January 2006

World War I and the Nevada Homefront Pre-war Rhetoric vs. War-time Reality

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From the early 1860s, first as a territory then as a state, Nevada has been identified as a part of the western frontier mythology. The harsh environment invited an even harsher incursion of outlaws, bandits, and outcasts from the East. Other arrivals included diverse immigrant groups, entrepreneurs, and religious sects ready to embrace the freedom promised by westward migration. Having achieved statehood in the midst of the Civil War, the Battle Born state has not only encouraged but also prospered from its errant image. Equally evident is the unconventional, rebellious, and anti-government reputation associated with Nevadans who, regardless of their location, have proven themselves proud and fiercely loyal to their state. Indeed, from 1937 to 1950, the state legislature approved of a state slogan designed to appear on all official stationery and advertising publications: “Nevada, one state without an income tax, a corporation tax, an inheritance tax, a gift tax, a sales tax. With cheap power, and liberal mining, corporation, taxation, and other laws. Welcome to Nevada.”¹ Yet despite the self-imposed isolation and intra-state devotion, as the United States entered World War I, Nevada was among the first states in the country to demonstrate a thorough allegiance to President Woodrow Wilson’s campaign for 100 percent Americanism, whole-heartedly implementing his policies that called for the repression of civil liberties in support of the war effort.

No sooner did Wilson publicly ask Congress to declare war on Germany, on April 6, 1917 than his battle to win the hearts and minds of the United States citizenry began. Having just been re-elected on the platform “He kept us out of the war,” the president had to explain his about-face to the nation amid serious concerns about the number of
immigrants in the country and the federal government’s ability to achieve some degree of national unity. David Kennedy explains the demographic realities of the situation: “According to the 1910 census one out of every three Americans was either foreign born or had at least one parent born outside the United States. Of those 32 million persons, more than ten million held ties to the Central Powers.”² While America was not unified when it entered the war, Wilson was convinced that he could use the masses to his advantage if they could be united under a common framework of ideals. With this goal in mind, Wilson implemented a series of repressive acts allowing the federal government control over the flow of information, the formation of public opinion, the enforcement of immigrant loyalty, and the regulation of labor.

Shortly after the United States entered World War I, Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Originally intended to organize the distribution of war-related information to the American public and abroad, the CPI increasingly became a propaganda machine that specifically targeted immigrants, radical labor elements, and socialists. The CPI engaged in deliberate and calculated efforts to regulate, repress, or remove any and all seditious, disloyal, or unpatriotic actions (physical, verbal, or written), using any means necessary. To assure success, the Espionage Act, passed in June 1917, imposed prison terms for acts of sabotage, aiding the enemy, or inciting a riot. It also empowered the postmaster general, Albert Burleson, to censor all publications according to his own definitions of treason, insurrection, or opposition to the war effort.³ Moving quickly, in the fall of 1917, the federal government imposed further restraints on the press with the passage of the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act, which required all foreign-language newspapers and journals to present an advance copy of their proposed
publication to the Post Office Department for approval, thus forcing many newspapers and periodicals to close either temporarily or permanently. The Sedition Act of May 16, 1918, which expanded the repressive measures of the Espionage Act, prohibited any negative declarations regarding the government, constitution, or flag of the United States. As Kennedy maintains, “Here was an inventiveness in the art of subverting free speech.”

These four federal measures became the official authority for hundreds of community activist groups, each enforcing its own brand of vigilance and repression. In slightly more than thirteen months, Wilson actively sought out and endorsed measures that effectively silenced significant portions of the Bill of Rights. Lacking the political and military structure to coerce mobilization as the European nations had done, the president relied on psychological and later economic motivations to rally the country together.

Rallying Nevada together would require different means. Historically, Nevada has been known for the diversity of its inhabitants; indeed, this is as true today as it was in the years leading up to World War I. The 1910 census established Nevada’s population at 81,875 persons, of whom only 35,326, or 43.1 percent were American-born whites of American parentage. The remaining 56.9 percent were either foreign born or of foreign parentage. Italians made up the largest segment (15.7 percent), followed by Germans (10.6 percent), Canadians (10.2 percent), English (10.0 percent), and Irish (9.5 percent). Other countries represented were Greece, Austria, Spain, Mexico, Denmark, Sweden, and France. Encompassing a total land area of 110,540 square miles, Nevada had a population density in 1910 of 0.7 persons per square mile, about one third of the minimum level required to meet Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous 1893 definition of
frontier. Nationally, the average number of persons per square mile was 30.9, giving Nevada a decidedly lower population density than any other state, at approximately 1/45 of the national average. Primarily a rural state, Nevada contained only seven cities in 1910, with a combined population of 19,698, or 24.1 percent of the state’s total. With the greater part of Nevada uninhabited, the cities, towns, and rural communities were isolated, encouraging their residents to form bonds of trust and friendship whose roots grew strong and deep. The majority of Nevadans were concentrated in the northern and central counties, where mining, agriculture, and railroads existed as the principal employers.

While the population of Nevada had nearly doubled since 1900, the economic outlook was strained on the eve of World War I. The typical boom-and-bust cycles for mining persisted, with a bust then playing out. A declining demand for silver added to the state’s poor financial outlook, and Nevada’s distinct climate and soil composition meant both ranching and farming required more land and water than the then current technology could supply to make them profitable. Nevada was on the verge of a mass exodus (of what little mass there was) if change did not come quickly.

In Churchill County, however, the population was growing. Between 1906 and 1914, the Socialist Party had captured votes from the Democrats. In his second edition of the History of Nevada, Russell Elliott suggests, “Had World War I not occurred the two parties would most likely have merged.” State election results for 1914 reveal that the Socialist Party made a significant mark on Nevada politics, with A. Grant Miller winning 25 percent in a Senate race that incumbent Francis Newlands barely won, while the Socialist candidate for the House, Martin J. Scanlon, received 20 percent and
gubernatorial hopeful W. A. Morgan, garnered 15 percent. In contrast to the high totals in Nevada, when the Socialist Party reached its peak nationally in 1912, presidential candidate Eugene Debs received only 6 percent of the vote. The popularity of socialism in Nevada did not go unnoticed by the party’s leaders.

Four miles east of Fallon, a socialist colony was taking shape on land recently reclaimed through the 1902 Newlands Act. Defenders of socialism established Nevada City as a retreat with the hope that it would become the center for the party first in Nevada and eventually for the entire West Coast. Its isolated position and the state’s relaxed controls enabled socialists to retain their party ideals. Fred D. Warren, a resident of the colony and former editor of the *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist newspaper distributed in both the United States and Canada, said, “Nevada alone seems immune, because of the barrier of the western mountains and the alkali desert on the south and the wide reaches of desert lands on the east. So those who don’t want war to visit their fireside had better prepare a place for the wife and kiddies out in the mountains of Nevada.”

Firm believers in pacifism, many colonists rejected organized religion, traditional political parties and capitalism. Throughout 1917, Nevada City remained quiet, as socialists denounced United States involvement in the war. In the spring of 1918, however, a resident of the socialist community, Paul Walters, was drafted. When Walters refused to enlist, Churchill County Sheriff Mark Wildes, after waiting several days, entered Nevada City on May 19, intending to arrest the young man. The sheriff was shot in the back and eventually died, with Walters named as his killer. Joining the initial band of seventy-five men, bounty hunters invaded Nevada City searching for Walters, but on May 24 four Indians killed the draft dodger and claimed the $2,000 bounty. The Walters incident
brought an end to the peaceful coexistence between the colony and nearby Fallon. Wilbur S. Shepperson illustrates how the utopian dream of a rural cooperative remained elusive:

Instead of converting the state to socialism, the Nevada colony was converted to capitalism; instead of remaining an island untouched by war and violence, the colony stood condemned for the murder of Sheriff Mark Wildes; instead of growing prosperous on the land, the economic plight of the colony steadily deteriorated; instead of expanding the area of cooperative enterprise, the colony leaders became less socialistic when compelled by the war to consider how socialistic they were.\(^9\)

By 1919, the majority of the socialists had left Nevada City, and the property was sold off to investors. Socialist party candidates in Nevada never again achieved the electoral victories of the pre-war years.

As those pre-war years came to a close, analysts in Washington, D.C., saw the beginnings of an economic depression developing across the country and feared the war would only exacerbate the problem. But in Nevada, immediate economic prospects inspired conflicting perspectives. George Wingfield, one of the state’s most powerful economic figures, saw the war as a godsend for Nevada. He predicted that ranching and mining would flourish, thanks to the needs of both American troops and their allies. Wingfield maintained that the entire country would benefit from war-time demands.\(^{10}\) Nevadans stood ready and waiting for an opportunity. Consequently, when Congress declared war, Nevada quickly took action. Nevada City proved to be the great anomaly of the state.
On April 30, 1917, little more than three weeks after the United States entered the war, Nevada had already supplied its entire quota of men for the draft. In a statement released to local journalists, Henry A. Lemmon, Reno’s former superintendent of public utilities and newly appointed director of the Nevada State Council of Defense (SCD), elaborated: “Nevada’s patriotism, as reflected by volunteer enlistments for the regular army, is the highest of any State in the Union.” Draft totals from April 1917 to February 1918 numbered 1,447, exceeding the quota of 162 men by 900 percent. Whether a draftee or an enlistee, each soldier received overwhelming support from his hometown. Parades, speeches, dances, dinners, and band escorts to the train were among the special send-offs provided to Nevada’s men-at-arms. Nevada took the draft seriously and aided the government in its search for skilled, specialty personnel. Several local newspapers advertised for road workers, lumbermen, enginemen, cooks, and aviators, as well as those with medical training. One general call for enlistees in Tonopah in January 1918 requested “All able bodied white men” to serve their country. The racism in the statement also may have reflected the small number of non-whites living in Nevada: according to the 1910 census, only 513 African Americans lived in the state, approximately 0.6 percent of the total population. Similarly, Japanese and Chinese accounted for a combined 2.2 percent of the population, with 927 and 864 residents, respectively.

Registration Days were held throughout the country, and Nevada joined in when the first event took place on June 5, 1917, and the second exactly one year later. In Nevada, Governor Emmet D. Boyle declared each one a holiday, and in most Nevada communities businesses were closed, except the banks, which stayed open to sell Liberty
Bonds. When the Selective Service Act was amended, on May 18, 1918, to expand the age bracket for service, Nevada participated in a third Registration Day that September 12. In response to the age amendment, the SCD directed Nevada employers to inspect the registration cards of all applicants whose agents made them eligible for the draft. The age limits were initially 21-31 years of age, later extended to 18-45; those outside the limits were recruited for farm work or to serve on the various boards, leagues, and committees, or in other patriotic efforts. The SCD made clear that it would tolerate no idleness relating to the war effort; participation in the draft and all patriotic leagues, committees, and programs was not only expected but monitored.

Organization for the war effort began with the SCD, a division of the National Council of Defense. Its primary purpose was “the production and dissemination as widely as possible of the truth about America’s participation in the war.” Members of the state council included Governor Boyle, Lieutenant Governor Maurice J. Sullivan, Secretary of State George Brodigan, State Controller George Cole, and Attorney General George Thacker. The committees under the control of the Council of Defense and their directors included Finance (war bonds), H. A. Lemmon; Red Cross, Thatcher; Public Speaking (Four Minute Men), Supreme Court Justice Pat McCarran; Food Conservation and Production, Dean C. S. Knight; Women’s Section, Mrs. P. B. Ellis; Medical Section, Dr. George McKenzie; and the Federal Food Administration, H. M. Hoyt. Boyle appointed the directors, each of whom, once notified, replied with a note of thanks and a pledge to serve their country. Whether for reasons of efficiency or because of the scattered population across a vast area, in early 1918 Boyle pioneered the concept of county Councils of Defense as support units for the State Council. The federal government took
notice and forwarded the information to newspapers across the country. State Council Chairman Lemmon congratulated the governor for his foresight with the slogan “Nevada leads, Washington follows.”

The county councils came on board gradually from early summer to the autumn of 1918. In selecting his county chairmen, Boyle had a tendency to choose community leaders, bankers, lawyers, and judges. As did the directors, these men pledged their loyal support to Boyle and America. Their efforts were validated as Nevada exceeded her Third Liberty Loan Quota on May 8, 1918 and by the end of the drive had secured subscriptions totaling $2,582,000 (84 percent over quota). In the initial drive, the Liberty Loan of 1917, Nevada was the first state to exceed her obligation (on June 15, 1917) and eventually procured $1,870,000. The state came close to repeating this feat during the second loan effort by meeting quota expectations on October 28, 1917, with total contributions of $2,868,000.

The county chairmen attributed their success to good organization as well as to having a well-coordinated plan for canvassing their communities. In Humboldt, Washoe, and Nye counties, whose combined populations totaled 39 percent of all Nevadans, the chairmen used a system that kept records on all adult residents. They and their committees distributed loyalty cards throughout their communities with explicit instructions to fill them out and return them to the local Council of Defense office. In addition to the general questions (name, address, birthplace), there were more specific and personal inquiries: If foreign born, when did you come to the United States? How much did you pledge for Liberty Loans (and War Saving Stamps) and where did you purchase them? Are you a member of the Red Cross? Is your wife a member? What does
she do for them? Contribution amounts made to the YMCA or Knights of Columbus? T. J. D. Salter of Humboldt County espoused the potential psychological effects of the “spot-light system.” Scrutiny of the information quickly confirmed that if most people were giving a fair share, the would-be slackers, afraid of being discovered, would be inclined to buy additional bonds and become active in local war activities.

Other counties used various divide-and-conquer strategies to survey and solicit their districts. At the meeting of the State and County Council of Defense held in Reno on Saturday, May 17, 1918, each county chairman explained the methods used for exceeding his Liberty Loan quota and how dissent or indifference was handled. Lyon County relied on Four Minute Men, so named because their talks were not to exceed four minutes, and other public speakers to unite as well as to educate residents regarding Liberty Loans, War Saving Stamps, and other war-related programs. Any “slow-moving” citizens were subjected to public ridicule and condemnation. In Elko, the barn storming effort, led by Governor Boyle, was singled out as a useful tool for rallying public support. The county council director, Judge E. J. L. Taber, explained their system:

In some instances it has been necessary to write to the district chairman and request him to give the Director of the Council information as to who could afford to buy bonds and do not do so, and to give information as to the finances of such people; that the parents of sons in the army and navy were entitled to know who were their friends and the friends of their boys.
Council members in White Pine County made a personal canvass of the area and spoke with every male resident. They kept records and a committee visited all non-subscribers, who, more often than not, then made a contribution. Additional support came from the Four Minute Men who spoke frequently at local theaters. Ormsby County relied on its nine council members to conduct a house-by-house survey. They checked names with the assistance of the Ladies’ Auxiliary and the Boy Scouts.\textsuperscript{20}

In Nye County, Judge Mark Averill admitted it was difficult to obtain contributions from corporations for the Third Liberty Loan. Both the railroads and the Nevada-California Power Company, then under government management, abstained. The banks, dealing with certificates from the past loan drives, also declined to subscribe. Only the mining companies and local citizens came through in the end, and, while he was not proud of their total, Averill assured the council that the county had been card-indexed for use in future bond-raising efforts. He was, however, concerned about communicating current war information to Nye County’s nine thousand residents and requested franking privileges (i.e., free postage, letterhead, and envelopes) for the local councils. As a final point, Averill expressed concern over the lack of authority afforded to councils by the federal government. Although not an advocate of mob law, Averill felt it was inevitable, stating that “our duty is to prevent mob law, except in those cases where it might do some good. The Third Liberty Loan is over, the future is the important thing with us and we want to be able to do things that are necessary.” Esmeralda County’s council devised another method to ensure a thorough canvas: separating the city into three or four city block sections and appointing captains who visited every household in their division. The county director said of the matter of power that “we simply assume whatever authority
we feel we should have. Any authority we do not have we are going to take in order to reach and solve these problems as they come up and we will continue to assume this authority.”21

Public speakers, the Four Minute Men and Soldier Orators made numerous appearances throughout the state to educate the public on the war. In a truly patriotic, non-partisan campaign, three speakers—current Governor Boyle, former Governor Tasker Oddie, and the 1914 Socialist candidate for United States senator, A. Grant Miller—barnstormed through Nevada. In two ten-day trips spanning late February and early March 1918, the trio, accompanied by the Council of Defense state chairman, Henry Lemmon, traveled the northern and southern portions of the state, organizing county councils in areas where none existed and promoting Liberty Loans and the national war effort. After each spokesman presented on a different topic, including nationalism, patriotism, and Americanism, audiences responded with enthusiastic cheering and applause. A review by the *Reno Evening Gazette* acknowledged Lemmon’s successful strategy: “The psychological effect produced by three men who have been political opponents in Nevada for years going upon one platform and speaking before the people of Nevada on one issue, the war, has done more to cement the patriotism and cooperation of the people of Nevada than almost any one thing that has been done in this state.”22

Besides the main presentation to local residents, the men were willing to fulfill any request for their time, including those from the Red Cross, high schools, loyalty leagues, and other patriotic groups within each community they visited. For instance, during their scheduled stop in Ely, the local railroad operators had planned a strike vote
for the next morning in response to low wages and other disputes between the operators and owners. Boyle and Miller immediately set up meetings with the union representatives while Oddie and Lemmon gathered with the operators. The governor, using the trump card of patriotism, reminded both sides of their duty to keep the railroads moving so as to enable war production to continue without interruption. Both sides made small concessions, and the strike was averted with an agreement to postpone further negotiations until the war ended. As a result, plans were initiated to organize a state arbitration board.\textsuperscript{23}

While Nevadans sought ways to mediate agreements, in other parts of the country striking workers and labor unions were not held in high favor. In Bisbee, Arizona, for example, more than two thousand copper miners went on strike with hopes of unionizing for better wages. As copper was vital for the production of bullets, the townspeople viewed the strike as unpatriotic. The strikers were herded at gunpoint into busses and deported to Mexico. Legionnaires in Centralia, Washington, raided the headquarters of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), where a gun battle ensued. The leader of the IWW was then castrated, killed, wrapped in an American flag, and dragged through the streets of town.\textsuperscript{24} In Tulsa, Oklahoma, sixteen men were arrested for being members of the local IWW. After spending the night in jail they were transported to a secluded area of town where they were stripped, whipped with ropes, then tarred and feathered. The men were told to leave Tulsa and never return; their clothing was burned and shots were fired at them as they fled. Whether or not laborers were successful in Nevada, they and management avoided such overt acts of violence and vigilantism.\textsuperscript{25}
The call for nationalism was heard loud and clear throughout Nevada. Branches of federal patriotic associations sprang up in all counties as Nevadans demonstrated their support for the war. Foreign-born members of the community, eager to show their loyalty and dedication to the United States, often volunteered to head these groups. Units of the Home Guard (a pseudo military organization) were established in Elko, Lovelock, and Tonopah, as well as in Nye (two units) and White Pine counties. Intended to encourage young men to enlist and designed to combat trouble within the state, they consisted of both eligible and exempted men. While similar in structure, some groups were more regimented in their performance, as the Elko division illustrated. As the first Home Guard in Nevada, established in November 1917, it operated in conjunction with the local high-school course in military training and tactics. Directed by Principal George C. Jensen, the curriculum included daily calisthenics, infantry drills, sighting and gallery fire, signaling with flags, first aid, map reading, military lectures, and combat exercises.²⁶

In Lovelock, the Home Guard focused its energy on the IWW. Alarmed by a sudden increase in the foreign membership of the IWW, residents of Lovelock and the neighboring towns of Rochester and Packard began to monitor the group. Writing to Governor Boyle, the mayor of Lovelock, L. A. Friedman, admitted that the local townspeople had maintained a close scrutiny of the labor organization and reported any activity to Home Guard leaders.²⁷ The fear of both domestic riots and seditious disturbances prompted most states to establish some type of home-defense force. More than thirty states organized Home Guard units or similar semi-military groups.²⁸

Many Nevada Home Guard units contacted the governor requesting rifles and ammunition for their members. While he personally endorsed the project, both federal
and state statutes strictly regulated state police and armed militia organizations, which
tempered his enthusiasm. Always a diplomat and politician, Governor Boyle praised the
vigor displayed by the Home Guards and agreed to present their case to the national
government, but was non-committal on the rifle issue. These actions were a far cry
from what happened in some other states: In Connecticut, the legislature authorized its
Home Guard to be another armed force within the state, with duties ranging from benign
participation in parades and overseeing registration days to vigilant protection of the
state’s railroads, bridges, and power plants, as well as making weekly raids on socialist
meetings.

To show that legislative authorization need not matter, local citizens established
their own divisions of national organizations. In Tonopah, for example, the Vigilance
League, a branch of the Secret Service, was made up of volunteers who pledged their
assistance to the federal government’s war effort. Whereas membership was open to all
resident males within the immediate area, the following restrictions were imposed; only
loyal citizens or those who could be vouched for were accepted, and all members had to
sign an oath and were bound to secrecy. The League presented a description of its goals
to Henry Lemmon, assuring him that “by investigating all cases involving disloyal,
seditious or hostile acts against the U. S. government, and using measures within their
power (not detailed here) to bring about the punishment of the offender, we hope to
promote the order and welfare not only of this community, but of the state and country at
large.” The letter included an offer of aid to the state if an emergency should arise and
requested an endorsement from the State Council of Defense. In closing it noted, “There
has been no public statement made here of the organization, as we believe that our work
of being the *eyes and ears* of the government will be better accomplished if our existence and intentions are not heralded to the public, for the time at least." Fearing that some local officials were not in agreement with League objectives or those of the federal government, the group asked Lemmon to be discreet. To this end, all future correspondence was to be sent directly to the Executive Committee members listed and marked “personal.” Additional correspondence included a letter to Lemmon detailing the visit of Captain Arthur Allen of the United States Bureau of Investigation to the local defense headquarters in Tonopah. Its purpose was to assure Lemmon that the federal government was “fully aware of the situation” in Tonopah and to recommend that “the State Council may post itself on this point by conversation with Captain Allen if opportunity offers.” Despite its desire for anonymity, the League did become public one month later when a newspaper article detailed its objectives. *The Tonopah Daily Bonanza* described the members as a “group of men who felt that the time had come when organized action should be taken to eliminate the few disloyal and seditious spots which appear as blemishes on our fair name as a loyal, patriotic community.”

Because the male population of Nevada contained more thirty-year-olds than eighteen-year-olds, the draft took a heavy toll on the state’s teaching profession. President Wilson urged the country to preserve the efficiency of public schools during the war and the United States. Commissioner of Education agreed. State Superintendent of Public Schools John Edwards Bray declared the task could be accomplished only if teaching were to be considered an essential industry and teachers exempted from the draft. At the state Educational Conference, a nationwide program directed by the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Education, Governor Boyle endorsed the
president’s plan but failed to address the issue of draft exemption. In September Bray directed his concerns to the State Council of Defense, requesting Lemmon’s help in presenting the issue to national authorities. Since the war ended two months later, the idea was never debated.34

Attempts to influence the hearts, minds, and homes of Nevada’s youth were evident in the efforts of the Department of Educational Propaganda (DEP). A subcommittee of the Women’s Division of the State Council of Defense, it focused on Nevada’s students. Eugenia Stone, co-chair of the Nevada DEP, designed a pamphlet that was submitted to the governor on September 5, 1918, for possible distribution to all Nevada high-school students. In detailing young men’s responsibilities, Stone emphasized the importance of college and directed those under the age of eighteen to enroll for military work. She encouraged girls to study food conservation and production, and suggested home nursing, the Red Cross, and teaching as ways in which women could aid their country. In her message to all students, Stone stressed the critical role the students would play in the nation’s future: “In this time of war and need prepare yourself by going to school for the time when, BY YOUR TRAINING YOU ARE FITTED TO SERVE YOUR COUNTRY BEST.”35 Governor Boyle expressed his approval and promised to forward the request to the SCD and its director, Henry Lemmon, but the war ended before the circular could be considered.

As a means of reinforcing the patriotic commitment established through the local Defense Councils and various other vigilance groups, both educators and students were encouraged to join the Loyal Service Legion of Nevada. Another subcommittee of the State Council of Defense, the Legion was open to all public and private institutions and
had the purpose of promoting the nation’s welfare through participation in patriotic activities in the schools. The local education authorities were responsible for compliance within their districts. Members pledged their love of the United States and dedication to the League, and they promised to serve their country as directed by the president, governor, or a school-district authority.\textsuperscript{36} Nationally, Wilson’s Committee on Public Information was aware of the large and captive audience the public-school system provided. In his book, \textit{How We Advertised America}, the CPI director, George Creel, immediately recognized the potential for influencing the masses, stating, “For this purpose there was no other agency so effective, so sure, as the public schools with their twenty millions of pupils.”\textsuperscript{37} Working with the National Education Association and government departments, the CPI produced \textit{The National School Service}, a semi-monthly magazine distributed to every one of the estimated six hundred thousand public-school teachers in the United States. Along the same lines, the CPI used the Boy Scouts to disseminate war-effort information to the public. The CPI supplied them with millions of copies of Wilson’s Flag Day speech and instructed the scouts to distribute them door-to-door with the request that after reading the pamphlet, the recipients pass it on.

In some cases the desire to form a state version of a national program was not optional. The League to Enforce Peace was established June 17, 1915, at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, with former President William Howard Taft at the helm. Looking beyond the present, its purpose was not to end the war, but to prevent future wars through the creation of a League of Nations. At the bottom of its letterhead could be found the words: “By the entrance of our country into the war on the basis declared by President Wilson on April 6, such a League of Nations to maintain the peace of the world as the
League to Enforce Peace advocates has become a reality. It remains now to insure its successful continuance by committing the people and the Congress of the United States to this high purpose of the war.”

On May 5, 1917, the League to Enforce Peace forwarded a list of conventions for the state of Nevada to Governor Boyle, requesting that he personally approach the groups involved and arrange for a League speaker to participate. Another letter, dated May 23, 1917, called for all speeches and essays for upcoming commencement exercises to include the topic of the League to Enforce Peace. To further this cause, the League included a prepared statement titled “Commencement War Theme” for distribution to all local newspapers. Nevada, however, was unable to participate, since all graduation ceremonies for the school year had been completed.

On October 15, 1917, the League requested a current list of Nevada’s county League chairmen. In response Governor Boyle admitted that Nevada had not organized a League to Enforce Peace, citing the numerous requirements of his time for state matters. Fortunately, Tonopah attorney Hugh H. Brown and his wife, Marjorie, had been trying since December 1916 to establish the League in Nevada; Boyle finally created a state branch, and in November 1917 Brown became co-chairman (with Boyle) and promptly set out to organize a membership drive. To expedite the process, Brown asked SCD Director Lemmon for a list of “patriotic and public-spirited” Nevadans to whom he could appeal for support. At the same time, Governor Boyle called upon Chief Justice McCarran, chairman of the state CPI, to assemble a speakers bureau to carry the League’s message to the people.

The State Speakers Committee of Nevada consisted of nine appointees all chosen from the northern portion of the state. As did other Boyle appointees, they heartily
accepted their new positions—except one, Samuel W. Belford. An attorney in Reno, Belford expressed his “grave doubts as to the utility of its [Council of Defense] services.” Belford went on to add, “My own personal opinion is that the press must handle the publicity end of our war activities and that very little would be accomplished by making speeches.”\(^{39}\) Despite his reservations about the program, Belford offered to help the governor in any way he saw fit.

As prominent members of their communities, the State Speakers Committee chairmen were responsible for assembling a group of local businessmen, clergy, and attorneys willing to address public gatherings with short talks designed to arouse patriotism. Moreover, each branch was expected to form a local sector of the Four Minute Men, a division of the Committee on Public Information. The motivational but non-professional speakers were supposed to enlighten the public on the war and related topics as a means of stirring the masses to action. As a tool of the government’s propaganda factory, the local Four Minute Men branches, as described by Governor Boyle, “are state committees organized to aid the National Government in its war work here.” He added that “the value of this service has been made clear in the Liberty Loan Bond Campaign, the Red Cross Campaign and in other war activities in Nevada where informal and hastily organized speaker’s committees in certain towns rendered service of the very highest patriotic order.”\(^{40}\) At community movie theaters the speakers used the intervals between films to present their message. The CPI selected topics in advance, required strict adherence to the four-minute rule and discouraged any addition of personal feelings or biases. Throughout Nevada, the Four Minute Men rallied audiences behind such themes as Liberty Bonds, Food Conservation, the Red Cross, the Selective Service Draft, and the
broad theme of “Why Are We Fighting.”

In the summer of 1918, the Speakers Bureau and the Four Minute Men were consolidated into one division.

On both the state and national level, the campaign to sell the war paid particular attention to the large immigrant population. Nevada worried about the high number of non-assimilated immigrants, especially the Austro-Hungarian populations in the Ruth-McGill area and Tonopah. While the media inaccurately portrayed them as one monolithic group, the resident Serbs and Greeks sought to separate themselves from other Central and Southern European immigrants by conducting loyalty parades, establishing patriotic societies, and contributing speakers to local events. The situation in Douglas County was similar. Although it contained the largest German population in the state, the foreign-born residents had already forged their place in the community and there was little anxiety about their dedication. But in Minden, the Lutheran Church voluntarily gave up its German services and the local high school discontinued its German class until the war ended. In smaller, more isolated areas where their numbers were less significant, German immigrants experienced scorn, ridicule, and distrust. The CPI telegraphed Boyle, and other governors across the nation, about Loyalty Celebrations for foreign-born citizens during Fourth of July festivities; it included a directive to make sure that the immigrants controlled and managed “their part” of the gala, with others only “cordially assisting.”

Nevada also took steps to reassure Austrians, as immigrants from one of the empires fighting the United States. According to 1910 census information, only 969 Austrians lived in Nevada, 1.2 percent of the state population. Though their number was small, Lemmon prepared a statement intended to reassure the immigrants that if war
should be declared their jobs were not in danger. He maintained that “Austrians ‘who keep their mouths shut and obey the laws’ of the United States and of the State of Nevada have nothing to fear.”

In another, less abrasive memo, Lemmon warned all mining operations to resist any public denunciations that might negatively affect treatment of those Austrians who wished to comply with the law.

Most immigrants—and the native born—clearly wished to comply with the law. Although the composition of Nevada’s population was highly mixed, there were few reported incidents of sedition. The case garnering the most attention occurred on April 1, 1918, and involved J. B. Sauer of Manhattan. The Daylight Saving Bill, signed by President Wilson, took effect the day before. Sauer, a businessman of German descent, publicly denounced the president and was arrested at once. Charged as an enemy alien and with disturbing the peace, he pled guilty, paid the $50 fine, and was immediately “railroaded out of town.”

The Nye County Council Director, Judge Mark Averill, inquired as to whether his bakery could be confiscated under the Trading with the Enemy Act. In reply, United States Attorney William Woodburn explained the definition of an enemy as “any person within the military or naval lines of Germany or her allies Austria-Hungary.” Consequently, Sauer’s property could not be taken.

After the war, the federal government took steps to avoid situations like the one involving Sauer. Beginning in February 1919, the Justice Department required all enemy aliens to register with local authorities. Detailing the registration process, The Tonopah Daily Bonanza justified the measure, explaining, “Persons required to register should understand that in so doing they are giving proof of their peaceful dispositions and of their intention to conform to the laws of the United States.” In addition to three copies
of the registration form and four photographs, applicants also had to submit thumbprints, signatures, and oaths before a registration officer. Ten to fifteen days later, when the registrant returned for his identification card, another thumbprint and signature were necessary. As was required of all men of draft age, loyalty cards were to be presented upon demand.

Elko made its contribution to avoiding sedition. The Elko County papers published an article supplied to them by the County Council of Defense. The headline read, "Elko County Council of Defense Says, Seditious and Disloyal Utterances Must Stop. Director Requests Citizens to Inform Council of Objectionable Language." Examples of seditious or disloyal language included phrases such as “This is nothing but a rich man’s war,” or that “the United States had no business getting into this war,” or “we have no business sending our troops across the Atlantic." Reminding readers of their duty to report such words or actions, the Council announced its intention to deal with those who persisted along these unpatriotic lines in a swift and stern manner.

In another effort to control seditious publications, Nevadans initiated a statewide ban on all newspapers and magazines owned by the William Randolph Hearst Company. This order was in response to a New York American article describing President Wilson as “a vacillating incompetent.” On September 11, 1918, Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo and CPI Director George Creel publicly condemned Hearst. Three days later, the county Councils of Defense showed their support with a unanimous vote to suspend circulation specifically citing Hearst’s San Francisco Examiner and the San Francisco Call and Post. Governor Boyle was not present at the meeting and was therefore unable to respond to the numerous telegrams he received requesting details
about the media ban. Posters titled “Hearst’s Newspapers Not Sold Here” denounced twelve Hearst publications, quoting the derogatory reference to Wilson and declaring, “Nevada is American All of the Time.”

San Francisco Examiner circulation manager A. E. Crawford reminded Nevadans of the forthcoming Liberty Loan and the immense amount of publicity generated by the Hearst papers. He argued, “When you figure the wonderful circulation of the Hearst papers which runs into the millions, you can imagine what this assistance means to the Government, and how little they will appreciate the action of any person or persons that interfere with it.”

While the county councils might have had a unanimous opinion of Hearst, editors and distributors offered more mixed reactions. Although the New Mexico War News supported Nevada’s claim, describing Hearst as “the Kaiser’s personal representative in America,” other such endorsements of the anti-Hearst sentiment were hard to find.

Hearst requested and received an injunction against the statewide ban from Edward S. Farrington, United States District Judge for Nevada:

Acting together, [Lemmon and the State Council of Defense], they sought to prevent disloyal propaganda in Nevada, a purpose not in itself criminal or unlawful. It was to be accomplished by preventing the sale of the San Francisco Examiner in Nevada, and this in turn, was to be effected by inducing newsdealers, whether willing or unwilling, under pain of being disloyal, to refrain from buying or selling that paper. This is concerted action. It will materially interfere with interstate commerce, which is unlawful.
Since Hearst made the statement before the United States entered the war, the majority of newspapers felt no need to pursue the matter. The ban was short-lived and it appears that most Nevadans went along with it only to keep from being labeled disloyal or unpatriotic. In a state whose populations were generally isolated and contained a variety of ethnic cultures, one would expect to find more cases of disloyalty, sedition, or anti-war demonstrations. On the contrary, documentation shows the numerous and varied ways Nevadans declared their commitment to the war effort. The girls of Sparks High School formed the state’s first Patriotic League in September 1917. The young women collected magazines for military hospitals overseas and assisted the Red Cross. Later that year, the League was recognized for its efforts, which included knitting garments, assembling Christmas packages, and raising funds for the Red Cross Campaign.53 Also in Sparks, Dr. Henry Warren Poor presented photographs of the war compiled from his two trips to France. In an effort to boost support on the home front, Dr. Poor’s exhibit included views from the front lines, as well as of submarines and battleships in action. Throughout the state, Nevada’s women volunteered their time and energy for the war effort. Joining women across the country, they formed their own branches of such organizations as the state and national Councils of Defense, Liberty Loan Committees, Department of Educational Propaganda and Patriotic Education, and state chapters of the Federation of Women’s Clubs. World War I changed traditional gender roles by allowing women to take part in activities other than women’s groups. Under the auspices of self-defense or war vigilance, some formed their own gun clubs or Home Guard units while others joined men’s organizations such as the American Protective League. Women also played a primary role in the deportations of the striking Bisbee copper miners.54
Informative speeches proved to be another effective tool to attain and preserve the patriotic spirit in Nevada. In Reno, for example, the New Baptist Church hosted a series of six Sunday-evening talks in the spring of 1918. Topics included “The Shadow of Prussianism,” “What I Learned in Washington,” presented by Governor Boyle, and “What I Learned in Russia.” Lectures on patriotism were presented at Tonopah High School every Tuesday and Friday morning, beginning with the causes of the war, then moving on to such topics as the “Secret Service,” “Financing the War,” “The Espionage Act,” and “Mobilizing the Army.”

An unexpected boost to the war effort occurred in the spring of 1918 when Tonopah played host to representatives from Montenegro, which was allied with the United States, England, and France, despite being within the borders of Austria-Hungary. The group, whose country was completely under enemy control at this time, was traveling throughout southern and western Europe as well as North and South America, seeking input on Montenegro’s future from former countrymen who had immigrated before the war. When asked what a native Montenegrin could do for his homeland, one representative replied, “Whatever contribution you desire to make or do for your native country in this war, do it for the United States and you have served your native country as your adopted land.”

After the war ended, on November 11, 1918, Nevada, and the rest of the nation, attempted to adjust to post-war life. The war-related wealth and prosperity that Wingfield had predicted materialized only briefly, joining many transitory mining booms before it. Agricultural production and farm prices were waning. Also troubling were the 1920 census statistics, which revealed 4,468 fewer Nevadans than in 1910. The end of
the war also meant a decline in mineral demands, resulting in surplus stock. Production decreased to half its war-time levels while the cost of living remained high. Likewise, laborers were ready for promises made during the war to be fulfilled.58 Beginning in January 1919, a series of strikes started in the copper mines of Ruth. Strikes would also break out in McGill (July 1919) and Tonopah (August 1919). Increased tensions between workers and employers and a declining economy plagued Nevada’s once unified counties. To make matters even worse, the very industries that had experienced a short-lived prosperity as America entered the war were the first to feel the crunch once peace arrived. In 1919, mineral revenues were less than one half of the 1918 total.

The rebellious façade Nevada that presents to the rest of the country and the world belies its history as a nationalistic, patriotic, and conformist state ready to serve the federal government when called upon. Likewise, the ideals of individualism, resistance to regulation, respect for freedom, and liberalism associated with Nevada have been quickly shelved in the name of country. World War I proved how quickly Nevada could withdraw the rights of its people, becoming just as authoritarian, oppressive, and militant as any state in the Union. Yet, as the state of emergency subsided, Nevada could not return to its pre-war status of isolationism. Automobiles, the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the interstate highway system would further intensify the state’s integration with the nation.

The rebellious, anti-government pretense is just as discernable today as it was immediately prior to World War I. Yet, although this independent sentiment dissipated very quickly once the war began, and with little protest or opposition from residents, its post-war return was marked by both fervor and endurance. Nevada may project the image
of self-sufficiency and aloofness, but when duty calls, the state has proven itself ready to
give its all for the country.

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NOTES


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9 Ibid., 175.

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