



0. ABRAMS: MORE CONVICTIONS - Story Preface

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In addition to Jacob ("Jack") Abrams (pictured far right), Sameul Lipman, Hyman Lachowsky and Mollie Steimer printed and distributed leaflets criticizing the U.S. federal government for sending American troops to Russia during that country's civil war. All four were arrested, charged, tried, convicted, sentenced and deported for violating the Espionage and Sedition Acts. Image online via UMKC (University of Missouri-Kansas City) School of Law.

After the Russian Revolution erupted in February of 1917, followed by the Bolshevik Revolution in October of that year, Russia descended into civil war. The "Red Army" supported Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The "White Army" supported the Tsar and a return to autocratic rule.

By July of 1918, the White Army was gaining ground. If successful, would they reinstate the Tsar? Eliminating that risk, the Bolsheviks ordered the execution of Nicholas II and his entire family.

World War I, meantime, still raged. France and Britain unsuccessfully tried to convince Russia to rejoin the war. Failing that, an Allied coalition of sixteen nations actually sent troops to Russia to support the White Army.

President Wilson, bowing to pressure from America's allies, sent U.S. troops to Russia in the summer of 1918. Two expeditionary forces (one to North Russia [AEFNR] and the other to Siberia) were dispatched without specific objectives. The decision was not one of Wilson's finest.

The Allied coalition, formed (in part) to oppose the growing power of the Soviets in northern Russia, was doomed from the beginning. Wilson did not want Americans involved in Russia's internal affairs. (It is legitimate to ask: Then why send troops to support one side of a civil war?) Because of Wilson's orders, when atrocities occurred, Americans could not interfere.

The men understood neither their mission nor their role in the sub-Arctic. Americans suffered casualties within the first few days. French forces mutinied early on, as did Russians. Even British soldiers resisted their assignments. All told, it was a fiasco.

Living in America, a group of Russian emigres (anarchists known as the *Frayhayt* ["freedom"] group) knew that Wilson had dispatched U.S. troops to oppose the Bolsheviks. Outraged, Jacob Abrams and his colleagues prepared two leaflets criticizing the government and calling for a general strike.

One pamphlet, written in English, denounced sending U.S. troops to Russia. The other, written in Yiddish, criticized American efforts to hinder the Russian Revolution. The group printed 5,000 copies of each. (The link takes you to the leaflets, introduced at trial.)

On the 23rd of August, 1918, Mollie Steimer (one of the most vocal of the group) dropped some of the leaflets from the washroom window of the lower-Manhattan factory where she worked. Workmen, busy on the street below, found some of the leaflets and brought them to the police.

Following a brief investigation, the police arrested Abrams, Mollie and several others, charging them with violating the Sedition Act.

The defendants were roughly treated by the police. One (Jacob Schwarz) ultimately died from a beating. At trial the judge, Henry Clayton, refused to allow the foreign-born Jewish "Jack" Abrams to claim America's founding fathers as "my forefathers." Twice during trial, the judge asked Abrams:

Why don't you go back to Russia?

Abrams - whose wife, Mary, had survived the deadly (and infamous) Triangle Shirtwaist Fire when she (like so many others) jumped from a window - and his friends were found guilty. Their sentences? Twenty years imprisonment. The defendants appealed the case - referred to as *Abrams v United States* - to the Supreme Court.

Eight months after the high court had decided *Schenck v United States*, the justices tackled Abrams. Once again, it would not go well for the defendants.

But ... in the short span of eight months, Oliver Wendell Holmes had undergone a remarkable philosophical transformation.

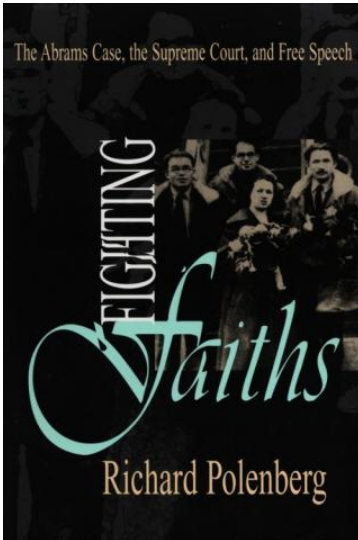
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Media Stream



Fighting Faiths - by Richard Polenberg

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Jacob Abrams - Free-Speech Defendant

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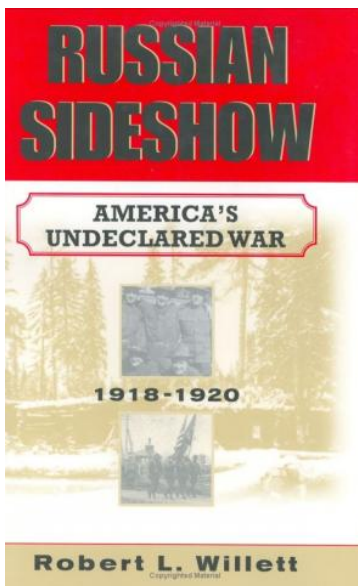
Judge in Abrams Case - Henry Clayton

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Quoted reference from *Freedom of Speech*, by Zechariah Chafee, footnote 36, page 146 (published, 1920).

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Russian Sideshow: America's Undeclared War

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Woodrow Wilson - U.S. President

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. PD

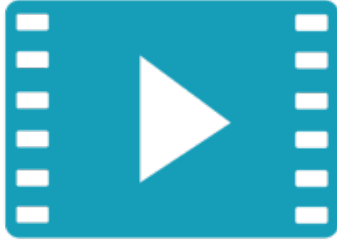
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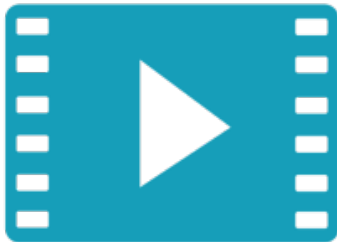


Bloodless Coup - Nicholas II Abdicates

From *Russian Revolution: Freedom and Hope*, a [BBC documentary](#).

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Change in Russia - Lenin Returns

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October Revolution - Lenin Seizes Power in Russia

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