920, 1:1; "Raid Business Booms in Paterson 17 are sent to Ellis Island," *New York Call*, February 16, 1920, 1:1; "Terrorists Caught In Paterson Raids," *New York Times*, February 16, 1920, 1:3.

*Who do they think they are as a race, these arrogant whites? From where do they think they come? These blacks are at least a race, but the white Americans ... how many of them are bastards? How much mixing is in their pure blood? How many of their women ask for kisses from the strong and vigorous black slaves? Like the white man who wants the hot pleasure of the black women with big lips and sinuous bodily movement. But the white knights care little for the honor and decency of the black woman, whom they use and abuse as they please. For these, race hatred is a national duty.*

In this example, the writer not only fails to analyze the concept of race itself or problematize the sexual stereotypes associated with race. Instead, the writer ended the article by collapsing race into class: "The producers must unify against the exploiters of their product. The struggle isn't about race but class."<sup>24</sup> Vecoli goes on to quote Luigi Galleani, who mocked the self-righteousness of white Americans. Galleani expressed indignation at the persecution of the Jews in Russia while they "denied blacks work in their factories, justice in their courts, protection in their laws, and pity in their heart."<sup>25</sup> While we find the occasional article in other newspapers on the Italian left, the anarchist press in Paterson contains the most sustained and detailed critique of race in United States. It was for this reason that the anarchists were particularly targeted during the Red Scare of late 1910s and early 1920s. The absence of these anarchists from the narrative of Italian American experience was a carefully orchestrated campaign of erasure on the part of the U.S. federal government. Their absence from the larger history of the American labor movement is also due to the fact that many scholars rely solely on English language sources. It is perhaps a final irony that this discourse of the Italian anarchists was not lost

---

<sup>24</sup>Vecoli, "Free Country," 45-46. See also "Non lotta di razza," *Il Proletario*, June 4, 1909.

<sup>25</sup>Vecoli, "Free Country," 45-46.

in natural science. Rather, the writer argued, race should be seen as a historical notion and that nationalism was the result of secular struggles of the state.

The author then addressed the work of Alfredo Niceforo, an Italian anthropologist, who used statistical data to demonstrate that the southern Italian poor were a race apart from the northern Italian wealthy elite, with specific physical, psychological, and ethnographic deficiencies: "Even if the theory were not correct and the differences of class would not correspond with differences of ethnic origin, the race of the rich and the race of the poor would only have antagonistic interests. That struggle of race, it seems to many, is the propagator of the progress of history." Leaving aside this allusion to the amalgam of race and class, the writer went on to discuss formulas used by the press to whip up jingoism and inspire in every citizen the "duty to cooperate for the triumph and definitive victory of the superior race." After a while, the writer continued, "one perceives that the formula was empty of content, was absurd, was false but, when the game is revealed, it is already too late."<sup>22</sup>

In his examination of the Italian radical press, Rudolph Vecoli found that Italian socialists, unlike other Marxist groups, did not fail to protest wrongs against blacks. Rather Italian socialists grappled with the causes of racism and attempted to incorporate an analysis of race into their critique of capitalism.<sup>23</sup> However, one finds in the Italian socialist press that they privileged class over race. One of the few articles to appear in *Il Proletario* summarized the perspective of the Italian Socialist Federation. In "Not a Race Issue, But a Class Issue," the writer pointed to the reprehensible way racism was practiced in America society:

---

<sup>22</sup>"Razze superiori, imparate!", *L'Era Nuova*, February 27, 1915, 1; see also "Questione di Razze?", *L'Era Nuova*, January 1915, 1; and "Guerra di razze," *L'Era Nuova*, February 6, 1915, 2.

<sup>23</sup>Rudolph J. Vecoli, " 'Free Country:' The American Republic Viewed by the Italian Left, 1880-1920," in *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty*, ed. Marianne Debouzy (Saint Denis, France: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988).

ton, DC. The bomb thrower stumbled on the stone steps that led to the front door of Palmer's home and blew himself to bits. From the fragments of his body and clothing, police determined that the bomb thrower was an Italian alien from Philadelphia. What caused great suspicion within the left community was the fact that the suitcase he carried was only slightly damaged and that in addition to clothing, leaflets were also found. These leaflets were entitled "Plain Words" and signed "Anarchistic Fighters."

At the same time as the bomb at the Palmers went off, another exploded at the home of Koltz, president of the Suanaha Silk Company. The fact that at least two known members of *Gruppo L'Era Nuova* had been recently discharged by the company because of labor trouble and that characteristics of the explosion were similar to those that occurred at the homes of government officials, the U.S. Justice Department launched the most effective investigation, and talk of a nationwide plot developed.<sup>7</sup>

The events that led to the raids on Paterson's Italian anarchist community are a complicated story that involves a dizzying array of factors. Some of these factors include the connections between Italian anarchism and the rash of bombings that took place in the late teens and early twenties. However, the radical community saw these bombings as a deliberate frame-up on the part of authorities to legitimate repression against the labor movement. The leftist press pointed out that as time passed the bombings continued in spite of ongoing arrests, deportations, and the secret emigration of those anarchist who left the country rather than face arrest. The question of who in fact was responsible has been the subject of a number of theories, none of which are satisfactory. Although the federal government opened hundreds of deportation files on Italian anarchists, they rarely filed formal charges, and very few

---

<sup>7</sup>"Brief History of L'Era Nuova Group of Anarchists at Paterson, N.J., Including the Activities of Certain Leaders, Official Organs and Connections With the Francisco Ferrer Association," Record Group 65, 61-4185.

ended in actual deportation. In fact, no formal charges were ever brought against the Paterson anarchists in connection to the bombings, although a number of them were detained and placed under surveillance for months and, in some cases, years. This suggests the possibility that the bombings might not have been orchestrated by Italian immigrants at all. Because the bombings were used by the FBI to justify its campaigns of surveillance, detention, arrest, and deportation with those seen as oppositional to the U.S. government, some have suggested that, perhaps, the FBI orchestrated the explosions. Indeed, evidence from contemporary and later movements on the part of the federal government to crush the resistance movements of African Americans, American Indians, Latinos, Asians, and other marginalized citizens suggests that this was entirely possible.<sup>8</sup>

After the outbreak of World War I, an atmosphere of war hysteria colored all decisions from the local to the national level. In his study of the federal suppression of radicals, William Preston summarized the situation faced by labor activists:

*One hundred per cent Americanism, with its demand for conformity and distaste for dissent, savagely resented any treat to national unity, especially of a class and radical nature. Nativist anxieties increased this tension. Such an irrational and emotional atmosphere encouraged patriots, businessmen and politicians to indoctrinate official Washington with exaggerated accounts of a treasonable IWW conspiracy. Convinced of its own helplessness in the face of Wobbly solidarity, each locality hoped that the federal government would resolve an intolerable industrial crisis. (Preston, 1963)*

---

<sup>8</sup>Theodore Kornweibel Jr., *Seeing Red: Federal Campaign against Black Militancy 1919–1925* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press). See also, Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War against the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Viking Press, 1984); and John W. Sayer, *Ghost Dancing the Law: The Wounded Knee Trails* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

and anti-patriotism, it was now written anonymously. The article discussed the many crimes whites had committed and continued to commit against Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian immigrants. “The discovery of America marks the beginning of a period of destruction,” the author(s) wrote, “which lasts even today for the shame of humanity. The white race continues its systematic destruction of the races of color. When it cannot succeed with violence, it adopts corruption, hunger, alcohol, opium, syphilis, tuberculosis — all weapons — as good as guns and cannons.” In addition to recounting the horrors of colonization, the writer(s) discussed how whites have denied the humanity and civilization of those they sought to colonize. To the *Gruppo L’Era Nuova*, the greatest tragedy was the “loss of human variety, the beauty of the entire human species, deprived of (its) very beautiful and powerful branches.” The writer(s) then closed the essay with a reminder of the transformative potential of the resistance movements that were developing among the oppressed and colonized:

*We believe that within a short time what they call the Negro Problem will give more trouble to the United States, more than they have already had from any other serious issue, even bigger than the Civil War. Maybe even the destruction of the United States will result from this problem because at this point the Negroes are not willing to be considered the descendents of slaves, and are developing a pride of race ... we don't know what it will bring ...*<sup>21</sup>

Another article, “Racial Superiority, Learn This!” attested further to the long history of resistance of colonized people to the European domination. This essay provides further evidence of the breadth of the group’s solidarity activities with worldwide struggles for liberation. In “War of Race,” an article that appeared some months later, the Paterson anarchists addressed the topic of patriotism and militarism. The writer focused their critique on modern sociology and called into question the notion that race was based

---

<sup>21</sup>“I delitti della razza bianca”, LQS, February 20, 1909, 1.



Although the details of association between Italian, Spanish, and Mexican anarchists are still obscure, these influences are evident in the movement's expressive culture. In addition to his Italian language column, Caminita contributed many of the graphics that became emblematic of the Mexican Revolution. This can especially be seen in a poster printed as part of the newspaper in 1910. The top part of the poster displayed the *Regeneración* masthead. Over a picture of the sun were the portraits of five anarchists: Peter Kropotkin at the center; to his right the famous Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta, and the French anarchist Charles Malato; to his left, the Spanish anarchists Fernando Tarrida del Mármol and Anselmo Lorenzo. These portraits are set against an open book upon which are written two titles, Malato's *Philosophy of Anarchism* and Malatesta's *Conversation between Two Workers*. Below them are the portraits of the most prominent Mexican anarchists, the Flores Magón Brothers, Librado Rivera, Angelmo Figueroa, and Antonio de P. Araujo.<sup>20</sup>

After the suppression of *LQS* in 1908, the Paterson anarchist group began publishing another paper, called *L'Era Nuova*. In 1909, an article entitled "I Delitti della Razza Bianca" (The Crimes of the White Race) appeared. The article began by stating: "Since the most ancient times the white race has acted against all the other races like a predatory animal." The article appeared on the front page, but like many of the articles that would appear in this paper on race

<sup>20</sup>It is difficult to say when Caminita's association with the Magonistas begins or the exact date that his Italian language column appears. Presently, no archive has a full run of *Regeneración*. From what has survived, it appears that the column begins in November of 1911. Examples of Caminita's graphics can be found in *Regeneración [i]in the period 1912–1916*. James Sandos includes a poster designed by Caminita in his book *[i]Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 53. Following the suppression of *LQS*, *L'Era Nuova*, begins coverage of the Mexican Revolution. Under the title "La rivoluzione nil Massimo," one can find continued reports on the Mexican Revolution through 1916. For the announcement of Caminita's propaganda tour, see *Regeneración*, November 11, 1911, 3.

The Paterson anarchists fueled these fears. They were at the center of the revolutionary industrial movement that was rapidly growing in this period to assert the rights of workers to a livable wage, safe working conditions, and humane hours. Italian immigrant anarchist groups like *L'Era Nuova* had joined the IWW (which occupied the heart of this struggle) early on, and they remained active from 1905 through 1909, when bitter factional disputes threatened to tear apart the movement. During this critical period, the bulk of the early membership abandoned the IWW because it embraced anarchism and syndicalism, which were centered on the use of direct action tactics such as the general strike and sabotage, versus the parliamentarianism of the Socialist Party and Socialist Labor Party.<sup>9</sup> Following these factional disputes, the IWW membership was limited to a handful of foreign language locals in the east and a few hundred migratory workers in the west. During these lean years, the bulk of IWW activity occurred in the eastern textile industries where the majority of workers were Italian. The *Gruppo L'Era Nuova* became an official local of the IWW in March 1906, and their newspaper *LSQ* was one of the first foreign language papers to carry the IWW logo. The Italian anarchists continued to be of strategic importance to the IWW. When federal agents raided *L'Era Nuova* group, they found E. F. Doree, Philadelphia Secretary of IWW, at the home of Andre Graziano, *L'Era Nuova* member and IWW organizer, showing the depth of the *L'Era Nuova*'s ties to what the FBI considered among America's most serious threats. *The New York Times* reported that among Doree's records were the "bulky membership rosters and ledgers showing financial transactions all over the eastern half of the country."<sup>10</sup> In tracking the government surveillance of the Paterson anarchists, I began to unravel a labyrinth of material that scholars have been

<sup>9</sup>Tatsuro Nomura, "Partisan Politics in and around the IWW: The Earliest Phase." *The Journal of the Faculty of Foreign Studies*, 10 (1977): 86–139; Salerno, *Red November*, 69–90.

<sup>10</sup>"Terrorists Caught in Paterson Raids," *New York Times*, February 16, 1920.

unable to locate since 1960. Indeed, it was in files kept by the immigration departments, which had been closed to the public the last forty years, that the significance of race to repression against the immigrant left was revealed.<sup>11</sup>

During the widespread raids on the immigrant left during and after World War I, FBI linguists made extensive translations and analyses of material published by *Gruppo L'Era Nuova*. Among the reports that have survived is one that focused on an article that appeared in *La Jacquerie*, the final newspaper that *Gruppo L'Era Nuova* published and attempted to circulate during the Red Scare. Entitled "Race Hatred," which appears to have been part of a series or irregular column dating back to LQS, the article appeared in the September 13, 1919 issue. In his report to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Special Agent Frank Stone cited the following passages as

---

<sup>11</sup>Researchers who tried to look into the record groups in the National Archives cited in William Preston's classic book about the Red Scare, *Aliens and Dissenters*, and John Higham's book *Strangers in the Land* were unable to locate the files in these record groups. They concluded that the offending parts of the record group had been destroyed in retaliation for Preston's work or that following the publication of *Aliens and Dissenters* the government restricted access to the files that Preston used. This myth begins with Melvyn Dubofsky, who was the first historian to request documents cited in Preston's book. He did not know that the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), which had withdrawn the "56,000 series" of materials used by Preston, had retired the files to Federal Record Center in 1960. Although he was able to enlist Senator Robert Kennedy to help open or declassify the files, the files could not be found. "Whether Dubofsky requested files previously withdrawn by the INS, or files still at the Archive but withheld due to FBI restrictions, he left with the impression that the FBI somehow controlled access to INS files, and now did so because of Preston's book." Subsequent researchers also encountered difficulty and attributed it to some conspiracy on the part of the FBI. But the fact that records were missing did not necessarily mean they were destroyed. Rather, we now know that they were consolidated into Afiles or C-files or simply misplaced. In 1996, the "56,000 series" materials were returned to the INS. It is in this record group that much of the material on the Paterson anarchists, as well as files on hundreds of other Italian immigrant activists, can be found. See Marian Smith, "Back from the Grave: The Life, Death, and Future of INS Historical Subject Files" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

*which is fought fierce and without truce between Blacks, whites, Chinese, Europeans, Americans, Indians*<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately Caminita chose to build his case around Czolgosz. Leon F. Czolgosz, a self-proclaimed anarchist, was not a member of any anarchist group, nor was he known within the anarchist movement. He assassinated President William McKinley on September 6, 1901 (Avrich, 1995). "When Czolgosz killed McKinley, it was not enough to shout against anarchy, it was shouted that he was of Polish nationality." The combination of the emotionally charged subject of political assassination, coupled with Caminita's caustic wit and Italian sense of irony, made the careless reader jump to the conclusion that "Race Hatred" was a defense of Czolgosz and not a condemnation of race hatred.

Caminita disappeared from Paterson in May 1908 after a grand jury indicted him for authorship of illegal editorials. Many rumors surround Caminita's disappearance. Rumors ranged from his joining the Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman's group at *Mother Earth*, a prominent anarchist journal, to having eloped with the young wife of a tavern keeper.<sup>19</sup> Caminita would eventually return to Paterson and reconnect with the Paterson anarchist group, but details of his life are sketchy. We later find Caminita editing the Italian language column of *Regeneración*, the newspaper of the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM), an anarchist organization responsible for initiating the Mexican Revolution. That the paper included a column in Italian is explained in part by the observations of historian James Sandos. He writes that Ricardo Flores Magón found his deepest support for the PLM and the plight of the Mexican working people from Italian and Spanish anarchists. From Caminita's column, it appears that some of the Paterson anarchists fought in the Mexican Revolution on the side of the PLM.

---

<sup>18</sup>Ludovico Caminita, "Odio di Razza," LQS, May 18, 1906

<sup>19</sup>Carey, "The Vessel, the Deed and the Idea" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 315-316.

ten, even though no overt act of physical injury follows. It is the power of words that is the potent force to commit crimes in certain cases.”<sup>15</sup>

One man in particular was singled out from the thirty members of the *Gruppo L’Era Nuova* who were arrested in the 1920 raid: Ludivico Caminita. Considered by the Justice Department to be the group’s leader, he was also identified as the editor of *La Jacquerie*. Caminita had a long history with the group. He was born in Palermo, Sicily in 1878 and immigrated to the United States in 1902. On his arrival in the United States, he worked as a printer in Barre, Vermont on *Cronica Sovversiva*, a militant anarchist newspaper edited by Luigi Galleani. Sometime later, he relocated to Paterson, New Jersey to help Pedro Esteve, a Spanish anarchist, edit *LQS*.<sup>16</sup> When Esteve began his propaganda tours among the hard-rock miners in the western part of the United States Caminita took over editorship of *LQS*. He edited *LQS* from November 1905 until he was discharged from his responsibilities as editor by the *Gruppo Diritto all’Esistenza* in April 1908.<sup>17</sup> The group discharged him following a series of his articles that resulted in the removal of the paper’s postal privileges under obscenity statutes. The first of these articles had appeared in 1906 shortly after Caminita had assumed editorship of *LQS*. The article, entitled “Race Hatred,” was intended as a crushing condemnation against racial and ethnic stereotypes, which he argued divided the working class into hostile camps:

*Instead of joining together, workers in this large cosmopolitan nation fight for their existence, according to the laws baptized by Darwin, instead of joining together to mutually defend their class interests against the common enemy; the capitalist. They instead participate in a painful phenomenon which profoundly destroys the proletarian class in its most vital social interest: in a war, that is to say,*

---

<sup>17</sup>Carey, “The Vessel, the Deed and the Idea” (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 287–291.

those he considered most troubling: “In the United States, this land of the free and the home of the brave, it is a crime to kill a dog but an honor to lynch a Negro. During the war, while the American Negro soldiers were allowing themselves to be massacred at the French front in behalf of the triumph of democracy, their relatives were being murdered in their own houses by the democratic rabble.”<sup>12</sup> The article called attention to the fact that patriotic sacrifice had not ensured that African American soldiers would return to an improved social and political status. Rather, lynchings by whites had increased after the war, and 1919 witnessed the most intense racial rioting seen in decades.

Black activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells also pointed to the increase in lynching and race riots as evidence of the white majority’s refusal to accept changes in the racial status quo. Department of Justice files shows the FBI singling out a related article, “Returning Soldiers,” which appeared in the September 1919 issue of *The Crisis*. They quoted, “We Sing! This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land. It lynches \*\*\* It disenfranchises its own citizens \*\*\* It encourages ignorance \*\*\* It steals from us \*\*\* It insults us.” The parallels between these two Italian and African American papers are quite interesting; I have not yet found evidence of whether Italian anarchists read African American papers like *The Crisis* or *The Messenger*, or if they were in contact with black militants. But it does appear that Italians anarchists were aware of the kind of arguments African Americans were making to demand that the United States live up to its democratic ideals.

To the Justice Department, however, the *Gruppo L’Era Nuova*’s writing on “Race Hatred” was evidence of their involvement in another diabolical plot. In a lengthy report concerning the department’s investigations, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer warned that American stood at Armageddon: “Practically all the

---

<sup>12</sup>12.“Brief History of L’Era Nuova ...,” Record Group 65, 61–4185.

radical organization in this nation have looked upon the Negro as a fertile ground for spreading their doctrine. These organizations have endeavored to enlist Negroes on their side, and in many respects have been successful. [As a consequence,] the Negro is seeing red.”<sup>13</sup> Such overtures to interracial solidarity reawakened the fear among elites of what class-based social and political relationships across lines of race might mean for the racial order. The Justice Department’s greatest fear was that radicals were intent on breaking down the social barriers that separated blacks from whites.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the U.S. Army developed a counter-espionage division known as the Military Intelligence Division (MID), which, like the FBI, redirected its energies from combating domestic subversion by enemy aliens to attacking economic and political radicalism. The army’s domestic intelligence efforts focused on radical labor unionists in the IWW, particularly those with connection to anarchism and communism. Convinced of the growing possibility of a “race war,” which followed the race riots in 1919, MID’s weekly summary report ominously noted: “IWW and other radical organizations, both white and black, have played their part in inciting the negroes [sic] to the recent outbreaks in Chicago and Washington. It is stated that agitators have played on the feeling of resentment against injustices or fancied injustices suffered by the negro [sic] soldiers during the war.”<sup>14</sup>

Since IWW activists and all anarchists were believed to be chief among the offending radicals and a significant portion of the IWW membership was foreign, the Justice Department pressured Congress to make changes to the immigration law. Congress amended legislation to make membership in the IWW by nonciti-

---

<sup>13</sup>U.S. Senate, *Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice*, 66<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1919, S. Doc. 153, serial, 13.

<sup>14</sup>Kornweibel, *Seeing Red*, p. 69.

zens a ground for deportation, and were thus able to disrupt and eventually destroy what they saw as a major menace. At the same time, the Justice Department managed to convince Congress of the necessity of this change; it argued for further amendments to the immigration law that would facilitate the arrest of foreign anarchists: “In this class of cases,” the department asserted, “the courts and the public have too long overlooked the fact that that crimes and offenses are committed by the written or spoken word. We have been punishing offenders in other lines for words spoken or written, without waiting for an overt act of injury to person or property. Individuals can be punished for words spoken or writ-

---

<sup>15</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, *Confidential, To all Commissioners of Immigration and Inspectors in Charge*, General Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Services, Record Group 85, 54235, 36–85.

<sup>16</sup>Little is known about Pedro Esteve (1866–1925). Considered the leading Spanish anarchist in the United States, Esteve’s relationship to anarchism began in Barcelona, where he participated in the Catalan anarchist movement and worked with Barcelona’s principal anarchist newspaper, *El Productor*. Early in the 1890s, Esteve left Barcelona for the United States. In the United States, he moved between New York, where he organized seamen, Colorado, where he participated in union forming activities with miners, and Tampa, Florida, where he organized cigar makers. Esteve frequently shared the platform with Emma Goldman and acted as her interpreter. In addition to intermittently editing *LQS* between 1899 and 1906, Esteve also edited *El Despertar* (Paterson, 1892–1895?, 1900), *El Esclavo* (Tampa, 1894–1898?), and *Cultura Obrera* (New York, 1911–1912, 1921–1925). In York City, Florida he ran *La Poliglota*, a small anarchist press. He married the Italian anarchist Maria Roda. See also Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 143, 391, 393; Gary A. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, “Spanish Anarchists in Tampa, Florida, 1886–1931,” in *Struggle a Hard Battle”: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, ed. Dirk Hoerder (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986); Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World*, 145–174; Joan Casanovas, Pedro Esteve (1865–1925): Un Anarquista Catala a Cavall de Dos Mons I de Dues Generacions, Papers of George E. Pozzetta, Immigration History Research Center; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1934), 150; Carey, unpublished manuscript and “The Vessel, the Deed and the Idea.”