

# **With Speech as My Weapon: Emma Goldman and the First Amendment**

**A Unit of Study for Grades 8-12**

by

**Candace Falk**

**The Emma Goldman Papers Project**

**University of California, Berkeley**

**In association with Lyn Reese and Mary Agnes Dougherty,  
New Direction Curriculum Developers**

**Sally Thomas and Stephen Cole, Editors**



**NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS  
University of California, Los Angeles**

Gary B. Nash, Director  
David Vigilante, Series Editor

# **With Speech as My Weapon: Emma Goldman and the First Amendment**

## **Table of Contents**

### Teacher's Guide

Approach and Rationale	1
Content and Organization	1

### Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview	2
II. Unit Context	4
III. Correlation to National Standards for United States History	4
IV. Unit Objectives	4
V. Historical Background	5
VI. Using Primary Source Documents	7

Dramatic Moment	8
-----------------	---

Lesson One: Emma Goldman, The Making of a Radical	9
---	---

Lesson Two: Public Perceptions of Emma Goldman	39
--	----

Lesson Three: The Right to Free Speech	62
--	----

Lesson Four: Deportation	62
--------------------------	----

Epilogue	72
----------	----

Glossary	73
----------	----

Selected Bibliography	77
-----------------------	----

## **I. UNIT OVERVIEW**

Emma Goldman (1869-1940) is a major figure in the history of American radicalism and feminism. In a period when the expression of controversial ideas was itself dangerous, Goldman insisted on her right to challenge convention. Goldman devoted her life to asserting the individual's potential for freedom that otherwise was obscured by a system of social and economic constraints. She was among America's most prominent advocates of labor's right to organize, reproductive rights, sexual freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of the individual.

As passionate in her personal life as in her political life, Goldman left an intriguing body of personal papers, including correspondence and writings; and her activities generated extensive newspaper coverage, government surveillance reports, and legal papers. The documents in this curriculum unit are drawn from a massive archive collected by the Emma Goldman Papers Project, at the University of California, Berkeley.

Goldman was part of a blossoming culture of dissent. Her anarchism was one of many popular political philosophies of her time, including socialism, communism, utopianism, populism, and progressivism, that challenged and influenced the evolution of the dominant social and political culture. As an anarchist, Goldman maintained that social justice and individual freedom could not be legislated by the state. Instead, she argued for a complete transformation of social values and economic relations.

In nationwide lecture tours, Goldman took her message to the people and in the process tested a democratic society's tolerance for dissent. Goldman believed that "the most violent element in society is ignorance." The government and most newspaper reporters responded fearfully to Goldman's iconoclastic ideas as well as to her confrontational style. She was shadowed by police and vigilantes determined to suppress her talks and was arrested frequently. In 1919, after spending a year and a half in prison for her open opposition to conscription and to U.S. entry into World War I, Goldman was deported.

Standard school texts often ignore Goldman and other challenging voices, or only briefly mention them. This absence of an historical record of controversy in the curriculum not only denies students access to a full range of ideas but also ultimately limits their ability to understand and analyze the past. Recent educational reforms encourage classroom use of primary sources as the best way to present opposing points of view. For example, the documents from the Emma Goldman Papers on free speech are compelling because they expose the student to firsthand accounts of a long struggle to affirm the right to disagree. The immediacy of the issues of the period are experienced through newspaper accounts, political cartoons, speeches, pamphlets, and autobiographical narratives rather than through synthesized historical texts.

## ***TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS***

---

### **II. UNIT CONTEXT**

The lessons in this unit of study focus on issues relating to freedom of expression and the limitations placed by local, state, and federal governments to control unpopular speech. The unit supplements the study of the American labor movement, anarchist activities, free speech, the Red Scare of the post-World War I era, and the deportation of aliens in 1919. It provides teachers an in-depth study of issues relating to freedom of expression using Emma Goldman as a case study. The lessons are most effective if placed within the context of a study of domestic issues of the 1920s.

*“In the Aftermath of War: Cultural Clashes of the Twenties,” “Women in the Progressive Era,”* and *“The Constitution in Crisis: The Red Scare of 1919-1920,”* are other National Center for History Teaching Units that relate to the topics addressed in this unit.

### **III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY**

*With Speech as My Weapon: Emma Goldman and the First Amendment* provides teaching materials to support the *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Lessons within this unit assist students in attaining Standards 2C and 3A of Era 7, “The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930).” Students analyze the impact of public opinion and government policies civil liberties and evaluate government reactions to the growth of radical political movements.

This unit likewise integrates a number of Historical Thinking Standards including: explain historical continuity and change; assess the credibility of historical documents; compare and contrast different sets of ideas; analyze cause-and-effect relationships; support interpretations with historical evidence; and, marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances.

### **IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES**

1. Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses ground in historical evidence.
2. Draw upon visual sources to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon information presented in a historical narrative.
3. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas and values.
4. Analyze cause and effect relationships.

## **V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Emma Goldman was born in the city of Kovno, Lithuania, then part of the Russian Empire, on June 27, 1869. As a child she and her family experienced blatant anti-Semitism and observed peasants beaten, government officials bribed, and young men dragged off to serve in the army. Hating the injustices she saw, she welcomed the idea of revolution that promised to change Russia. She hoped for a new world of equality and justice.

Goldman's family life was hard. Goldman felt that her father found fault with everything she did. He sent her out to work at an early age and wanted her to get married to someone of his choosing when she was only fifteen. To avoid such a fate, Goldman and her older sister Helena fled Russia for America.

Full of optimism, she arrived in America in 1885 expecting to find the freedom she was denied back in Russia. Relatives in Rochester, New York, offered her a place to live and helped her find work in a clothing factory. Unhappily, she discovered that working conditions in America were not so different from those she had left behind.

For Goldman the Haymarket tragedy of 1886 was a transformative event. At the height of the fight for the eight-hour day, a mass meeting to protest the police shooting of strikers at the McCormick Reaper Works the previous day drew a large evening crowd to Haymarket Square, Chicago. As the peaceful meeting drew to a close and the crowd began to disperse, a bomb exploded, killing seven police officers and injuring dozens of bystanders. In an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, eight anarchist leaders were convicted of murder. Seven of the eight were sentenced to death, though the sentences of two of them were commuted and another later committed suicide. The execution of the remaining four on November 11, 1887, led Goldman to devote her life to the anarchist ideal.

Goldman began to read everything she could find on anarchism. Determined to make her adopted country live up to the ideals of freedom, harmony, and prosperity for all, Goldman left her sweatshop job in Rochester and went to New York City where she hoped to meet other people who shared her ideas. There she learned that anarchism had many definitions and strategies which spanned from philosophical to militant. She was attracted to those anarchists who lectured about the challenge and the promise of their political ideas. Yet, the press often stereotyped the anarchist movement as "bomb-throwers" because some anarchists believed that political violence was a justifiable means for bringing about revolutionary change. Goldman found herself between these two poles.

Within New York City's anarchist circle, Goldman befriended Alexander Berkman and was eventually associated with his attempt in 1892 to kill Henry Clay Frick, manager of a Carnegie Steel plant, after Frick had ordered an armed attack on striking workers. The newspapers sensa-

## ***TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS***

---

tionalized the event. Later, in 1901, when President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist, Goldman was suspected even though she was not involved. After this, Goldman briefly changed her name, led an underground life, and from then on was watched carefully by agents of the government. When it became safe for her to appear in public, she distinguished her conception of anarchism from the characterizations of it by the press. In 1906, she started the anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*. It gave writers, artists, and political thinkers with radical ideas a place to express themselves.

Among her many challenges to convention was Goldman's distrust of the institution of marriage. She believed that marriage restricted the freedom of both men and women and, at the same time, gave them a false sense of security. Throughout her life, she fell in love many times—the most passionate was her ten-year love affair with her lecture tour manager, Dr. Ben Reitman. Even though her lectures espoused the principle of free love, her letters to Ben show that she could not rid herself of her own feelings of jealousy when he followed his attraction to other women.

Goldman was a talented public speaker. She toured the country several times a year lecturing about politics, drama, birth control, economic freedom for women, education, anti-militarism, and other vital issues of her day. Goldman believed that anarchism would bring total social, economic, political, and spiritual emancipation without government regulation. Because of a common fear of anarchism, she faced constant threats from policemen and vigilantes determined to suppress her message. She was arrested countless times and spent over a year and a half in jail.

She spoke out against U.S. participation in World War I because she believed the war was being fought first and foremost to promote the economic interests of the very rich. In addition, she encouraged young men to exercise their right to free choice and resist compulsory military service. Arrested and convicted of conspiracy to obstruct the draft, she went to prison. During that time, her citizenship was invalidated by a government eager to rid the country of her influence. On December 21, 1919, Emma Goldman and 248 other foreign-born radicals were rushed aboard the ship S.S. *Buford* at dawn and deported to Soviet Russia.

Emma Goldman stayed in her native Russia for only twenty-three months. Despite the overthrow of the czar by a revolutionary government, Goldman was shocked by its continuing disregard for political freedom. She met with V. I. Lenin, the Soviet leader, and questioned him about the lack of free speech. Unhappy with his response that free speech at that point in Russian history was a luxury not a right, Goldman eventually left the country in disgust and disappointment. She was determined to alert the world to what she saw as the Bolsheviks' betrayal of the ideals of the revolution.

For the rest of her life Goldman felt like “a woman without a country,” moving from place to place, and allowed to return to the United States only once in 1934 for a brief lecture tour. In 1936, she visited Spain and witnessed the optimism of the Spanish anarchists and their hope that a real revolution would occur in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. When the dictatorship of

## ***TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS***

---

Francisco Franco triumphed, a defeated Goldman went to Canada to help raise funds for the refugees of the Spanish war and to be closer to the country in which she had felt most at home.

Emma Goldman died on May 14, 1940. The United States government permitted her body to be returned to America. She is buried in Chicago near the anarchists who were executed for the Haymarket incident.

Throughout her life Emma Goldman wrote many letters, articles, speeches, and a number of books. The most notable of her writings is her autobiography, *Living My Life*.

### **VI. USING PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS**

**B**efore beginning the unit you may wish to duplicate copies of the Document Analysis Worksheet (*Student Handout*) as a means of assisting students in working with the numerous documents that are included in the four lessons in this unit. Encourage students to examine the documents for bias and question the material to determine the author's frame of reference. Caution students not to accept without question evidence presented in documents and to always examine documents in the context of the time in which they were written. Students should make a habit of testing the data presented in primary source materials with evidence gleaned from their study of history.