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The Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties, 1917-1921

Harry N. Scheiber

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This much-cited study of Woodrow Wilson and his administration is a foundational work of legal and social history. In it, Berkeley historian Harry Scheiber explores the suppression of speech and print publication during an era of world war, the Red Scare, anti-foreign fervor, and unionism. Wilson's notable achievements in social leadership and the progressive movement are questioned in light of his failure to protect civil liberties amidst the tide of war fever, nationalism, racism, and corporate interests. His administration, through the Justice Department and the Postmaster General, took ruthless and often spurious actions to repress liberties, as the author reveals by prodigious research and useful tables showing prosecutions and dispositions of anti-speech legal actions. Toward the end of his administration, as he was rendered weak and distant by stroke, there is no doubt that Wilson turned a blind eye to anti-speech governmental behavior. But Scheiber shows that the systematic suppression came long before, for reasons that included the hyperfocus Wilson had on World War I and the League of Nations. This book is accessible to a wide audience interested in American history and moments of challenge to human freedom. It is not exclusively, or even particularly, for students of law and history or for lawyers. The author's use of source materials and private papers has spoken to many readers and researchers over the years. This is an unabridged republication of the original work.

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