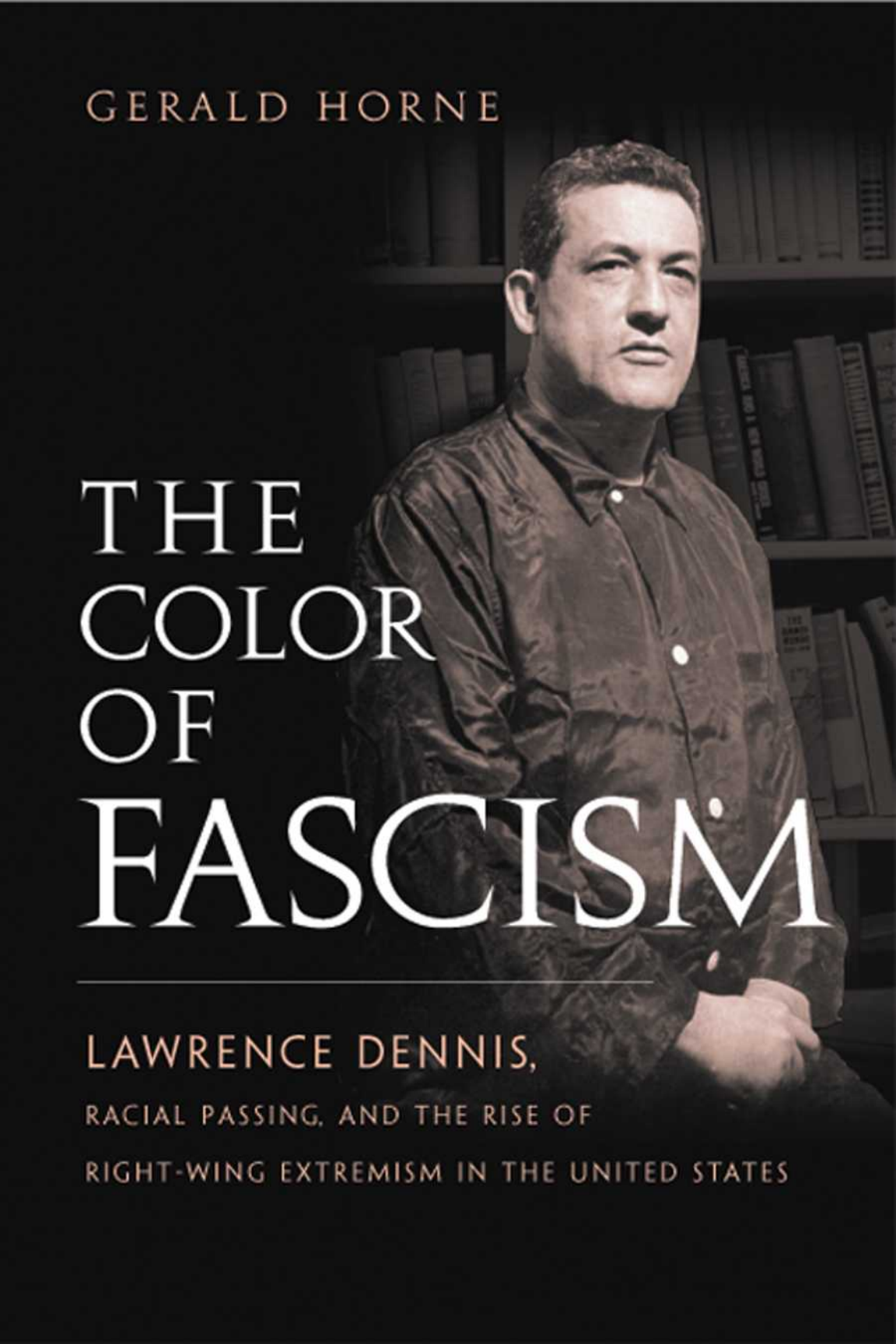
GERALD HORNE



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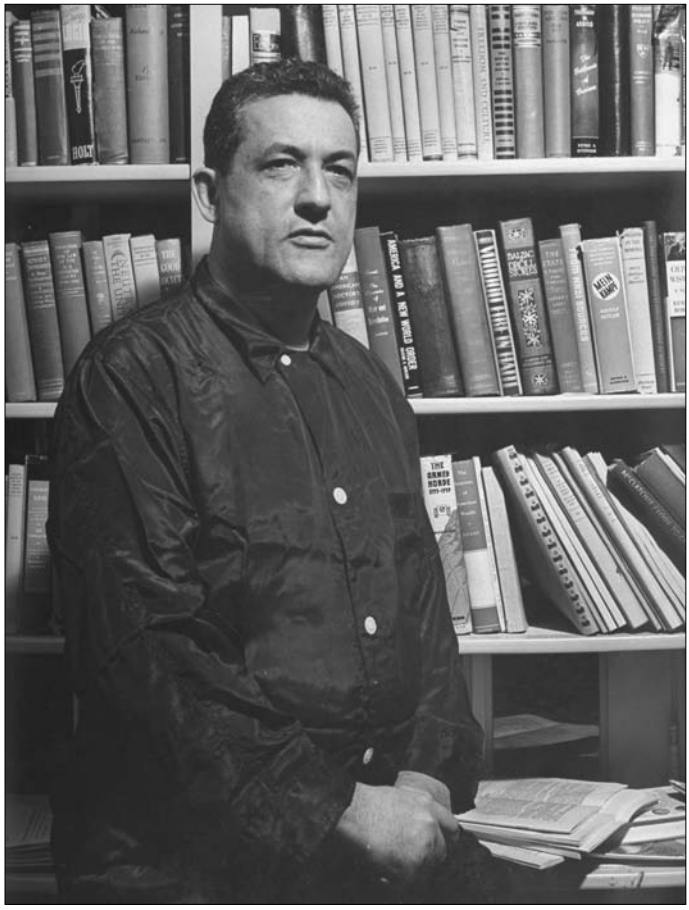

Lawrence Dennis in his study. Photo by Charles E. Steinheimer.
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Preface

Lawrence Dennis, much touted as the "brain" behind U.S. fascism, had "hair" that was "wooly, dark and kinky. The texture of his skin," said John Roy Carlson, who interviewed him face-to-face in preparing his best-selling book of 1943, "is unusually dark and the eyes of Hitler's intellectual keynoter of 'Aryanism' are a rich deep brown, his lips fleshy." It was also reported, in words replete with multiple meaning, appropriate for the racially ambiguous, that Dennis was "born in Atlanta 'of a long line of American ancestors.' "[1] Encountering him a few years before, in 1927, when he was a highly placed U.S. diplomat with postings ranging from Europe to Latin America, a *New York Times* journalist was taken by his "tall, trim powerful build with close cropped bristly hair and [skin] deeply bronzed by the tropical sun."[2]

PM, the voice of the left-led "popular front" referred to Dennis as "the tall swarthy prophet of 'intellectual fascism,' " as they too danced nimbly around his suspected racial origins,[3] as did the historian from the other shore, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who termed him—apparently metaphorically—a "dark and saturnine figure."[4]

Charles Lindbergh was quite attuned to the " 'rivalry of the races' "; indeed, suggests one perceptive analyst, he had "displayed an obsession with race—its improvement, its degradation, its superior and inferior elements"—with the African deemed decidedly to be among the latter. He was passionately concerned with the ability of the " 'White race to live . . . in a pressing sea of Yellow, Black and Brown.' " Such lunatic notions had not halted his ascension to the status of being deemed a "superhuman figure," a " 'demigod,' " according to one star-struck onlooker.[5] But even Lindbergh's signal achievement—his transatlantic flight—was dripping with racial animus. For it was flight and air power, he thought, that guaranteed that a "white" minority could dominate the colored, which is why he was hostile to war between Berlin and Washington since it distracted

from the true mission: "it is our turn to guard our heritage," he said, "from Mongol and Persian and Moor, before we become engulfed in a limitless foreign sea. . . . we can have peace and security," he exclaimed, "only so long as we band together to preserve that most priceless possession, our inheritance of European blood, only so long as we guard ourselves against attack by foreign armies and dilution by foreign races."[6]

Such bizarre ideas had not endeared him to U.S. Negroes. One of their leaders, the moderate Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, disliked him because of his alleged refusal to shake hands with Negroes and his failure to meet with the black man who found his kidnapped son's remains—after the child had been murdered in the "crime of the century"—and because his family hired European, as opposed to Negro domestic servants.[7]

Yet, it is unclear how Lindbergh would have reacted if he had realized that the man whose hand he embraced, Lawrence Dennis, had African "blood" flowing in his veins—he was a walking example of "blood dilution"—and had begun life as a celebrated "Negro" child preacher.

Lindbergh found Dennis to be a "striking man—large, dark-complexioned, strong and self-assured." The controversial aviator, who had fascist leanings all his own, was taken aback when he laid eyes on the silken Dennis. It was "rather a shock, when one sees him for the first time, especially in a room in Washington," a city of rigid racial segregation, "for one is so unprepared for his type. He would seem more in place at some frontier trading post along the eastern border of Europe." Lindbergh, who had firmly held ideas about white supremacy and racial purity, "tried" as they "talked" to "fathom the nationality of his ancestors." But Dennis, a product of Exeter and Harvard, could perform "whiteness" with the best of them, with his elegant manner, his refined accent with echoes of pastoral New England though he had been born in gritty Jim Crow Atlanta, his honed and precise diction, his Ivy League dress and manner, his utter confidence in the rightness of his beliefs—his evident patrician veneer dismissed doubts about his origins in the same way that a similar façade, evinced by a latter-day conservative, William F. Buckley, Jr., eroded any residue of doubt in the North Atlantic about his Irish Catholic origins.

Actually "performance" is an all too apt term to describe Dennis's deportment for, to continue the analogy, a Hollywood actor of African ancestry inexorably is slotted for "black" roles, while one of European background has access to a broader array of opportunities. "I am in favor of opportunity for all persons and races," Dennis said tellingly at one

point, "but I believe fundamental differences between persons, races and nations are inevitable and must forever persist."[8] Given this gloomy view, unsurprisingly Dennis opted for the opportunity provided by crossing the "color line."

Surrendering to Dennis's bedazzling performance of "whiteness," Lindbergh "concluded that some" of his "ancestors" "might have come from the Near East"—perhaps he would have surmised years later that he was as "white" as, say, the Lebanese-Americans Ralph Nader and Marlo Thomas or as "white" as the contemporary singer, Norah Jones, who describes herself using this privileged term though her father is South Asian. Thus, with the obstacle of Dennis's possible tinge of the tar-brush swept aside, Lindbergh surrendered and could now affirm enthusiastically, "I must get to know Dennis better. He has a brilliant and original mind—determined to the point of aggressiveness. I like his strength of character, but I am not sure how far I agree with him."[9]

"Lucky Lindy" came to agree with Dennis more and more. In fact, says one biographer of the charismatic man who for a time defined celebrity, Lindbergh's "arguments and phraseology had some striking parallels with Hitler's and even more those of Lawrence Dennis" with whom he was to be in "frequent contact." There was "no doubt that the flier had read and been strongly influenced by Dennis' books."[10] Late in life, Dennis—rarely hesitant to trumpet his own presumed assets, perhaps as a defensive reaction to being deemed arbitrarily to be part of an "inferior race"—recalled warmly that there was a "paragraph" in a Lindbergh book "about me in which he says I have a brilliant and original mind."[11]

Dennis's paradigmatic relationship with Lindbergh also revealed another defensive trait of his: he often derided the intelligence of those who were part of the presumed "superior race," perhaps as a defensive reaction to the hand that fate had dealt him. In fact, his less than exalted opinion of the nation's "racial" majority helps to explain why he felt the United States would benefit from the rule of a fascist elite, headed by those like himself. How could Dennis have faith in the intellect of, say, the white working class when it often preferred to align with its bosses who were of the same "race" than those of their class of a different "race"?

Thus, Lindbergh, Dennis sniffed, "was and is not an intellectual or a thinker," he "is not interested in politics or sociology and never was"[12] —unlike Dennis himself who, if nothing else, was a man of ideas. The prominent social scientist, Bertram Gross, told Dennis as his career was in its twilight, "I have been re-reading some of your books, which are

remarkably impressive from many points of view"[13]—this was a widely held viewpoint about Dennis, in stark contrast to his own opinion of so many others.

But it was left to Anne Morrow Lindbergh, spouse of the famed flyer and an intellectual force in her own right, to capture the complexity that roiled beneath Dennis's curiously "bronzed" skin and agitated his febrile brain. He was a "hard, brilliant, assertive man," she confided to her diary. It was rumored that he was a ghost-writer on her behalf, though her biographer denies this adamantly. Still, she found him "most interesting," though "the things people say about him" led her to expect "the devil incarnate."[14]

"But though very brilliant he did not seem hard, and I would say that far from being assertive, he was rather reserved and extremely sensitive. He was very interesting and that first talk [he gave] seemed sound and sensible. His brilliance carries you along 'with the greatest of ease.' I only find myself disturbed by that curious downward pout of the mouth that is almost like the terrible mouths of the Greek masks for 'tragedy.' He has suffered, this man, and been badly hurt—why, I don't know, and it seems to have left him with that curious grimace (terribly revealing, changing a whole face in a flash) and with no love of mankind as such." Here is where Ms. Lindbergh, no slouch in her advocacy of their commonly shared politics, parted company with the "hard" Dennis. "Perhaps this is not fair," she suggested, "and I am judging too quickly. But I feel in what he says a profound bitterness—the ring of the 'People is a great beast.' This is where I leave him."[15]

Unlike Ms. Lindbergh, I parted company with Dennis well before then—though I remained fascinated by the possibility that his turn toward fascism may have been spurred by his less than elevated view of the nation's majority, not least because of their dimness in perceiving their own interests. Yet, when I first heard of the story of how the "brain" behind U.S. fascism was a "Negro" who was "passing," I was intrigued—but I resisted exploring this story further, for writing about Dennis inexorably means explaining him and I was not interested in explaining a "fascist." It was fine with me if he were misunderstood. But after thinking a bit more and scrutinizing Dennis more carefully, I decided to embark on this project, not to explain or rationalize his ideology—despite Dennis's attempt to construct a kind of "fascism with a human face," a dark-skinned person of socialist views such as myself, would have been an early victim of *any* kind of U.S. fascism—but, instead, to try to shed light on how Jim

Crow, an ideology that was a close cousin of fascism, may have driven Dennis to political extremities and infected his thinking. For Dennis's fateful decision to place distance between himself and U.S. Negroes, and his insensitivity to Jewish-Americans as an outgrowth of his fascination with fascism, could not obfuscate Ralph Bunche's weighty assertion that " 'should America develop its own brand of Fascism, which presumably would be an intensification of much that now exists in the South, both the Negro and the Jew would provide handy scapegoats.' "[16] Thus, I suggest that Jim Crow is the key to unraveling his still mysterious decision to "pass" for white, just as the persistence of Jim Crow helped convince him that fascism in the United States was inevitable.

Still, unraveling this tangled skein has not been a simple task for there remains a lingering enigma surrounding Lawrence Dennis. He did not tell his own daughter, who he professed to love dearly, about his "racial" background and avoided answering questions when she pressed him.[17] He was an extremely guarded person. Precisely why he chose to cross the "color line" remains unclear. Still, Dennis did write voluminously and was in contact with a number of leading figures who have left behind impressions and writings of their own which help to explain why and how he could very well be described—other than W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., or, perhaps, Ralph Bunche—as the most influential U.S. "Negro" of the twentieth century.

Most U.S. "fascists," argues Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "were figures in a sideshow, without significance," but there was "one intellectual" who "brought to the advocacy of fascism powers of intelligence and style which always threatened to bring him . . . into the main tent." The man he had in mind, Lawrence Dennis, had "Goebbels-like qualities. His style was clever, glib and trenchant."[18]

Later it was to be said that Dennis's rocky road to fascism was paved by a rebuff from the White House of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which supposedly angered him by rebuffing him in his effort to get a top post. But it was early in the advent of the New Deal that the president himself told Dennis directly how "grateful" he was and how "very kind" it was for Dennis to "say about me" such "nice things."[19] But later the true temper of the New Deal attitude to one of their sterner critics from the right was revealed when the FDR confidante and one of the leading members of his cabinet, Harold Ickes, termed Dennis contemptuously as the "brains" behind U.S. fascism.[20]

Whatever the case, the fact is that despite his views on fascism, Dennis was influential in leading U.S. circles. This was partly due to his own strenuous effort, as he attracted the rich and famous, almost as if this was a shield against being unmasked as a "Negro"—for certainly none in the latter group would be circulating in the elevated circles in which he traveled.

Thus, M. S. Eccles, the powerful chair of the Federal Reserve in Washington—the Alan Greenspan of his era—told Dennis in 1939 that he was "very much interested to read" his influential publication, the *Weekly Foreign Letter,* "most of which coincides with my general viewpoint"; indeed, he gushed, "it was a pleasure to see you when you were at [a recent] luncheon and I trust I may have an early opportunity of meeting with you again."[21] Dennis had recalled later that he had "first made the acquaintance of Governor Eccles of the Federal [Reserve] System back in March 1932 when both of us read papers the same morning before a Senate Committee on the causes, course and cure of the depression. As our views and recommendations had so much in common," commented a self-satisfied Dennis, "we conceived a high regard for each other which has not diminished."[22]

The fabulously wealthy corporate baron, Cyrus Eaton, was also a "regular reader" of Dennis's words[23] and Secretary of State and uber-lawyer, John Foster Dulles, likewise sampled Dennis's handiwork.[24] Dennis conceded that he "only influenced Taft,"[25] speaking of the son of a president and stalwart of the GOP right-wing. Another top GOP potentate, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, admitted similarly, "I *partially* agree with Dennis" (emphasis in original).[26]

It was in the early 1930s that Dennis captured even more headlines when Senator Hiram Johnson, the powerful politician from California, invited him to testify before the similarly muscular Finance Committee. By then Dennis was well on his way to being regarded as a dissident, an elite intellectual who had come in from the cold, and the solon informed him that "you will have no sympathy from the government," nor "little approval from the committee, but, as my mail indicates a very decided support from those you don't know," that is, "the great inarticulate mass." Senator Johnson sought "to prove by your testimony the whole iniquitous course of lending to Latin America," and it was through such high profile appearances where he provided expert opinion on profound though technical matters that Dennis began to attract attention nationally in a way far outstripping most "Negroes," who were pigeonholed, at best, into narrow "race" matters.[27]

Dennis was known widely for his pointed views about economics; thus, John Maynard Keynes "invited me to lunch," he recalled, "when I was in London in 1936."[28] Some were immune to Dennis's charms, however; Keynes's fellow Londoner, Harold Laski, the left-wing intellectual, told him bluntly, "when I received your earlier letter I did not realize that you implied that Fascism is a solution of American problems." Horrified, he continued, "as I am myself a Socialist I doubt very much whether anything I can say would be of interest to you," so he concluded irritably, "I think, on the whole, I will not waste your time."[29]

All were not so resistant to Dennis's blandishments, however. As William F. Buckley, Jr., was ascending to prominence, he and Dennis "had nearly an hour together. He knew a lot about me," said the gratified Dennis.[30] The disreputable anti-Semite, Willis Carto, expressed "keen anticipation" at the prospect of "meeting" Dennis and "appreciated" the latter's "hospitable offer of accommodation" at his comfortable home in western Massachusetts.[31] From the other end of the political spectrum, long-time Socialist leader, Norman Thomas, admitted that "I like Dennis personally and respect his brains" though adding balefully, "I was very sorry when he called himself an American fascist."[32]

"Alice Longworth, the daughter of Teddy Roosevelt," Dennis effused, "often took me over to her house for a meal."[33] Before his popularity began to sink as a direct result of World War II, Dennis told a colleague in the chic and exclusive Newport, Rhode Island, "I was at dinner last night at Mrs. Longworth's in Washington. Senator [Burton K.] Wheeler and his wife were also there."[34] Even in 1955, when Dennis's influence was presumably at its nadir, he still could assert, "I had a nice visit with Burt Wheeler in Washington recently. He sees eye to eye with me on about everything political."[35] Like an undercover secret agent, Dennis regularly penetrated circles to which virtually all "Negroes" were barred.

Joseph P. Kennedy, patriarch of a powerful Massachusetts-based political dynasty, sought to "to assure" Dennis that "we follow your opinions with great interest in every proposition."[36] Dennis liked to flaunt his myriad connections with ruling elites; this was part of a lifelong effort of his to stress "class," where his credentials were impeccable and his footing sure and keen; to be sure, he spoke quite a bit on "race," but not as an insider but as a seemingly disinterested patrician. There were added reasons for this trait for as one colleague said of him, he had "the Olympian attitude that I have found extremely irritating in some Exeter-Harvard men,"[37] but this colleague may not have recognized that Den-

nis's demeanor may have been a defensive reaction to being grouped arbitrarily with an "inferior race."

Whatever his attitude, when the president of the well-financed utility, Southern California Edison, was in need of contacts at high levels, it was Dennis who graciously decided to "link you with a number of others like General [Robert] Wood, Joseph P. Kennedy and Herbert Hoover."[38]

Similarly, Dennis told an interviewer in 1967 when the Kennedy glow already was shining brightly, that he "went to call on him [Joseph Kennedy] several times in Massachusetts"; he also "called on him once or twice down in Florida. He had a very high regard, I think, for me," said the confident Dennis. "He spoke well of me"; yes, he continued, there was a "very keen friendship" between the two men, since "our views coincided very much because Kennedy was very much what was called an isolationist."[39] Dennis maximized his influence by frequently donating his books and other published writings to numerous college and high school libraries, a munificence that was facilitated by his close ties to the likes of Kennedy.[40]

Dennis was not in touch with many Negroes but conspicuously among this select group was the embodiment of Negro Conservatism, George Schuyler; "if my memory serves me well," Dennis said, "you wrote an extremely appreciative review of my book *The Dynamics of War and Revolution*"; returning the compliment Dennis added, "I have occasionally read things of yours and always admired your realism and straight thinking; usually I have agreed with you," he said, characterizing himself as a "much misunderstood and misrepresented person."[41] Apparently he never exchanged pleasantries with another prominent "Negro"—W. E. B. Du Bois—though when this NAACP founder was prosecuted during the early Cold War, Dennis remarked that that case "was quite like ours," the "evidence was similar in both cases"—with one being a presumed agent of the Soviet Union and the other, fascist Germany.[42]

Dennis too was a staunch critic of U.S. foreign policy, being an "isolationist" of sorts—he preferred the term "neutralist"[43]—particularly during the run-up to World War II when Kennedy as U.S. ambassador at the Court of St. James expressed similar viewpoints. "I think the United States could have avoided fighting in World War II," Dennis said in 1970; "I also think the United States could and should have avoided fighting in World War I."[44] "Why should we have minded the Japs [*sic*] trying to repeat the acts of the whites in Asia or against the poor Chinese," he asked querulously.[45]

It was in this context that Dennis met with the top leaders of European fascism. "I have a very vivid impression of you," Dennis was informed later, "striding down the streets of Nuremberg on the 8th of September 1936 during the sessions of the Parteitag." This colleague, Charles C. Tansill, a future Georgetown professor, "wanted to catch up with you but you were lost in the crowd and my search was in vain,"[46] as Dennis—symbolically—melted into the Nazi mass.

Later Dennis confessed that he was "less impressed with Mussolini than with Hitler." Perplexed, he "tried to figure out why and how they had been so successful and had gone so far," but he "never came to any strong conclusions." He found Il Duce to be "most cautious and friendly. He didn't talk much," apparently taken by Dennis's notoriously gifted way with words. "Hitler didn't impress me," he snuffled, but "one of the Nazis who [did] impress me," he said brightening "and was very much more communicative was Goering and another was Goebbels. They talked and I appreciated their talking. But Hitler never talked much, at least to me"; he was "always very reserved and cautious"; he was "not as communicative as a man like [Neville] Chamberlain and the British," though he found the noted appeaser, "rather guarded," when they "met"; hence, "I never liked him very much." Of his counterparts, Winston Churchill and Pierre Laval in Paris—both of whom he met—uncharacteristically he had little to say.[47]

Still, Dennis later stressed that he sought to moderate the fascists' extremism. "The Southerner or South African would never think of fighting a foreign war to impose his racist ideas or practices on other lands," he declared in 1948. "The Nazis did, which was their great mistake." Dennis had "an interview" in 1936 with the leading ideologue "Rosenberg" and when Dennis "suggested that the Nazis could only avoid war with America if they could tone down their racism as regards the Jews to some such hypocritical pattern as that followed in America toward the Negro. He was quite shocked that we should consul such hypocrisy. Well," Dennis said smirking, "he got hanged for his lack of it. The main reason why Britain has prospered and expanded more than Germany from the Reformation to the Russian Revolution," said Dennis, the ultimate cynical realist, "is that the British have been past masters in hypocrisy."[48]

The poet laureate of fascism and avatar of "modernism," Ezra Pound, was impressed with Dennis's way of thinking. He thought Dennis was "not yet a Brook Adams / at least I don't think so." He found his fellow extremist a "very irritatin[g] writer" but, he insisted, "you better all the

same read him/not as gospel/read him for what he has got and for what he has NOT got yet or cannot get printed." Yes, he thought, Dennis "does know more than most of his confreres" but Pound was unsure about his erstwhile comrade's ideological bona fides. "I think he thinks he is fascist / but I have no idea what he means by a FASCIST / it seems to me that he leaves out a good deal of what they mean here by the word." The "trouble with Dennis," said Pound, "is that he uses these general terms like fascism, democracy, liberal / he knows what he means, or he may know but the reader is buffaloed / however Dennis does get some things across / especially where he has had Experience / like he had on Rosyfield's [*sic*] Brain Rust" (emphasis in original).[49]

Pound's skepticism about Dennis's fascist credentials was understandable for some of his ideas did not seem to dovetail with those of the ultraright. Since Dennis continually argued that he was not a fascist but simply asserted vigorously that he thought fascism was inevitable, this gives rise to the belief that even here he was "passing," or seeking to position himself advantageously for what he viewed as an inexorable rise of fascism, as the "wave of the future" crested—to use Morrow Lindbergh's phrase that she was reputed to have cadged from Dennis.

Thus, he found the "[Joseph] McCarthy line" to be "bad strategy," particularly his assault on clergy as being influenced by the left; "much of the case made out against these preachers and teachers on account of the leftist affiliations is like the case made out against me for being linked with the Nazis."[50] Thus, Dennis was "surprisingly sympathetic to the deposed Secretary of Commerce"—and 1948 third party presidential standard-bearer—Henry A. Wallace.[51] In 1952, he opted to "prefer Adlai to Ike" since he found the latter "really a hick just like [Truman]," both "contradictory and confused."[52] He was an early and adamant opponent of the Cold War—a conflict continuously pointed to by most on the right as one of their greatest accomplishments. But during the height of the war in Vietnam, Dennis asserted that "there was more basis for intervention against Nazism and Fascism before and during World War II than there is today for intervention against communism. Communism poses no counterpart of Hitler's anti-Semitism," though he found it "probably more dangerous over the long run than was Nazism."[53] "There is no such world plan of Communist conquest," he declared in 1954, "as our propaganda extremists have been telling us about." This was his response to the overthrow of the progressive Arbenz regime in Guatemala on precisely anticommunist grounds.[54] "I have never liked Nixon," said the

"brain" behind U.S. fascism in 1968 and "would have liked to see Rockefeller get the nomination."[55]

His readers, who often were not as esoteric in their viewpoints as Dennis, often took umbrage with his fiercely held notions. "Some of our readers," he said in the spring of 1942, "have been reproaching the editor with having turned pro-Communist"; this was after—consistent with the newly minted national consensus—he was effusive in his praise of the United States' wartime ally, the Soviet Union. He cautioned that the war would "make communism master of Europe"—which, like his argument about fascism, was something he viewed as inevitable, not a matter of his advocacy.[56] Later, as African nations were rising to independence in the postwar era, he noted mournfully that "we lost several subscribers because of our repeated use of the phrase 'the colored world.'" He sought to reassure these doubters of his bona fides by alleging that he had borrowed the phrase from the notorious white supremacist, Lothrop Stoddard—author of wildly popular volumes warning darkly about the "rising tide of color"—but some careful readers were not assuaged.[57] He would not relent. "In the United States today," he announced in 1952 as Jim Crow's foundations were beginning to show stress, "far too much emphasis is being placed on communism as a menace and too little attention is being paid to the revolt of the colored world against the white man," though "American publishers and people in control of communication" refused to discuss this latter point. "No useful purpose is being served," he insisted, "by hush-hushing the war of the colored world against white supremacy." He went on to cite Du Bois favorably, no mean feat during this tense year of war in Korea, and added presciently that the "Supreme Court must, sooner or later, outlaw segregation" and "this it has to do because of the imperatives of American foreign policy."[58]

More obdurate readers were not conciliated because like a nervous tic, Dennis had a habit of addressing racial matters in a manner not congruent with those of his comrades on the far right. It is said that an arsonist often returns to the scene of the crime to admire his deed: it seemed that Dennis found it hard to avoid alluding to his controversial racial origins, as if he wanted to be "outed."

"White and colored, like beautiful and ugly, are semantic booby traps," he asserted. Like a precursor of post-modernism, he proclaimed, "what is a white person or a white nation or people? You might as well ask what is a beautiful woman"; the "upper classes of the Moslem world in North Africa and the Near East . . . always accepted a certain amount of inbreed-

ing of Africans or Negroes. As one often hears the top people say, in these circles, they regard bringing in a little Negro or African blood," like "English breeders of thorough-bred horses."[59] No doubt a few more readers were lost after this assault on the bedrock ultraconservative notion of "racial purity" by a man who considered himself to be a "thorough-bred" among intellectuals. Yet ultimately modern conservatism jettisoned extreme racism and moved toward Dennis's viewpoints. Thus, as Dennis "passed," his opinions entered the conservative mainstream.

Now I am not one to view Dennis as some sort of "prophet on the right" or even as Sidney Hook—the profoundly anticommunist though "Marxist" philosopher—put it as some kind of Social Democrat.[60] When he received a letter in 1936 from the "Societa Delle Nazioni Delegazione Italiana" in Rome, inviting him for an official visit on behalf of the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs," he knew full well what fascism was about and protestations that he was not an advocate but simply curious about the "wave of the future" are hard to swallow.[61] In 1968, writing from the nation then known as West Germany, Professor Klaus Kipphan instructed him brusquely, "my study of German propaganda in the United States has indicated that [Dennis's] 'Weekly Foreign Letter' . . . was subsidized since the beginning of 1941 by Germany. The files of the German Foreign Ministry reveal a monthly subsidy of 1200 dollars."[62] Dennis replied weakly that, yes, he "did receive some contributions from the German Embassy" —a fact he had denied adamantly previously—"but they were never anything like $1200 a month." It was more like a still handsome "$500 a month."[63] Herr Professor was "pleased . . . enormously" by his interlocutor's "frankness" since his "German oral sources try to reveal as little as possible; they even don't hesitate to tell outright lies."[64]

Such an explosive detail was denied by Dennis when in 1944 a grand jury brought forth an indictment, placing him at the center of a "three year plot to incite mutiny in the armed forces, unseat the government and set up a Nazi regime."[65] Dennis, said *PM,* was one of a number of "full-fledged partners in a world-wide fascist plot."[66] This "plot," it was thought, was the culmination of a rising arc of hate. At the time of the disbandment of Henry Ford's meretricious and fanatically anti-Semitic *Dearborn Independent* in 1927, "there were only five hate organizations in the entire country"; but the bigotry soaked years of 1933 to 1940 "witnessed the emergence of an estimated 121 groups preaching fascist, pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda, an astonishing increase," fueled by

developments in Rome and Berlin.[67] In January 1940, the U.S. authorities arrested eighteen members of a Christian Front splinter group and charged them with trying to overthrow the government. Their alleged aim was to rally thousands of Irish Catholic members in the police and National Guard to seize the White House and place one of their ideological own in the Oval Office as a dictator. Supposedly, they had accumulated arms, explosives, and ammunition from an officer of the New York National Guard—and allegedly had army support.[68]

Though these were Dennis's ideological confreres, it would be a mistake to impute their weird and less than wonderful plans to him, even though characters of this ilk were to share the dock with him. Likewise, it would be an error to assume that he shared the same degree of anti-Semitism as his codefendants. William Dudley Pelley, leader of the Silver Shirt storm troopers in the United States, headed an organization whose explicit aim was " 'a wholesale and drastic ousting of every radical-minded Jew from the United States.' "[69]

Of course, anti-Semitism was not necessarily on the fringes of society during Dennis's heyday. It was on 21 July 1947 that President Harry S. Truman had a conversation with former secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, who happened to be Jewish, and wanted to talk with the occupant of the White House about a ship carrying Jewish refugees to Palestine, who faced the prospect of being turned away by the British colonial occupiers. "He'd no business, whatever to call me," the irked chief executive confided to his diary. "The Jews," he added sweepingly, "have no sense of proportion nor do they have any judgement on world affairs. Henry brought a thousand Jews to New York on a supposedly temporary basis and they stayed." Working himself into a lather, the man who was to receive millions of votes from his compatriots about a year later, added, "The Jews, I find, are very, very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated as D[isplaced] P[ersons] as long as the Jews get special treatment. Yet when they have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the underdog. Put an underdog on top and it makes no difference whether his name is Russian, Jewish, Negro, Management, Labor, Mormon, Baptist, he goes haywire. I've found very, very few who remember their past condition when prosperity comes."

"Truman was often critical, sometimes hypercritical, of Jews in his diary entries and in his correspondence but this doesn't make him an anti-

Semite," says Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis, pointing to his role in recognizing the state of Israel.[70] I'm not so sure. I will say, however, that there are degrees of anti-Semitism and Dennis falls closer to the Truman, rather than the Pelley, pole.

Moreover—and this is a painfully sensitive matter—even a system as demonic as fascism has to be placed in context. For it is apparent that in retrospect one reason—perhaps—why German fascism particularly is viewed so negatively is precisely because it occurred in Europe with the victims being overwhelmingly European. Thus, according to one analyst, " 'between 1880 and 1920, according to the best demographic estimates today, the population of the Congo was slashed in half: from roughly 20 million to 10 million people. . . . Some writers cite even higher numbers. . . . Hannah Arendt used a figure of 12 million deaths' "—but such genocidal slaughter hardly registered a blip on the world's consciousness, perhaps because of the color of the victims. These astonishing figures do not encompass the even more atrocious depopulation that accompanied the African Slave Trade, an atrocity that was not widely recognized as such for much of Dennis's lifetime.[71] On the one hand, such anti-African atrocities may have convinced Dennis that wisdom compelled those who were able to escape with all deliberate speed the straitjacketed and asphyxiating U.S. definition of "Negro." On the other hand, such atrocities may have induced in Dennis a kind of moral coarsening and jaded inability to rationalize the horrors that were unfolding in Europe.

Still, though the powerful Republican Right shed Dennis-style isolationism after 1945, leaving him further isolated, as it rushed to embrace the forward-leaning momentum of the Cold War, it also—at least rhetorically—embraced Dennis's premature anti-racism: this may be his ultimate intellectual legacy.[72]

For Dennis, who was no Negrophobe—unlike some of his more stubborn comrades—was exquisitely sensitive to racial matters. On the other hand, some of his bedrock ideas were not entirely inconsistent with fascism as defined by the scholar, Robert O. Paxton. The latter has asserted that fascism is grounded on the articulation of historic grievances, involving a cult of leadership spearheading a mass-based movement of militants bent on repressing democracy. The popular view on the left is that fascism has involved the open and naked terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary segment of the ruling elite. If there was a "historic grievance" driving Dennis it was persecution of Negroes—hardly a motive force for his presumed fascist comrades. On the other hand, Paxton also

points to "humiliation or victimhood" as a motive force of fascism globally, though it is doubtful that this eminent scholar had in mind the kind of humiliation endured by Dennis as a result of his ancestry. Yet, it is easy to see how this humiliation could drive Dennis to extreme remedies. Paxton also points to the "failure of democracy" as an "essential precondition for the fascist achievement of power"; again, he did not have the plight of Dennis in mind but it is hard to imagine a larger "failure of democracy" besides the plight of the Negro.[73]

Was it really as anomalous as it appears that one who could be defined as a "Negro" would become the intellectual leader of fascism? After all, were not those of African descent—more precisely, brutality toward them—essential to the rise of fascism, notably in Italy?[74] Who would resist seeking to escape the sad role of being the focus of a death machine? But Dennis did not necessarily define himself as a "Negro" in the first place and, in any case, anomalies abound in the history of fascism. The infamous Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, had a clubfoot, and given the Nazi bent toward eugenics, may have been done away with but for his high position.[75] Hitler was homosexual—according to some[76]—which might have qualified him for one of his concentration camps but for his high position. Mussolini had a corps of Jewish backers[77] and so on.

Were Dennis—and his presumed anomalous cohorts—all overcompensating madly because of their purported liabilities and flaws? Was fascism ideologically so powerfully seductive that it could even entice those who could easily become its initial victims? Was the malevolent targeting of specific groups, in any case, essential to fascism's mission or was it driven predominantly by a perceived crisis in capitalism—and challenge from socialism—that transcended the boundaries of identity? Many of the early fascists were outsiders of one sort or another and in the U.S. context there are few more entitled to that description than those who could be defined as "Negro." Certainly the kind of restrictions on finance capital and state intervention that Dennis advocated was consistent with a good deal of thinking during the 1930s, thinking that was inspirited by capitalism's crisis and that animated the New Deal.[78]

In any case, there was no U.S. fascist leader Dennis followed, save himself, but within this motley movement, he was viewed less as a mass leader than as a man of ideas who could articulate a rationale wonderfully. To be fair, Dennis repeatedly denied that he was a fascist. "I was not 'a fascist' or even an advocate of fascism," said the man viewed widely as the "brains" behind this phenomenon. No, he insisted in 1954, "I said it was

the 'wave of the future,' a phrase I coined in that connection." Dennis persisted in claiming that he was an isolationist or "neutralist": "I opposed the anti-Nazis just as today I oppose the anticommunists," but his critics dismissed these qualifications as misleading at best.[79]

For Dennis repeatedly expressed reservations about democracy—though even here his lack of enthusiasm seemed to be influenced by the fact that the voting masses in the United States seemed to have few qualms about Jim Crow and other repressive policies, which apparently pushed him toward advocating rule by elites; this idea, quite frankly, was not incongruent with the historic position of Negroes, who from their first being granted the ballot tended to rely not on the party of the "workingman," the Democrats, but on the party dominated by the highest ranks of Northern capital, the elite, that is, the Republicans. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Dennis was not the only prominent personality in the United States who felt that fascism was inevitable.[80]

In other words, though I think it not unfair to term Dennis a fascist, a term I consider freighted with the opprobrium it so richly deserves and more, saying such should be the beginning of this inquiry—not the end. My overriding point is that the fascist-like policies of the United States, for example, winking at the proliferation of lynching, inevitably—to use a favorite word of Dennis's—impelled madness in policies and men alike. As I see it, this is the beginning kernel in an inquiry into the mystery that was Lawrence Dennis. It is this kernel that leads me to suggest that a fascist-like Jim Crow compelled him to cross the color line, just as it convinced him that fascism itself was inevitable.

As Dennis's life was varied, readers may want to dip into various chapters of particular interest, rather than proceeding in this book from beginning to end.

The Introduction provides an overview of the matter of "passing" as a historical phenomenon and notes how a form of "passing" has involved, for example, gender, class, etc.

Chapter 1 concerns Dennis's early life. He began life as a famed, globe-trotting Negro child preacher, based in Atlanta. His mother was a Negro—but it is unclear who his father was, though the various possibilities are raised here. However, by the time he entered Exeter in 1913, he had decided to "pass," perhaps because he recognized even then the circumscribed life chances faced by those defined as African-American. Still, there, at Harvard where he matriculated, and following there in the U.S.

military he faced problems of various sorts, some of which could easily be described as "racial."

Chapter 2 concerns his entering the diplomatic service, where he toiled in Haiti, Romania, Honduras, and Nicaragua (where he crossed swords with the famed Sandino). However, in a pattern that was to become typical, he broke publicly with the State Department and, as so often happened, there were thinly veiled references to "race" in some of his pronouncements, as if he wanted to be unveiled as a "Negro." He then joined a prominent Wall Street firm, where he predicted the 1929 crash.

In Chapter 3, Dennis is ousted from Wall Street after a spat—a recurrent pattern signaling his prickliness, which may have been an outgrowth of his unease with the "racial" order. He gains a reputation as a loose cannon and he is increasingly alienated from left and right alike. Celebrated architect, Philip Johnson, argues that it was yet another rebuff—his being turned down by the New Deal for a top post—that affected him deeply. It is then that he latches on to what appears to be a rising movement—fascism.

Chapter 4 tracks Dennis's growing notoriety as the public face of fascism. He argues that fascism is inevitable, not necessarily that he is an advocate, though others fail to discern the meaning of this distinction. He fails to detect a distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracy, arguing that the racism of the latter is akin to the mass deprivations of the former. The FBI begins to investigate him and a former girlfriend tells them that he is a frequent attendee at Nazi gatherings.

Chapter 5 deals with, inter alia, his growing celebrity; when he visits Rome, he meets with Mussolini one-on-one; in Germany he consorts with Hess, Goebbels, and Goering. However, when he is photographed standing next to a uniformed Nazi and this picture makes it to *Life* magazine, controversy erupts in the United States.

Chapter 6 concerns Dennis as courtier to the rich and powerful, including Lindbergh. Dennis argues that the United States and United Kingdom want to treat the Axis like they treat Negroes. Thus, "race" is central to his analysis of fascism though, for whatever reason, his many critics choose to ignore this. Meanwhile, the FBI zeroes in on him as they conclude that what is most dangerous about him is his "anti-British" rhetoric and his invocation of the "race question."

Dennis was a big name-dropper, perhaps yet another defensive reaction induced by his insecurity about "passing." Chapter 7 discusses his growing infamy, termed by *Life* as "America's No. 1 Intellectual Fascist."

Dennis develops ties to Tokyo, which is busily seeking to fan the flames of "race" in the run-up to the Pacific War. Dennis argues that if the United States and United Kingdom can engage in "racial supremacy," why can't Germany and Japan?

In chapter 8 Dennis is charged with sedition for supposedly seeking to incite mutiny among the armed forces and establish a Nazi regime in the United States. Friends begin to desert him.

The trial generates enormous publicity, as chapter 9 notes. Dennis defends himself in a trial that is marked by strangeness; his codefendants are crackpots and extremists of various sorts.

After a mistrial is declared, as chapter 10 details, Dennis emerges as a stern critic of the emerging Cold War; he bashes Dixie as resistance to desegregation emerges and takes pleasure in the squirming of the White South.

However, Dennis becomes heavily dependent upon the charity of millionaires—for example, Sterling Morton of the salt fortune—to make ends meet. His spouse, who had stood by him—more or less—during his travails, dumps him, as chapter 11 observes. He becomes increasingly idiosyncratic, backing Stevenson over Eisenhower in 1952 and expressing viewpoints on foreign policy that are well beyond the mainstream. However, he remains close to a raft of prominent conservatives, including William F. Buckley, and remains influential on the right.

Chapter 12 takes Dennis to his life's conclusion. In his final years, he allows his hair to grow and develops an "Afro," returning at least symbolically to his origins as a Negro. He passes away in 1977, with none of the many obituaries noting the close tie in his life between his "passing" and his articulation of fascism.

Introduction

More Than Passing Strange

What Is Passing?

It is, according to one analyst, a "deception that enables a person to adopt specific roles or identities from which he or she would otherwise be barred by prevailing standards"; it "requires that a person be consciously engaged in concealment." By this standard, Lawrence Dennis —whose mother was black—was "passing," since according to U.S. standards, he should have been viewed as a "Negro." I should add immediately that I do not view it as an offense or sin of any type that one chooses to escape persecution by "passing"—or by fleeing abroad or elsewhere for that matter. I say this not least since the definition of "race" is sufficiently tenuous that Dennis had as much claim to "whiteness" as any.

For definitions of "race" in the United States have been rather malleable over the years. In Ohio "racial" categories were ambiguous, at least until 1859, when the state decreed that anyone with discernible "colored" ancestry was to be deemed "colored."[1]

A precondition for "passing," it has been suggested, is a kind of " 'social and geographical mobility' " particularly as it prevails in "environments such as cities" that " 'provided anonymity to individuals, permitting them to resort to imaginative role-playing in their self-presentation.' " Cities are accustomed to diversity and the offbeat and oft times are too wrapped up in hustle and bustle to stop and ask, "is that fellow really 'white'?"[2] Dennis, born in Atlanta, raised in Washington, D.C., and a long-term resident of the suburbs of New York and the liberally minded region surrounding the Berkshires, steered well-clear of small towns in the South where his authenticity was most likely to be challenged.

There was a similar flexibility among presumed antiracist stalwarts. William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist with the flaming tongue, begrudgingly accepted intermarriage between black and white but did not endorse it with enthusiasm, while Wendell Phillips was more embracing

of such marriages and the progeny of such unions, thus reducing the necessity for "passing."[3]

Contrastingly, Duff Green, an "influential newspaper editor," was "one of the best known figures of the antebellum period" and "was personally acquainted with every President from Andrew Jackson to Abraham Lincoln." In 1835, in writing about Martin Van Buren's running mate in the following year's election—Richard M. Johnson—he highlighted this politician's "liaison with a black mistress, producing two octoroon [*sic*] daughters. When the mistress died of cholera, Johnson tried to raise the girls as whites, to the chagrin of the South. The Democratic ticket became known as the 'black ticket.'"[4] During this same antebellum era, the notorious "fire-eater," Robert Barnwell Rhett "claimed that Hannibal Hamlin, the Republican vice-presidential candidate was a mulatto. . . . [He] knew that ['white'] Southerners could not accept the idea of a mulatto presiding over their Senators in Congress."[5] This animosity toward the offspring of interracial unions had not disappeared as Dennis was born as the nineteenth century was expiring.

Of course, there was—at least historically—a certain amount of antipathy between darker and lighter skinned U.S. Negroes which did exist, grounded in numerous factors, for example, "the role [in the Slave Trade] played by the mulattos of Saint Louis, in Senegal, where there were never more than 200 Frenchmen at the time. . . . we also know about the role of certain Anglo-African mulatto slavers in Sierra Leone towards the end of the eighteenth century."[6] This factor may have impelled some to escape such tension by crossing the color line.

The radically unequal disparity in power between the major partners in inter-racial sexuality—white men and black women, with the latter more likely to be raped than "seduced"—did not erode the hostility that greeted the progeny of such unions. There was a "dread" of passing that was palpable, as it was "not only a contravention of the natural order [*sic*] but it was also a sin made all the more grave by the deception that lay at its core and by the nagging suspicion that inferiors were putting something over on their betters." At times it seemed that "mulattoes" were resented more deeply than "full-blooded" Negroes, since "it was essential to know, just by looking, who was black and who was white. Biracial people were threatening, because they challenged the clarity of that understanding" and the smooth and easy functioning of the allocation of racial privilege—and penalty; "if those who were 'really' black, according to the rules, could get away with 'pretending' to be white, where

would the erosion of racial boundaries end?" Alternatively, there was an even more frightening—to some—scenario: "was it possible that the distinction between black and white, which seemed to account for everything, actually counted for nothing?"[7] In the penultimate expression of bigoted animus and despising of the "mixed race," in the movie, *Birth of a Nation,* "Silas Lynch" a "mulatto" character, "manipulated the Senator's misguided liberal doctrines of racial equality into black Southern rule at the expense of white Southerners."[8]

This emotionally charged film was just one more example of how the trope of "passing" was reflected in popular culture. Euro-American novelists of the South, "like Thomas Dixon [who wrote the novel on which this notorious film was based], Robert Lee Durham and Thomas Nelson Page typically portrayed blacks, especially mulattoes, as 'dangerous' and 'threatening' to civilization"—and the vaunted "southern way of life." The " 'passing plot' " arises in the "narratives of the fugitive slave who sometimes deployed racial passing as a strategy by which to escape the fetters of slavery, it also resurfaces as a plot element in nineteenth-century African-American fiction." Indeed, "the recurrence of the passing plot in both black and white fiction in the United States would suggest the importance of passing as a social issue from the late nineteenth well into the twentieth century,"[9] just as the popular construction of the "mulatto monster . . . [as] virtually *an infection,*" was indicative of the disdain that pushed Lawrence Dennis across the "color line" (emphasis in original).[10]

Historicizing this phenomenon of "passing" is crucial. "Significantly," suggests the scholar, Laura Browder, "ethnic impersonators appear in clusters during critical periods in American history, such as the decades leading up to the Civil War, when slavery was being debated and it was unclear which ethnic groups were to be afforded full human status, and during [the] 1920s when laws affecting immigrants and Native Americans were changing and the Ku Klux Klan was on the rise." Symptomatic "is the 'colored' janitor Sylvester Long, who in the 1920s transformed himself into Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance. He not only authored a best-selling autobiography but also became a movie star and had his own line of running shoes. He embraced his 'Indian' identity in every aspect of his life."[11]

Dennis was born in the middle of this arc of instability, stretching from the Civil War era to the post–World War I period. In fact, "from 1895 on"—just as Dennis's infancy was commencing—the "problem" of mis-

cegenation "was for over a decade a veritable obsession" in literature. The mulatto was a "symbol of social encroachment" and represented the deathly "fear" of " 'atavism of blood' " and "wreaking vengeance for slavery."[12] Yet "rarely" did "fiction dealing with passing and miscegenation take up the particularly sensitive issue of a 'black' *man*'s passing into the white world via intermarriage with a white woman. Usually writers liked to picture the mulatto's penchant for renouncing 'social equality' through the actions of women."[13] That is, the example of Lawrence Dennis—who "passed" and married a white woman—was deemed particularly forbidding and foreboding.

At its core, the peculiar rules that governed interracial sexuality—which underlay racial definition itself—were driven materially; that is, denying the legitimacy of the progeny of the major partners in interracial sexuality, virtually gave a license for profit to a slave-master who could rape his female slaves—and produce a revenue-producing slave, that is, a " 'black woman can[not] give birth to a white child" though a " 'white woman [is] capable of giving birth to a black child.' " So "stigmatizing" the white woman in this process simultaneously helped to bolster the notion of "racial purity" while prodding her toward exclusive unions with white men.

Rights of inheritance for the "mixed" progeny of both white and black women were circumscribed generally which allowed notions of "racial purity" to merge readily with ideas of property. After slavery, this fear of property loss remained a driving force behind the prohibition of black-white marriage—and the punishment of the progeny that emerged from such a profound transgression.[14] It was ironic that Dennis—a victim of a system that penalized him in no small part because of a wish to deny him rights of inheritance of property—never challenged frontally the system of capitalism that underpinned this deprivation, though I think his advocacy of fascism and resultant pro-Berlin and pro-Rome stances were motivated in no small part because of his resentment of a nation, the United States, that allowed for such racially driven penalties.

This system also had socio-psychological consequence. James Healy, who emerged from a racial background similar to that of Dennis, had a "tendency to be censorious and at ease in judging others"; he was "waspish and even haughty" in his "view of others, perhaps a kind of over-correction for the racial ambiguity that left him and his family always open to challenge." He found it "easy to criticize anything he considered common or undignified" and "his personality was influenced as

much by his sense of social class as his racial status." He deployed his "religious standing" as a high-ranking cleric in the Roman Catholic Church, "to silence questions about his racial standing and to cross over into white America." Dennis was notorious for his frequently referring to adversaries and nonadversaries alike as "dumb," brandishing boldly and flaunting intrepidly his obvious intelligence as a shield against those who might question him on racial grounds. He was similarly proud of his Harvard and Exeter ties which likewise tended to silence questions about his racial standing. Dennis also resembled Sherwood Healy—in more ways than one. One perceptive historian has wondered about the latter "why the wider, non-Catholic community went along with his transcendence of racial categories. . . . everything we know of American attitudes about race in this period leaves us unprepared for the apparent ease with which Sherwood's complexion came not to matter. He was excused from the rules whites generally enforced on African-Americans." His "approach was breathtaking in its boldness. He did not conceal his African heritage, for that was impossible. Instead he chose to hide in plain sight. By acting as if the disabilities imposed on African-Americans did not apply to him, he forced others to respond in kind, and his life thus upsets our historical generalizations about race in the United States."[15] Something similar could be said about Dennis.

Former Kentucky politician, Mae Street Kidd, was akin to Sherwood Healy and Dennis in that she had a black mother and a white father. Born in 1904 she asserted forcefully, " 'I never made an issue of my race. I let people think or believe what they wanted to. If it was ever a problem, then it was their problem, not mine.' "[16] James Weldon Johnson's " 'ex-colored man' " declared, " 'I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race, nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead.' " Then there were those "ex-colored" men who became fervent bigots; Harriet Jacobs, for example, recalled that in her hometown among the most insidious antagonists of enslaved Africans was a " 'free colored man, who tried to pass himself off for white. . . . everybody knew he had the blood of a slave father in his veins; but for the sake of passing himself off for white, he was ready to kiss the slaveholders' feet.' "

Dennis was closer to the Johnson vision in this regard in that he abjured standing on a platform and declaiming proudly about his newly

claimed racial origins, nor did he "disclaim the black race." On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the great mass of Negroes would have done anything but suffer grievously if his "fascism with a human face" had triumphed.

The approach of Sherwood Healy—and Kidd—mirrors that of Dennis, for the latter too rather brazenly presented himself as "white," in defiance of obtaining strictures. On the other hand, this is a tad overstated for "lineage has not been the only definer of race; appearance, associations, reputation and conduct have also been read as signifiers of racial identity."[17] As one writer has observed, " 'at no time in the history of its use for human beings was the term 'race' reserved for groups based solely on their biophysical characteristics.' "[18]

I, as a dark-skinned person, on the other hand, could never be in a position to perform "whiteness," irrespective of my "associations, reputation and conduct." Performing "whiteness" successfully requires melanin deficiency, akin to what obtains in indigenous Europeans. Moreover, it is not unusual that Dennis and the Healy brothers all were conservative, for if they had not been, it is doubtful if their performance would have been accepted as credible, not least since those most likely to challenge aggressively their "racial" authenticity would be ultraconservatives presumably assuaged or, more likely disarmed, by their ideological pretensions. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, was hardly comprised of broad-minded liberals and socialists. Thus, Bishop James Healy was virulently anti-union —"that the leader of a working-class church should seem to come down on the side of bosses was incongruous," according to one view. But, from a different perspective, this was entirely consistent as a shield against forceful challenges from the right to his seizing of racial privilege,[19] for "the threat of violence constantly lurked beneath the surface of discussions and events regarding interracial sex and marriage"—and the progeny of same.[20]

In 1920s Virginia, for example, "Anglo-Saxon clubs" were organized "to prevent and punish passing"—in that inimitable fashion that the South had made infamous. In a noted short story of that era, a character learns that "her own husband is black"; feeling "defiled"—like a conservative Cuban-American woman in South Florida that discovers that her recently immigrated husband is actually an agent of the Castro regime—akin to a "victim of a deception that she likens to rape, she destroys her family. She kills her husband, but even more significantly, she kills their daughter, permitting the toddler to be consumed by fire inside [a] locked

church." When the actor, Mel Ferrer, "played the part of a passing 'white Negro' in 'Lost Boundaries,' he and members of his family became targets of antiblack prejudice by people who identified him with the characters he portrayed."[21]

The leading theorist of white supremacy, Madison Grant, "warned of the dangers of racial miscegenation, advocating law barring intermarriage and stressing the constant vigilance that Nordics must maintain to unmask mulattos passing for white."[22] Though he came to this conclusion in 1933, as Dennis was in the process of becoming better known, it is unclear if Grant had him in mind.

Of course, all Negroes too were not pleased with "race mixing" though their responses were obviously more constrained. When NAACP leader, Walter White, left his black wife for a white woman, his closest relatives acknowledged that "marrying a white woman was a stain on the family."[23]

Still, arguably, even if bigots recognized a "passer," they could pass on reacting violently, since this act of identity transformation was paying obeisance at the altar of "whiteness" itself, which could be extremely satisfying to these racial patriots. W. E. B. Du Bois once opined that the " 'intriguing and ticklish subject' of passing 'is all a pretty, silly matter of no real importance which another generation will comprehend with great difficulty.' " Maybe so but Du Bois, above all, should have recognized that the "color line" was nothing to trifle with in the United States in the twentieth century—and beyond.[24]

An overarching philosophy or way of life—preferably with origins far distant from the United States—was another way for the racially ambiguous to shield themselves from the violence and quotidian harassment that accompanied those who did not appear to be of "pure European descent." James Healy was "positioned squarely in the conservative wing of the Catholic hierarchy"; in splits within the Church he invariably aligned with the faction that "looked 'over the mountains' to Rome as the source of all authority." He was "intensely loyal to [the] Pope and the Vatican bureaucracy."[25] It was said of the extremely light-skinned Harlem Renaissance novelist, Jean Toomer, that " 'in his need to forget he was a Negro, he joined the transcendental pseudo-Hindu cult of Gurdjieff, whose psychological techniques aimed at obliterating . . . the condition of being a man.' "[26] And Dennis too looked abroad for sustenance—ideological and otherwise—in an attempt to obliterate the parlous condition that came with being deemed a "colored" man.

Was there another kind of violence, an internal violence, that was visited upon those who chose to "pass"? Perhaps—but this turned on the extent to which the person passing had internalized the idea that he was a Negro who was now discarding this identity.[27] In Dennis's instance, this did appear to be the case, as his earliest identity was that of a Negro child preacher and a globe-trotter at an early age keen enough to recognize the hatred heaped upon those who were "colored." Says a character of the novelist, Nella Larsen, " 'this hazardous business of 'passing,' this breaking away from all that was familiar and friendly to take one's chances in another environment, not entirely strange, perhaps, but certainly not entirely friendly. What, for example, one did about background, how one accounted for oneself. And how one felt when one came into contact with other Negroes. . . . you never tell anybody anything about yourself." "Passing" could be "hazardous, risky and potentially dangerous to one's health," like being a double-agent behind enemy lines whose identity could be uncovered. Then, there's the "loneliness, since the ties to one's former friends by necessity have been severed."[28]

One commentator has observed that " 'passing for white inflicts psychological trauma on those who try it because it requires them to erect a wall between those who they are and could be as persons and [who] they are or try to be amid white society.' " Maybe, maybe not. Dennis's postchildhood identity, for example, allowed him to convert the notoriety he had enjoyed as a youthful preacher into that of an ultraconservative. He continued in the spotlight, continued to be the recipient of hosannas from the adoring, etc. Yes, he had left behind family—indeed, his Negro mother; however, since the exact reasons for this fateful decision remain mysterious, it is unclear what depth of psychological trauma he suffered.

Though the *subjective* reasons for Dennis's decision to "pass" remain shrouded in mystery, the *objective* situation that then obtained makes it easier to comprehend why he might leave his former life behind. Again, this radical transformation occurred as the nation itself was undergoing profound change. There was a sharp change between 1890 and 1930—precisely the period when Dennis was entering maturity—in the federal government's classifications (and those of many state governments) of "African-Americans" of cognizable "white" ancestry. This auspicious four-decade era saw the mandated liquidation of the category of "mulatto" in the nation's racialist and nationalist discourse. This period also witnessed a conspicuous acceleration in the quantity and intensity of

conversations about "racial mixing" and miscegenation, along with a marked rise in lynching as a result of violations of racial codes. Thus, in Louisiana in 1808, the Civil Code acknowledged the mulatto in the delineation of a three-tiered system racially, but a century later, this middling position had been annihilated, as the lighter-skinned were frog-marched into the netherworld of the Negro. The racial segregation that was then ossifying required "two stable, discrete racial categories and definitions of 'Black' and 'mulatto' " with a final abandonment of the latter altogether by 1930. Thus, the U.S. Census in 1890 included categories for "mulatto . . . quadroon . . . octoroon," etc. but not in 1930.[29]

This was not a smooth process. In 1894, the famed legal scholar, John Wigmore, concluded that Japanese were " 'white.' " In 1909, a court ruled that both Syrians and Armenians could be admitted into the hallowed halls of "whiteness." Asian Indians were so accorded this privileged status near this same time—before the decision was reversed on appeal. One judge veritably threw up his hands and asked plaintively, " 'what is white?' "[30]

A century earlier another jurist concluded that the way to adjudge "whiteness" was not via skin color but by hair texture since dark skin, he thought, could disappear via miscegenation but a " 'wooly head of hair . . . disappears the last of all.' "[31] "An ostensibly cultured southern man," once told the fair-skinned NAACP leader, Walter White, "that he could tell if a Negro was trying to pass simply by looking at his fingernails" and "examining White's, the man told him that unlike his, blacks' fingernails had pink crescents at the cuticles.' "[32]

Whatever the case, it was evident that a society bent on pursuing the rigidity of bipolar racial categories had difficulty grappling with the likes of a Lawrence Dennis. The terms that had once been used to describe him —" 'mulattoes, quadroons, musters, mustafinas, cabres, griffies, zambis, quatravis, tresalvis, coyotes, saltaras, albarassadores, cambusos' "—were fading into desuetude, in a kind of symbolic annihilation of the flesh and blood persons these terms once described. Those who had been viewed as "neither black nor white" were being forced to choose—and given only one option: the former.[33] But rather than fading into oblivion or enduring a forced march into a purgatory of "blackness," Dennis "flipped the script" on the racial theorists, going to the head of the pack as he extended the logic of their theoretical maundering by becoming the "brain" behind U.S. fascism.

Dennis was not alone—that is, in terms of ambling across the "color line." Walter White, the NAACP leader who could have "passed" himself and sometimes did to get scoops about lynch mobs, announced in 1947 that " 'every year approximately 12,000 white-skinned Negroes disappear—people whose absence cannot be explained by death or emigration. . . . men and women who have decided that they will be happier and more successful if they flee from the proscription and humiliation which the American color line imposes on them.' "[34] There is good reason to question White's figures[35] but fewer reasons to quarrel with his overall sentiments. In fleeing from the illogic of Jim Crow, Lawrence Dennis—like hundreds, perhaps thousands of others—implicitly acknowledged that he felt that "racial" egalitarianism was not on the immediate agenda of the nation of his birth. Interestingly, Dennis chose to retain an article that pondered, "Who is a Negro?," as it claimed that "2,000,000 Negroes have crossed the color line," an "excess" of whom were "mulatto females," though—perhaps not discomfiting—was that "Negroes who attempt to pass are seldom exposed by other Negroes."[36] Thus, Dennis turned his back on his immediate family as he sought to change the conversation from "race" to "class" or elite rule by those with acute intelligence such as himself. Once that Rubicon was crossed, it was a comparatively short journey to fascism.

"Isolationism" is not an inappropriate characterization of Dennis's ideology but this term also, ironically, points to his social position. For because of the desire to remain tight-lipped about his ancestry, he kept himself isolated socially and mum about his early life, not least with his immediate family. His daughter, Emily, while a student at Vassar had reason to believe that he might be "passing" and, thus, did research on her father and confronted him with the results. Dennis merely smiled enigmatically and refused to address the matter. She never met any of his family.

This was the essence of the "mystery" that was Dennis, though it did seem that his identity as a "Negro" colored his political beliefs, making it difficult to find a true home among what was thought to be his natural home—that is, the U.S. right wing. For not only did he often express acerbic critiques of white supremacy, particularly as European colonialism began to crumble in the 1950s, but he also expressed admiration for politicians like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Ralph Bunche, who were not exactly conservative heroes. But, like Dennis, they were light-skinned

"Negroes" and, perhaps, represented a road not taken by him, that is, a closer identification with the ancestry represented by his mother.

After World War II, the Republican Right moved away from the isolationism that Dennis had come to characterize, isolating him further, but also moved to embrace religion. Yet after his stint as a child preacher, Dennis moved in the opposite direction, becoming an agnostic, according to his daughter, Emily. He did occasionally visit a Congregationalist Church where he lustily sang basso profundo, but he was far from being religious.

But the Republican Right moved closer to his racial views, though by that time he was politically and socially isolated, a continuing prisoner of the once rising ideology of fascism. He was a man of utter seriousness, constantly reading and monitoring news broadcasts on the radio but he was also a deft chess player and checkers' player and was sufficiently adept at bridge that he wrote regularly about the subject. He was hesitant to open up about his life but he loved to entertain, often hosting house guests, and enjoyed French food.[37]

Lawrence Dennis, man of mystery, was also a man of contradiction. Yet more than ideology, what seemed to define him was identity. That is, being defined as a "Negro" in a nation where this group was treated like a skunk at a garden party, probably helped to push him to cross the color line to "whiteness." Yet he continued to encounter discrimination, which was embittering and probably drove him toward more extreme ideological stances. He had difficulties in the U.S. military, in the State Department, and on Wall Street, before finding his niche as an isolated—and isolationist—publisher of a newsletter and lecturer, both isolating activities, where he did not have to encounter as much day-to-day questioning about his ancestry and, possibly, discrimination. His searing experiences as an individual drove him toward sympathies for those in Europe who were among the most determined foes of his homeland and threatened to supplant then obtaining U.S. elites with those that would include himself. "Passing" had driven him into a "racial" closet, which then impelled him toward the radical remedy that was "fascism," which in turn drove him into another kind of closet, that is, the isolation he suffered as a result of his political choices.

"Passing" was a form of "identity politics," but not in the dismissive way this phrase is often deployed as a shorthand for a kind of navel-gazing and avoidance of "real" politics. For the example of Dennis suggests

that at a certain level "identity" politics and "real" politics merge almost seamlessly, that is, there is a connection between "passing" and fascism. At least one imagines that Dennis's example suggests this confluence, but the shroud draped over his life still leaves more than an iota of uncertainty about this—which is just one more aspect of the mystery that is Lawrence Dennis.

In the spring of 1946 Dennis's career was in sharp decline. By then he had endured a highly publicized trial that targeted his beliefs and his actions on behalf of fascism. The term "totalitarian" was arising which merged the old enemy in Berlin with the new one in Moscow and it had been affixed to Dennis, which meant his days of hobnobbing with elites were ebbing.

It was at this moment that the historically black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier,* addressed his predicament at some length. "Negroes turn up in the queerest places," mused their columnist, Horace Cayton; "you can never tell whether some people are light complexioned Negroes or dark complexioned whites. Just the past week or so it was discovered that Lawrence Dennis, America's number one fascist intellectual, is a Negro." It seemed that Dennis was now being "outed," so as to be better discarded, now that his ideology was viewed with increasing distaste in the wake of a brutal and bloody war against European fascism.

Yet the columnist had other issues to grapple with beyond this one. "There is a famous store in Chicago noted for its anti-Negro attitudes," he said. "Curiously enough more Negro girls have worked at that store passing for white than any other in the city." This was akin to the United States itself, a nation still grounded in white supremacy, which contained a "Negro" as the embodiment of fascism. "Get this straight," Cayton insisted, "Negroes can arrive at a state of biological whiteness where no one can tell them even though there is a myth that some sort of extra-sensory mechanism denied to the rest of the population" allows African-Americans to do so. Still, as "George Schuyler pointed out last week, lots of people have known" that Dennis was a Negro; "for a long time," this was known "but this is the first time it was printed," which was curious.

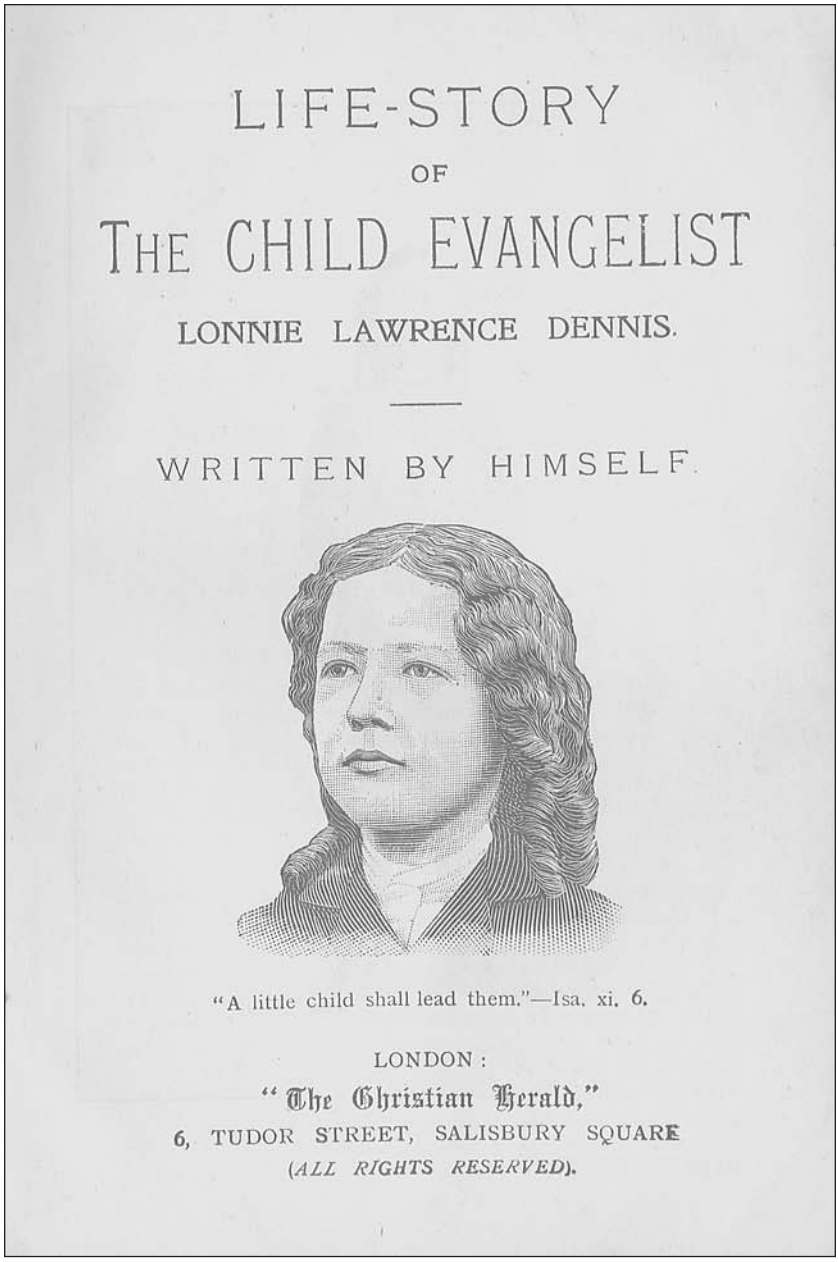
"I remember," Cayton recalled, "when a reporter for a large national magazine started doing a story on Dennis. After tracing down the man's record he came to the conclusion that he was a Negro and reported it to his publication, which promptly killed the story."

But during Dennis's heyday he was viewed as an articulate spokesman of an ideology—fascism—that appeared as if it might be the "wave of the future," but by 1946 this was no longer the case. So "now it's out in the open," that is, Dennis's racial heritage, "and even Walter Winchell had something to say about it on his Sunday evening broadcast a couple of weeks ago."

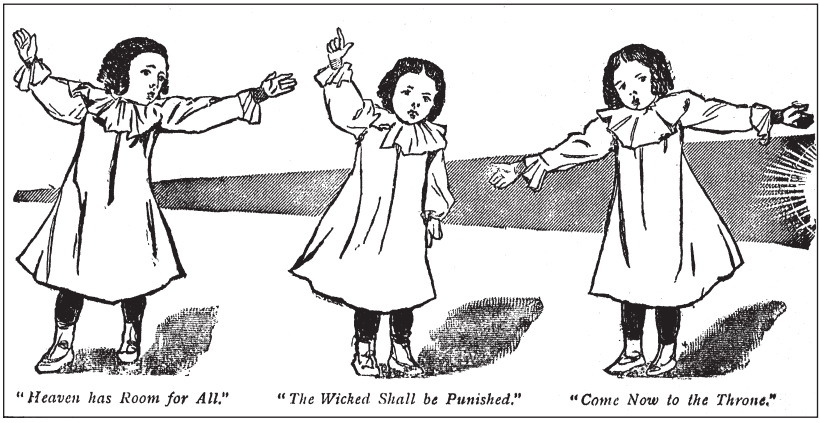
Yes, it was striking that now after undergoing the ignominy of being tried in court, Dennis now had to endure what seemed to be a larger disgrace—being "outed" as a Negro. Cayton, however, was "satisfied to get a deep belly laugh from the discomfort of our State Department and the two Wall Street banking firms who have unwittingly been on terms of social equality with a light complexioned brother in black." Their disgrace was Cayton's source of perverse humor.

But Cayton had another point to make. In words eerily reminiscent of a Communist bragging about how one of the comrades had infiltrated elite circles, figuratively wagging his finger in triumph the columnist reminded White America that "they can never be sure whom they're talking to and that Negroes turn up in the most unexpected places. These Negroes who pass can no more be detected by their ideology than they can by the fact that they have or have not half moons in their finger nails." But White America were not the only ones who could learn from this episode. For "Negroes should learn Americans and especially the wealthy and powerful are not shocked or ashamed because they associated with one who is alleged to be a native Fascist, but are humiliated to know that a so-called Negro has been in their midst."

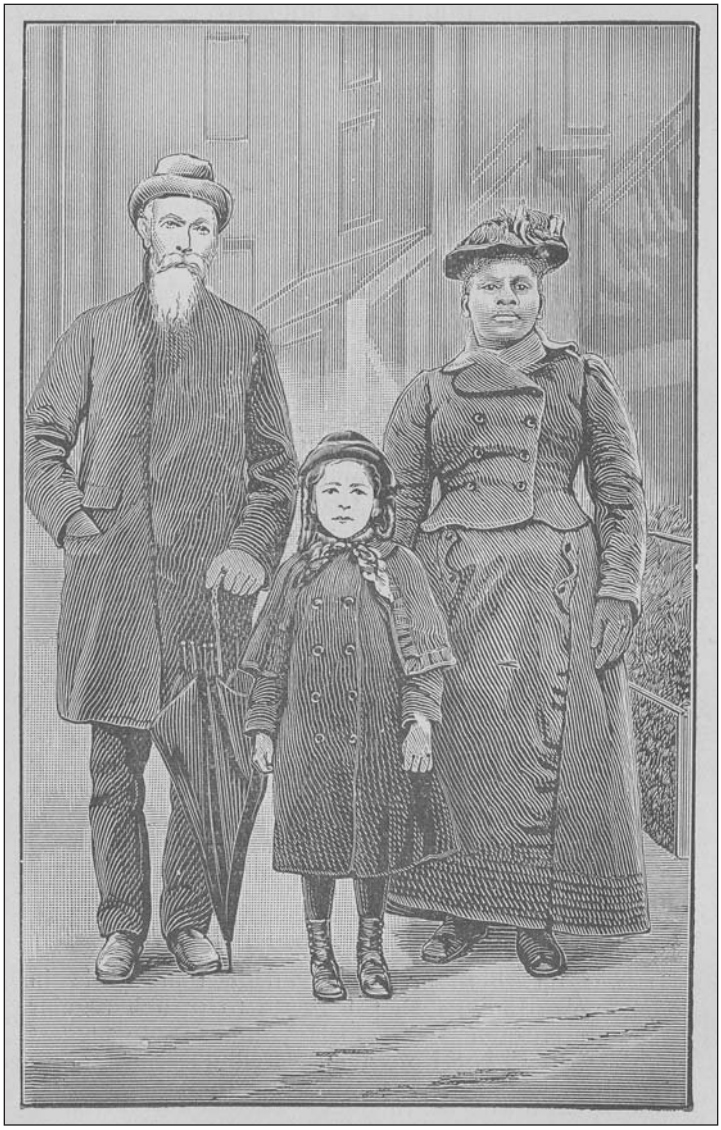
"Of course," Cayton added wisely, "it's really stupid to call Dennis a Negro because he has a few drops of colored blood." But it would take a stronger and more nuanced adjective besides "stupid" to describe the racial nightmare that encouraged passing, not to mention the confluence of fascism and passing that drove Lawrence Dennis's life.[38]



Lawrence Dennis was a child evangelist of no small influence, as he toured the world rousing audiences. Courtesy of the Duke University Library.



As he grew older, Dennis moved away from his engagement with Christianity toward decidedly more secular beliefs. Courtesy of the Duke University Library.



Lawrence Dennis and his parents: Actually, who Dennis's father was remains unclear. However, his mother was definitely African-American, which pursuant to traditional U.S. custom means that he was also: this meant that for most of his life he was "passing" for white. Courtesy of the Duke University Library.

1

Passing Fancy?

The United States was entering a brave new world of imperialism in January 1899, as it was dispensing with the tottering Spanish empire and taking on its mantle, including rule of "colored" peoples from Puerto Rico to the Philippines. Meanwhile, in midtown Manhattan, a surging, swaying noisy crowd fought to enter Mount Olivet Colored Baptist Church on West 52nd Street, to listen not to a learned exposition of the nation's newest responsibilities but to hear the " 'unlanguaged prattling' " of a child, one Lawrence Dennis. For two whole hours before the doors opened, which was late in the afternoon, the increasingly unruly crowd besieged this house of worship, as if it were a medieval fortified castle. A police officer on hand sought vainly to restore order, but the impatient crowd pounded on the doors with sticks and fists begging, beseeching, imploring—demanding admittance immediately, if not sooner. A stout Negro man peeped out a side door and cracked it open, then sought to explain that the church was already filled to the rafters and could hold no more. But this crowd refused to be denied. They pressed open the door and in a blink of an eye the body of the church was packed even fuller with a mass of humanity so compact that a child—even the child they had come to hear—could not have found standing or even sitting room anywhere in this edifice.

Yet more and more continued to try to fight their way inside and soon a spirited fracas had erupted in response. Women screamed. Men vociferated loudly. Then, at the conclusion of what appeared to be the final hymn, a tiny child in a white frock and black stockings, with a curl tied with a pink ribbon hanging on each side of his near white face appeared upon the platform—and the crowd erupted in even wilder tones. The pastor in introducing this child preacher, declared, " 'he is uneducated and cannot read,' " but this did not deter the crowd—and may have endeared them—since many of them, as a result of enslavement, then a brutally im-

posed racial segregation, were likewise deprived. What had brought this crowd out in droves was not his lettered education, in any case, but the belief that he was inspired divinely. Little Lawrence Dennis gazed calmly at the audience for a moment, then—like a tiny emperor—clapped his hands peremptorily for silence and not being obeyed at once, stomped his small foot imperiously. The crowd quieted down, Dennis began to preach, then began to answer a blizzard of questions about religion and faith that a Doctor of Divinity would have had difficulty in responding to. According to the reporter present, Dennis was able to answer "only set questions." But what no doubt moved the audience and impelled them to risk life and limb to jam a building in a manner that presented a clear and present hazard was Dennis's performance. He became excited almost to the point of hysteria and screamed. He spoke in disjointed sentences, as if possessed by a higher spirit and impressed one and all as being tremendously precocious. Already displaying the disdain for the masses that later during his adulthood caused him to dismiss legions as being simply "dumb," he referred to those assembled as "'goats'" and "'hellhounds.'" The crowd, accustomed to an even worse abuse, was nonplussed. There was a brisk trade in photographs of this child bidding for an early sainthood, selling for a more than meager 25 cents each. In fact, the rush for the photographs was so great and the struggle for them so fierce that the sale had to be stopped, lest a riot erupt. His dark-skinned mother remained displeased, however. She criticized the audience sharply for not giving enough donations.[1]

At this stage in his young life, Lawrence Dennis was already a kind of celebrity. Certainly there were few his age—of any color—who had entire books devoted to informing an avid public about their lives. In his first book, written as a young boy, Dennis acknowledged that "my father's ancestors were French and Indian. My mother's ancestors were African and Indian." If this admission had been uncovered in the 1930s or 1940s during the height of Dennis's notoriety, it could have destabilized his career since according to the unique race rules of the nation, this revelation of African ancestry submerged all else—this meant that Dennis was a U.S. Negro. But back then the glib and garrulous Dennis was talking openly about his life. "As a baby," he said, "I was red-headed. Unlike most babies, I did not care to be rocked to sleep. . . . I walked and talked fairly well when nine months old," he conceded with pride and later alleged that he "could remember some things that happened when I was only nine months old." He was "particularly fond" of his father, who

—he said—was a "building contractor by trade." Dennis's "Christian experience began very early," since both his "father and mother were devout Christians." This may account for the fact that he was "certain" that "God had called" him to "preach" while he "was still a mere baby." Then he "would arrange" his "dolls on chairs, and standing up in front of them, would preach to them."[2]

Dennis spoke for the first time in public when he was 47 months old, as Thanksgiving loomed in 1897.[3] Quickly the highly articulate child who could quote passages from the Bible became exceedingly popular and soon was touring, preaching mostly in "coloured" churches, though whites would also show up. His father, according to the young Dennis, traveled with him "until his death in 1902." The press intimated that Dennis was "gifted with some such seemingly supernatural power as Blind Tom," the musical sensation of the nineteenth century and a precursor of today's Stevie Wonder. This was due in no small part to the fact that he would be subjected to questioning by theology students at these outings and invariably would pass with distinction.

During one memorable occasion in Boston he was "invited by the Spiritualists to hold a meeting in one of their principal halls. They believed I was controlled by the spirit of some great prophet," said Dennis, immodest even then. "I celebrated my seventh birthday while in Boston"—this was in 1900 apparently—"and it was there that I first read my Bible. I had never gone to school a day and had never been taught by anyone. I simply picked up my knowledge of letters little by little, through the power of the Lord," said Dennis, who as an adult rarely evinced interest in religion. "Lonnie," said his mother, calling him by the name by which he was then known, " 'has never been to school, and I have never given him any instruction of any kind. But when he was six years old he was able to read, and now can read and write as well as anybody.' "

But, after all, Dennis was still a *Negro* child preacher and, thus, was exposed to indignities at an early age that his peers may have been able to avoid. While touring in Utah, Dennis said, "I had been informed by a Mormon that no coloured person would be allowed to go through the Mormon Temple—not even if he were a Mormon. He said this was because the black angels fought with Lucifer against heaven. I did not hesitate to so declare publicly and privately," said the obviously irked and antiracist Dennis, "that if that was their belief it was not of God, for 'God is no respecter of persons.' " Evidently his answer impressed, for while in this conservative western state, said Dennis, "I received an invitation

from the Governor of Utah to come and see him at the capital. We did so" —that is, Dennis and his mother who accompanied him on his tours— "and had a very pleasant visit."

This was a pleasant conclusion to an unfortunate incident but the question of "racial" difference was drummed into Dennis's young brain at an early age—and he could see that professions of religiosity did not necessarily bar such occurrences.

At the age of 10, he departed New York for Europe. On board was another celebrity, he recalled. "Buffalo Bill had 80 mustang ponies and 800 head of cattle on our boat, and I went down in the hold to see them. I also went into the stoking room and saw the firemen cursing and swearing and working like slaves"—a condition that his mother's family could have informed him about in depth. Dennis and his mother—who was as dark in visage as he was light—visited Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Jerusalem, and Egypt and were celebrated at every turn, a heady experience for a child. But somehow interested onlookers could not avoid drawing attention to one branch of his color. He was a " 'Zambo,' " said one paper that intrigued Dennis sufficiently to include in his book, " 'the child of a Negro and Red Indian. His race has furnished some of the ablest statesmen and soldiers to the Central American republics. Several Presidents of Nicaragua and Guatemala had been Zambos.' "

Dennis "supposed that I must have addressed at least 4000 audiences and a million [and] a quarter of people in the United States and Canada alone and perhaps not less than 5000 people professed conversion [to Christianity] in our meetings."[4]

Yet Dennis had to return to the United States at some point and his home was Atlanta, which was no prize—particularly for one not of "pure European descent." Shortly before he was born Jim Crow was legalized in the state of Georgia and his hometown, Atlanta. Perhaps not coincidentally a spate of racist lynchings erupted in this Deep South state, to the point where it was ranked with Mississippi as a leader in this gruesome category. Also—not coincidentally—it was during this era that the "successes of such Afro-Americans as W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Walter White who were of much lighter hue, contributed significantly to the use of bleaches and hair straighteners [*sic*] by heavily pigmented and curly haired blacks."[5] It was as if those of African descent were seeking to eradicate the markers—skin color and hair texture—that marked them indelibly for punishment and penalty.

This Grand Guignol of bias exploded decisively in 1906 during the fabled "riot"—racist pogrom is a more accurate term—that exploded in the city that was to pride itself later on being "too busy to hate."[6] At this point Lawrence Dennis was 13 years old and a globe-trotter who had tasted a bit of what the world had to offer. Defined as a "Negro" it was no doubt discomfiting for him to hear the words of his contemporary, William Benjamin Smith, who "pondered what the South stood for and affirmed, 'the answer is simple: she stands for *blood,* for the *continuous germ plasma of the Caucasian race*' " (emphasis in original). Such full-throated expressions of white supremacy helped to fuel massacres of Negroes in Atlanta. In response one Negro leader " 'advised the race to go to Africa. The Atlanta trouble is the greatest proof of the wisdom and judgment of my project' "—African emigration—" 'than anything. In the name of all that is good and righteous,' " thundered Bishop [Henry] Turner, " 'what do you see in this country for the black man but constant trouble?' " His words were echoed by highly placed white leaders who agreed that deportation was " 'the only solution.' "[7] But there were some Negroes—like Dennis—who chose instead not to migrate abroad but to migrate across the color line.

By 1908, in Jim Crow Georgia, Negroes were deprived of the right to vote in most elections by dint of the "white primary" and the state constitution. They could vote on bond issues only if they paid their poll taxes —which were inherently discriminatory. A price had to be paid for being part of the Negro community.[8]

As Dennis gained prominence as the "brain" behind U.S. fascism—as tensions between Berlin and Washington intensified—the FBI chose to investigate his background. They arrived at various conclusions.

According to one report, he was the "illegitimate son of Sallie Montgomery, adopted by Green Dennis" in October 1896. The latter was a mechanic who died in late 1901, leaving his estate to Cornelia Green, his spouse, and Lawrence Dennis, his adopted son, whose name originally was Lawrence Montgomery. Green Dennis was born in 1841 in the slave state that was Georgia—his "color" was "mixed."[9] Apparently, Sallie Montgomery was the sister of Cornelia Green. The mother of the two was described as being of a "very bright" complexion, and their father was not known to the agency. An early FBI report observed that Dennis's father was "not known," though later the agency explored "rumors" that

"Green Dennis is actual father of subject," that is, he had impregnated his sister-in-law. Sallie Montgomery died in May 1934—at this juncture, Lawrence Dennis already was established as rising star of the right. She was described then as a "widow" who had done "laundry work"; her "mother's maiden name" was "Amanda Williams." Her "cause of death" was "cardiovascular heart disease." But the FBI gumshoe in charge of this investigation concluded that the "description" of her "did not appear to fit the description" of the "mother" of Lawrence Dennis—she "did not appear to be old enough to fit the description," he said—so he "deemed it inadvisable to continue the investigation along these lines."

Though it never revealed publicly its thorough investigation of Dennis's ancestry, it is remarkable how color-obsessed the agency was at this point. They interviewed those who had known Dennis in Atlanta, including one person who collected rents for the Green Dennis estate during the first decade of the twentieth century. M. L. Thrower advised that Cornelia Green could be easily described as a mulatto and that Green Dennis was a brownish color though he would not describe him as being either yellow or black. Fayette Landrum, who delivered mail to the Green Dennis household, suggested that the latter was not only Lawrence Dennis's adoptive father but actual father. He added that Sallie Montgomery had lived in this household for a lengthy period, along with her own mother, and that the two and Cornelia Dennis—though all being defined as Negroes—were rather light-skinned. He said Sallie Montgomery's mother was "very fair" and that Sallie too had a similar complexion and that Cornelia was slightly darker in complexion. He said that he was nearly certain that Sallie and Cornelia were related. He also alleged that Green Dennis was a very good carpenter and that shortly after he adopted Lawrence Dennis, he retired and spent a greater portion of his time teaching the scriptures to his son. A witness who chose not to be identified "stated that [Lawrence Dennis] was an illegitimate child" with a "bright complexion and straight black hair" and that "in their travels Green Dennis had been able to pass for a white person." She stated further that the Dennis family belonged to the "Old Wheat Street Baptist Church." Another unidentified witness recalled Lawrence Dennis as having "olive skin, characterizing him as a Greek" in looks. Yet another unidentified witness declared that Dennis's father "was supposed to have been a white man," not Green Dennis, and that "Lawrence's mother Sallie could not very well keep him since he was so light-skinned, it being apparent that his father was not a colored man," an allegation that could mortally

threaten both mother and son—hence, the apparent ruse of moving into the Dennis household and subsequent adoption.[10]

The FBI also spoke at length with Sally McDuffie—"colored"—who stated "that many years ago she had lived for about one year in the Dennis home in [the] 1800 block of Vernon Street" in Washington, D.C. Supposedly she "possessed an excellent memory." "She recalled that Lawrence Dennis knew Cornelia Dennis as his mother [but] that in reality she was his aunt. Lawrence was the son," it was said, "of Cornelia's niece Sallie whose last name Mrs. McDuffie was unable to recall. She understood that Lawrence had been the illegitimate son of Sallie and that his father was supposed to have been a white man." Mrs. McDuffie thought that Lawrence Dennis's aunt and uncle "took [him] as a small baby and reared him as their own son. She explained that Lawrence could easily pass as the son of Cornelia and Green inasmuch as Green himself was a very light-skinned Negro. Mrs. McDuffie was of the opinion that Lawrence's mother Sallie could not very well keep him since he was so light-skinned, it being apparent that his father was not a colored man." Though others knew him as "Lonnie," she knew him as "Larney." Cornelia Dennis belonged to Lincoln Temple in Washington, D.C., "but Lawrence belonged to the Metropolitan AME church." When Green Dennis died, it was reported, "a white man became Lawrence's manager" and, presumably, was largely responsible for his globe-trotting.[11]

The erosion of memory and fact that comes with time makes it difficult to make definitive declarations about the true ancestry of Dennis, though it is evident that his mother was probably a Negro—and he chose not to be so defined. One has to be cautious, however, in accepting these FBI reports as holy gospel not least since they are internally inconsistent. Thus, contrary to the notion above about the "mother" of Dennis, "Sallie Montgomery" passing away in 1934, a 1946 agency report from Chicago observed that "Sallie Smith, who advised that she was the mother of Lawrence Dennis" was "recently released from the State Hospital at Manteno, Illinois, a hospital for the insane, in April 1946, and that she had been incarcerated there for approximately four years as an alcoholic. . . . her full name is Sallie Montgomery Smith . . . born on May 12, 1870 in Athens, Georgia. She is presently at an Old Folks Home for the aged and crippled at 4647 Calumet Avenue. This home is in the Negro district but Mrs. Smith appears to be of mixed white and Negro blood. Mrs. Smith stated that her grandfather was English and that his name was Captain Montgomery of Athens, Georgia, who she claimed to have been

an officer in the Civil War. She said that her father, a white man, was Scotch-Irish." She also claimed that "the father of Lawrence Dennis is W. C. Richards, a prominent business man of Atlanta" and "at the age of 22 months he [Lawrence Dennis] was taken from her by her sister and given to her uncle and aunt, Mr. [and] Mrs. Dennis. Mr. Dennis died while Lawrence was quite young." She also claimed that "she has been receiving money from Dennis through her sister but that Dennis does not visit her."[12]

Dennis was characteristically guarded when queried about his peculiar family background. Interviewed in 1967, he acknowledged that "my father died after McKinley was shot"; though he did not note his role as a child evangelist—which might have tipped off the unwary as to his actual roots—he did observe that "my mother had little income, not much; but she decided to go to Europe and travel around. She took me over there at the age of ten in 1904. We went to Europe and we stayed in Europe from 1904 to 1908, four years." This is not unlikely and sheds light, perhaps, on why he may have become so hostile to the United States, where despite his hue he was treated like a Negro, as opposed to a number of European nations where such distinctions were not as resonant.

"We traveled around," he continued. "My mother had tutors to tutor me a little. I didn't go to school but I learned French and a little German, and I spent time in England—a good deal of it. It was an important influence in my life because when we came back to America in 1908 I had a speaking knowledge of French and German. . . . I was very much of a cosmopolitan," he added tellingly. Teasing out that striking noun, "cosmopolitan," it appears that Dennis was seeking to transcend typical U.S. boundaries at this juncture, to—in fact—be transracial which made a certain amount of sense in a nation where "race" was such a mark of opprobrium. But how could he do so while tied to the apron strings of a dark-skinned mother?

"I was never brought up in any one American community," he added. "My mother wanted to make a minister of me," he confessed, hinting at his early evangelical career, "and I spoke in churches; but [in] 1913 when I was going on 20 I decided I had to go to college, so I sort of broke with my mother and I applied to go to Exeter. . . . I got my Exeter degree in 1913. Before that I had never been to college; I had never been to school; I had no formal schooling."

Dennis also proclaimed, "I had no relationship with my father," a statement that was true in a sense if he were referring to his alleged bio-

logical parent. "He died when I was seven or eight years old," he said, referring apparently to Green Dennis. "After my mother came back from Europe I had very little relation with her," he stated without amplification, thus leaving unclear why this was the case. "She had a house in Washington and I would stay there when I went to Washington. But we had no relation," he emphasized. This rupture continued during his years at Harvard where he "studied international law and diplomacy and political science" and "got good marks." "I was not a joiner," he said, signaling a kind of loner status that was to characterize his subsequent life and that may have been driven by a desire to keep his distance from those who may have wanted to query him about his ancestry. Furthermore, his "professors didn't take any great interest" in him, perhaps in earnest of their own uneasiness about his bloodlines. He "voted" for the "first time" while in Cambridge. "I vote[d] for Woodrow Wilson" though he "didn't have any very strong views"; he "liked Wilson. I respected him."[13]

I surmise that as he was growing to adulthood and after seeing something of a wider world, Dennis recognized that his life chances would be unalterably circumscribed as long as he was defined as a Negro, despite his fluency in languages, his raw intelligence, his ability to persuade audiences —which he had been doing since he was 47 months old—and all the rest. So he abandoned his mother and "blackness" itself for "whiteness."

A lingering question is why the FBI was so intrigued by Dennis's bloodlines. In fact, they seemed to be more interested in this subject than in his possible connections to Rome and Berlin. But the government had a ready reply for such pointed queries. Fletcher Warren of the U.S. State Department felt this "question of colored blood . . . warrants a thorough checking . . . inasmuch as if he [Dennis] is an agent of a foreign country, the motive might well be that Dennis as a Negro felt that an injustice has been done to him and has sold out."[14] In other words, it was recognized in Washington that racism came at the cost of possible endangerment to national security, and it was precisely this perilous confluence that led to the easing of the more egregious aspects of white supremacy.

Another question that arises inexorably from the FBI's questioning of Dennis's racial bona fides is that—ironically—his fate rested in the hands of the community he presumably had left behind: Negroes. For in seeking to trace his ancestry, the agency inevitably had to visit the neighborhoods in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., where Dennis had grown to maturity. Interestingly, despite his notoriety, a number of Negroes refused to

divulge what they knew about him, as if they were refusing to "squeal" or "snitch" on the whereabouts of a runaway slave. It was in early March 1941 that the FBI knocked on the door of "Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas, colored, mother of Mrs. Birdie Anthony, who was previously contacted" but they found her "unable to recall any additional information relative to [Dennis]. . . . Mrs. Thomas was even reluctant even to admit that she recalled them at all," though she was "interviewed by the writer under the pretext" of his "being an attorney interested in tracing title to a piece of property formerly owned by the ancestors of one Lawrence Dennis." The agent bumped into another brick wall when they interviewed—or attempted to interview—"Elizabeth McDuffie, colored, who is employed at the White House"; she "merely had a vague recollection of a young colored boy named [Dennis]." She had gaping gaps in her memory.[15]

The FBI was passed along from one tight-lipped witness to another, with one master of the taciturn saying that she was unable to talk since she was weighed down with "influenza and was not in a condition to talk to anybody." Mrs. Elmira Mitchell "colored" of "1742 T Street NW stated that she was mourning the death of her husband and did not care to talk to anybody. . . . she appeared to be laboring under considerable mental strain or anguish and was uncooperative in her attitude."[16] With such reluctance and lapses in recollection and Dennis's own reticence, he was able to cross successfully the mine-strewn Maginot Line of color and become an integral part of the "ruling race." In that sense, "passing" has to be seen as not exclusively a "race" phenomenon, as class too is inexorably enmeshed in this process.

On 17 September 1913, Lawrence Dennis entered the elite Phillips Exeter Academy in posh New England, a long way actually and metaphorically from the hell-hole that was Jim Crow Atlanta. He spent two fruitful years there though his grades were hardly excellent. Strikingly, he did receive an A in German, an A in Latin, and an A in "Bible"; otherwise, his grades were average. He was part of the "Academy Debating Team" and won a prize for debating. Appearing in the school yearbook in high collar, suit, and tie, he was described as one who " 'could distinguish and divide a hair 'twixt south and southwest side' "—that is, Dennis was comfortable with ambiguity, not least "racial" ambiguity.[17]

He performed "whiteness" well and, quite appropriately, received fine notices as well for his performance in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. For this play itself is a telling commentary on Dennis himself, insofar as it is the

bard's version of three-card monte: "what you see is never what you get. What seems on the surface, a panegyric to the victor of the battle of Agincourt is, to the ironies of its structure and the antithesis of its speech, a running commentary on the hypocrisy of political personality." Dissimulation is the name of Henry V's game, his real self is impossible to locate.[18] The same could be said of Dennis.

It is hard to say, however, if Dennis was accepted as "white" at Exeter. Interviewed in May 1940 when the FBI was hot on his trail, Mrs. M. L. Fields of 52 High Street in Exeter, New Hampshire, spoke of the time when she was renting rooms to students at the nearby Academy. She told the inquiring FBI agent that "in 1913 and 1914 at the request of the Academy she had rented rooms to colored students and that she had all of the colored students in the school," in her abode, "in addition to two or three white boys. She was, therefore, unable to positively state whether subject [Dennis] was colored or not, but was rather of the opinion that he was, in view of the fact that all of the colored boys at Exeter were then living at her house."[19]

Contemporaneous accounts corroborate the point that the authenticity of Dennis's "whiteness" was not unchallenged. When Dennis applied to Harvard, J. S. Ford of Exeter told the university that this budding student was "in respect of ability and accomplishment, what we call a *B* man. He is a mature, rather earnest and not uninteresting fellow. . . . he is interested in debating and excels at it, has a ready flow of words, and may develop thought to accompany them. I feel quite uncertain as to how far he was advance[d], but shall be glad if he has his opportunity." Not a bad evaluation, though terming him a "*B* man" was rife with ambiguities. Yet Mr. Ford went on to add unsolicited that, "I suspect" that Dennis has "some foreign blood."[20]

In other words, those who had suspicions about Dennis's pedigree, were not limited to suspecting that he was at the bottom of the ladder of descent: a Negro. Perhaps, it was thought, he was Greek or Portuguese or Lebanese or Maltese—not exactly the apex of elite lineage but not part of that dreaded group who, not so long ago, had been human merchandise.

In any event, Dennis—"foreign blood" and all—was admitted to Harvard. He had no hidden financial angel, however, and inquired pointedly, "whether or not I may receive Price Greenleaf aid if I enter Harvard College."[21] Compelled to disgorge details about the family he had left behind, the young Dennis declared that his "mother's maiden name" was

"Cornelia Walker" and his father was listed as deceased and a "contractor." Estimated income of the family was a paltry $600 per year—some of his classmates no doubt spent more than that annually on clothes alone. He also averred that his mother—along with "earnings during [the] summer"—would be a further source for tuition and fees. Then he was looking toward law as an occupation and was sufficiently impecunious to acknowledge, "if I do not receive a scholarship award for my second year, I shall, most probably have to quit college at mid year 1917." His mother—or one who purported to be his mother—signed this application.[22]

Dennis's grades at Harvard were as mixed as those at Exeter. His German grade fell to B, his grade in French was the same, though he was fluent in the language. His "concentration" changed from "Economics to Government"[23] and he found himself embroiled in a minor row after it was found that he had offered "notes of the weekly reading for sale." The questioning Harvard official was displeased though he added encouragingly that "Dennis is one of the best students in Government 1 and I have no doubt that he regarded the sale of printed notes as quite allowable. . . . my own opinion is that we ought to be not too hard on the boy."[24]

But like many young men of that era, Dennis was moved by the call to contribute to the "war to end all wars." In the middle of his Harvard tenure, he was able to obtain a recommendation for the military: "his record is above average and I do not hesitate to recommend him for admission to a Training Camp, believing that, if commissioned, he will make a zealous and efficient officer," said his endorser, simply identified as "Hay."[25] Entering the military in 1917, by 1919, he had been discharged honorably. He was part of the military police and served in France, fought in the Battle of Brest, and left as a lieutenant.[26] Evidently he was not regarded as a Negro by the military for he did not serve in an all-Negro unit.

A subsequent investigation found that Dennis was "considered very clever and did excellent work" and, generally, he found France quite pleasing. He "had an income from real estate in the United States" and "intended to go into business in Paris" and "live in that country." It is remarkable that he chose not to, particularly since he "claimed" to have encountered "trouble" at "Camp Devons" where he was stationed. He was "tried at Camp Devons on a charge of inefficiency and inability to command men"—though this was not entirely his own doing since "it developed" that "the other men did not associate or run around with him and

it was brought out that he was thought [to] be partly colored by reason of his complexion and features." In other words, "there was a strong current of feeling against Dennis because of the idea that he had Negro blood in him." It was striking to the FBI agent writing this report that Dennis forwarded his trunk from Europe to "Mick Mitchell . . . colored." Following up, the agent spoke to a "tailor at 1802 Vernon Street" in Washington, D.C., who had "been at this address 19 years." "He said at one time he asked [Dennis] if he was colored and he replied cryptically, perhaps tellingly, 'what do you think?' "[27]

Later, Dennis acknowledged to the journalist, Dorothy Thompson, other intriguing aspects of his time in Europe. "I learned an awful lot about sex in the service," said Dennis, indirectly confirming what others had noted—that is, that many women found him to be tall, "dark," and handsome. "I recall right after the Armistice" in November 1918 a "full colonel was sent to me for collaboration on his moral mission. He took me out to dinner" and "said he thought it terrible that so many officers and even enlisted men stationed in France were keeping women. . . . I, of course, expressed no dissent and promised full cooperation, which I naturally did not give. At the time I happened to know from MP colleagues in Paris the name and address of the poule in Paris whom General Pershing visited regularly and, presumably, was keeping. I also knew in the base of Brest, where I was then on duty, any number of officers who were keeping women." One reason why Dennis balked at providing "full cooperation" was, as he noted, "I, too, was guilty." Of course, if his fellow U.S. soldiers suspected him of the original sin of "passing"—then compounding this by tasting forbidden sexual fruit—he would be lucky to escape in one piece.

Anyway, "one evening in early 1919 as the boys were sailing for home, I was making my rounds in the red light district, where we had MPs stationed to keep service men out of the houses of sin. I dropped into one house to look around, downstairs and just happened to bump into a Major General with several field rank officers and his aide. The General was most embarrassed, seeing the Provost Marshall band I wore"—and, though Dennis did not mention this, chagrined about a "Negro" espying some of the more sordid details of "white" life. "I just laughed," replied Dennis, "and told him not to worry. Then we had a bottle of champagne on the house." Yes, Dennis recalled caustically, "I was a good MP officer upholding the best traditions of the service and Anglo-American hypocrisy." The attitude of superior officers to sexuality was, in his mind,

just one more example of their hypocrisy—an all-encompassing field that included engaging in sexual intercourse with "Negro" women while denying the offspring of such unions. Yes, thought Dennis at this late date, the "Kinsey researchers" were doing a "public service," not least since he was "convinced that American hypocrisy and attempts to uphold unenforceable laws are largely responsible for our high and steadily rising crime rate."[28]

Looking back a half-century after his military duty, Dennis chose not to reflect on these controversial aspects of his tenure. Instead he told his interlocutor that the circles in which he was circulating then included the "cream of the Eastern seaboard. There were people there like old Joe Kennedy and the Roosevelts." Likewise in France, Dennis modestly conceded, "I was very highly regarded because I spoke French and I was diplomatic and so on. I had a most interesting time there. It was there that I think I met old Joe Kennedy. He was passing through and I got to know him." He did not recall any difficult moments: ". . . I had a very good record. I came back and entered Harvard then in 1919. I was there for a little over a year and Harvard gave me my degree in 1920 as of the class of 1919. So I had really only two years in Exeter and two and a half years at Harvard and I got my AB degree with good marks."[29]

Fond memory characterized Dennis's subsequent recollections of his military adventure for it was there that he solidified ties with prominent families. "I have known Archie [Roosevelt] since we were at Plattsburgh in 1917 and maybe he was there in 1915, the first training camp when I too was. His brother Quentin was in my squad in 1917, along with Ham Coolidge."[30] This episode was the seedbed of many of Dennis's elite connections that followed him for the rest of his life.

As he was approaching the ripe old age of 60, Dennis opined, "nothing is better calculated to make any Asiatic or person of color anti-American or anti-British than the best education Oxford or Harvard can provide," not least since "in Asia America is lined with the doomed cause of white imperialism." Dennis may have been referring obliquely to himself for he had attained sterling academic credentials, yet for various reasons —not least being his bristly hair and melanin rich skin color—he could never hope to aspire to the heights of his classmates and this could only be embittering.[31]

2

Passing Through

By 1920, Lawrence Dennis, with his properly British name, his "blueblood" credentials from Exeter and Harvard—and his closely cropped haircut, which gave the foregoing resonance and a kind of authenticity—was well positioned to advance upward on the nation's socioeconomic ladder. Yes, there was the nettlesome issue of making sure his mother was kept safely in the background but that seemed to be a manageable problem. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department—then known as a refuge for the well born—beckoned.

" 'I took refuge in the diplomatic service,' " Dennis said later, " 'by performing the easy feat—easy for me—of passing a two-day 12-hour written examination in a number of subjects.' "[1] Certainly his facility with languages, developed during an earlier life as a Negro child preacher touring Europe, made him attractive to the State Department.

It was in 1920 that Dennis set sail for Port-au-Prince, Haiti, then under U.S. occupation, to take up his duties as a "clerk" in the U.S. legation, a job he performed, it was said, with "satisfaction."[2] It is striking that this color-conscious society was Dennis's first diplomatic posting, though his fluent French did mean he could converse easily with Haiti's elite. The nation had just been occupied by the United States in 1915, and Dennis was able to occupy a ringside seat in watching the ongoing conflict between the "two oligarchies" of this nation. "The mulatto oligarchy specialized in the export of foodstuffs and became increasingly urbanized, whereas the black oligarchy mainly continued to be large landowners. In fact, the mulattoes eventually came to form the dominant economic and political group, even though the blacks benefited from their predominance in the army and from their number, which gave them a broad and legitimate base among the population. This was the political framework and particular class structure, with economic legitimacy depending on skin colour, with which the United States occupants had to contend in 1915.

. . . [generally] the oligarchy did not oppose American intervention and tried to take advantage of it. The United States decided to back the mulattoes, the most powerful economic and political group."[3] Little evidence remains as to how Dennis reacted to this highly charged atmosphere but, certainly, it could do little to convince him that he needed to stop "passing."

He did recall years later that he enjoyed a "most interesting experience" in this Caribbean nation. "I had the run of the town," he said glowingly, referring to the capital, Port-au-Prince. "I joined the Haitian Club"; again, seeking to highlight his class credentials, which in a sense, vitiated questions about his racial authenticity, he noted pointedly that "one of my colleagues was Averell Harriman. He was one of the Harrimans," that is, the prominent elite family. "He was consul. He and I were both bachelors about the same age. . . . we went around together but we played both sides of the street," he added a tad elliptically, apparently referring to navigating from one side of the Haitian color line to the other.[4]

Though Dennis's sojourn in Haiti may have been an Eden-like idyll, the same cannot be said of the experience of the majority of Haitians chafing under U.S. domination. Some U.S. officials referred to them as " 'wretched people,' 'damned liars,' 'miserable cockroaches,' and 'grasping niggers.' " Random and unjustified beatings of Haitians at the hands of U.S. soldiers were not unknown.[5] That the darker-skinned were more often than not the butt of such assaults—physical and otherwise—may have confirmed further in Dennis's mind the wisdom of "passing."

His next assignment was Bucharest, Romania, another nation replete with Francophiles, where he was employed as "Third Secretary."[6] Apparently these Eastern Europeans were suitably impressed with Dennis since he received the "decoration of Officer of the Star of Romania" in 1922.[7] His employers were no less pleased as Dennis's "dispatches" were "read with interest" in the State Department and time was taken to "commend" him for the "thoroughness with which he reported upon the subjects in question."[8] Dennis, a descendant of slaves, was found to be "hard working" and "thoroughly familiar with the situation" nationally —and "very efficient" besides.[9] He was "exceedingly industrious," said his immediate superior, Peter Jay—whose surname reflected the actual lineage that Dennis was thought to have—of his "senior secretary"[10] and, consequently, he wanted to retain him in Bucharest. "I cannot possibly spare Dennis now," he moaned. His "staff" was "loyally working very

long hours at high pressure and Dennis through his long familiarity with the situation is my right hand man."[11]

Evidently others were not bubbling over with hosannas for Dennis. Subsequently, the FBI spoke with Frederick Lyon of the State Department who "knew Dennis in Bucharest when Dennis was attached to that legation. Mr. Lyon always thought or suspected that Dennis was colored."[12] It is unclear how Lyon acted—if at all—on this suspicion. If he was similar to others who bumped into Dennis, he simply kept his wariness to himself, perhaps shared it with a few others, but certainly did not seek to confront or unmask him—or, as might have happened in the dankest precincts of the U.S. South—attack him with fists flying.

Dennis recalled later that his "salary then was only $1500 or $2000 a year." Again, he recalled fondly and strikingly that his supervisor there, "Peter Augustus Jay" was a "descendant of the Jays, John Jay." Here he displayed another weapon in his arsenal, dismissing Jay peremptorily as "not an intellectual." Since the popular creed was that Negroes could not be intellects, if Dennis was able to denigrate the elite Mr. Jay on this basis, inferentially this suggested that Dennis himself was not a Negro. Moreover, this habit of Dennis's of raising questions about the intellectual mettle of privileged Euro-Americans was also a de facto assault on the notion of "racial" superiority or the idea that those of European descent were somehow inherently gifted with intelligence.

For Jay may have been discussed in hushed tones by others but to Dennis he was a "terrific snob," though he added, "I got along with him very well because I did all the getting and I was very diplomatic. He liked me." Like Haiti, Dennis also found Romania "very interesting." Again, as in Haiti he "played both sides of the street. I went to Roumania [*sic*] parties and I also went to Jewish [*sic*] parties. The Roumanians were very anti-Jewish and wouldn't take a Jew into any of their clubs. But I went to the best Jewish clubs there," he added proudly. "I went with the Jews and I went with the Roumanians. I played both sides of the street and I got along very happily"—just as at that point in his life he had "played both sides of the [racial] street."

In any case, Foggy Bottom had other plans for Dennis, whose star was rapidly ascending. Dennis was "extremely disappointed"[13] when he was sent away from the Old World charm of Romania to the more charged atmosphere in Latin America. His supervisors saw it differently, however; this move, it was said, was "in harmony with [the] Department's program

to offer those officers who have shown promise an opportunity to serve as Senior Secretary in posts which are active and of importance."[14] The Division of Near Eastern Affairs of the department concurred that Dennis was doing "excellent work."[15]

Thus it was that in 1925 Lawrence Dennis found himself in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in the heart of a tempestuous Central America. He was monitoring a possible "land invasion" by "several hundred men," possibly launched from neighboring Guatemala.[16] He was in close touch with the "President" in that nation's capital, who was "informing" him about the prospects of "repression of a minor insurrection," fueled by "arms . . . bought recently by the Reds" that were "to be landed from sailing vessels"; there were supposedly "preparations by Reds in an [area] near Puerto Barrios for an early outbreak on the coast."[17] There was a raging fire in the proverbial "backyard" of the United States and Dennis—selected early on as a budding and luminous firefighter—was dispatched to extinguish the flames.

Dennis was up to his eyeballs in an insurrectionary conflict. "Secret agents" with whom he was communicating told him "that some eleven hundred revolutionists under Manuel Darias armed with thousand thirty [*sic*] rifles and abundantly supplied with ammunition are on the frontier. . . . the government is moving troops to meet the expected invasion or raids." Guatemala was suspected of being behind this invasion[18] though Dennis acknowledged that "Indian insurrectionists"—who would be "inevitably suppressed"—were deeply involved.[19] There were also "revolutionists along the Salvadorean frontier" that Dennis was fretting about and he was "requesting the Salvadorean authorities to execute special vigilance."[20]

Dennis traveled to the north coast of this terribly underdeveloped nation dominated by North American corporations and was compelled to announce that "should any sudden emergency arise requiring my immediate presence at the capital. . . . I could return within a few hours by aeroplane, thanks to the courtesy of the United Fruit Company." He was carefully monitoring "Communist activities there, especially those of an alleged American Communist organizer," though due to "limited staff of the Legation, which includes only one clerk and myself," Dennis was hard-pressed to get a grip on a chaotic situation.[21]

Dennis was on the frontlines of a frontier aflame. Moreover, though barely 30 years old, he was "in charge of [the] Legation."[22] His appreciative supervisors expressed "gratification afforded . . . by the able man-

ner in which you have conducted the affairs of the Legation during the long and difficult period that you have been in charge." The "admirable way in which you have dealt with the delicate political situation," Dennis was informed, meant that "serious disorder has been diverted during this period."[23]

As he recalled later, Washington wanted to oust Honduras's "dictator" and "wouldn't recognize him and they wanted to get him out. My mission there," he said, "was to get him out." Dennis succeeded, compelling him to "resign, step out. Then they elected another man whom the United States could recognize. That was considered a very brilliant achievement of mine," he added with his usual dearth of humility, a preemptive strike against racial insult.

From Honduras Dennis, now viewed as one of the nation's premier firefighters, moved on to neighboring Nicaragua, "another very difficult situation," he recalled. "I brought the Marines into Nicaragua," he said with pride, though the events there martyred Sandino, helped to inspire the Somoza dictatorship, and led directly to a revolution in the 1970s as Dennis was passing on.[24] Later he recalled, speaking of himself majestically in the third person, as was his wont: "In the Spring of 1926 he was sent to Managua, Nicaragua to take charge of the American legation during a revolution . . . with orders to get Chamorro out with a view to getting a President in whom the U.S. could recognize. He succeeded in doing that, but not in stopping the revolution. He presided for a week over a peace conference held aboard a warship, the USS Denver in Corinto Bay between representatives of Chamorro and the liberals fighting him. . . . Dennis, on secret orders via the American Minister, then in Washington, did engineer the resignation of Chamorro and the election by the Congress of Adolfo Diaz." Dennis returned to Washington "where he was publicly praised for the job he had done and privately [was] told that the Department of State was sending an older and bigger man down on a special mission to get the fighting stopped. That man was Henry L. Stimson," a future Mandarin of the U.S. ruling elite. Yet, Dennis was miffed, not only about his being dislodged but also about how his derring-do was ignored in subsequent retellings of this adventure: "you would never guess," he said, if "this is the true story from reading Stimson's or the State Department's official accounts."[25] Why did this occur?

Nonplussed, Dennis none too humbly remembered, "I made a very good record" as Washington deemed him a prime "troubleshooter." With French and German already under his belt, by this point Dennis also

spoke fluent Spanish, which "made me very useful" and "had a very pleasant time" besides.[26]

Keen on reporting his insights to an audience beyond Washington bureaucrats—and, perhaps, recapturing a kind of celebrity he had not experienced since he was three years old—Dennis sought to try to publish an article about these tumultuous times "in the 'Post' first. . . then the 'Atlantic Monthly' and lastly 'Foreign Affairs'" though he had real "fear that the article" was "not sufficiently thrilling or 'jazzed up.'"[27]

The State Department was not receptive. To "authorize the publication of your article," he was instructed, "would set an undesirable precedent."[28] Moreover, Dennis had to contend with a "news article threatening Mr. Dennis" with "publication of documents proving acceptance by him of money from [the] Conservative Party" of Nicaragua, sworn enemies of that nation's organized left.[29] Soon Dennis was seeking to leave the State Department for more fertile fields and there was "no dissuading" him, he announced haughtily.[30] Sooner still he was receiving mail "care of the Guarantee Trust Company, Fifth avenue branch" in Manhattan, as in an age-old process he sought to parlay his government contacts into a lush payday.[31] "I got rather tired of the diplomatic service," he explained later, "so I resigned," despite the fact that "the Secretary of State wrote me an especially warm letter asking me not to resign and telling me how they had appreciated my services."[32]

Actually it was a bit more complicated than this. Dennis at the time perceived "dissatisfaction with what appears to be my prospects in the service under the present personnel administration" though he added, "I have had five and a half years service without a black mark on my record"; this was the case though "two" of these postings were "among the most unpleasant and active posts in the service and under conditions of exceptional difficulty and strain." Dennis had to endure the indignity of being "attacked by name in the press" as a result of his "delicate and often disagreeable duties." He had done the state some service and they knew it but akin to Othello he had received "numerous commendations but no promotion, while other members of my class have been promoted with probability of service" though they had been assigned to less onerous capitals. But in the Caribbean and Latin America "staffs" were "at least one half smaller" and "service less well rewarded and less esteemed than in the European missions."[33] Despite his sterling "two years of service in the two most unpleasant, active and difficult posts in Central America," Dennis found himself "a grade in rank below three of my

classmates who have had service mostly at agreeable posts." Moreover, his responsibilities were more far-reaching than that of his peers: "in Nicaragua," he reminded, "we have virtual supervision of the government finances." There seemed to be some sort of discrimination at play, he thought. The "guiding principle in personnel administration," he suggested, "has not been so much service of American interests as giving the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of one's friends."[34] Dennis was an "old boy" of a type—given his Exeter and Harvard credentials—but not that old. He had run into a stone wall of structural bias: despite his facility with language and posh education at Exeter and Harvard, somehow he found himself being assigned to less prestigious, less rewarding postings. Could it be because of the color of his skin?

Somehow the press got wind of this brouhaha, which could not have pleased his superiors. Dennis told the *Washington Post* that " 'wealth and politics' " played undue roles in determining advancement at the State Department.[35] He was irked when he perceived that " 'English mannerisms' " and " 'supercilious affectations' " and other extraneous factors were at play.[36] He did not mention skin color but, instead, diverted the discourse to Anglophobia—a dislike that was to fuel later his march toward fascism.

Now discussing skin color would have led Dennis—possibly—down a perilous path that may have unmasked the ineradicable fact that his mother was African-American. Dennis had "gained the reputation of being a forceful type,"[37] which was "somewhat unusual in the diplomatic service" and if he had raised the question of "race," he would not only have unmasked himself but also, possibly—given prevailing racial dynamics—might have been accused of being a kind of Nat Turner–like rebel of the State Department, with all the attendant dangerous consequences. So, when he resigned, the unusually "forceful" Dennis charged that "wealth and social position were determining factors in promotion." Somehow Dennis was cast as a "man of independent means"—a far cry from reality but an illusion that was buoyed by his elite educational credentials—but it was fair to say that he was "rapidly gaining the reputation of being a hard-hitter," given his harsh "attacks on the system of promotion."[38]

Dennis was under fire—literally. Just before leaving Managua his "automobile" had been "fired on"[39] during a "disturbance" and "one shot lodged in the upholstery."[40] Yet the fire he was receiving in Washington may have been even more perilous.

Still, Dennis's name was brought to the attention of a uniquely elite audience when he took to the pages of the publication of the haute Council on Foreign Relations to describe and analyze his harrowing experiences in Nicaragua. He recalled there "an equally unfortunate and even unfruitful conference aboard an American warship in Nicaraguan waters" that "was presided over two years later by me, as an American charges d'affaires. Peace in Nicaragua was later proclaimed by Mr. [Henry] Stimson and General Moncada. . . but it took nearly five thousand Marines several months of sanguinary fighting in which a hundred of them lost their lives, to make it a reality." While in Honduras, "it devolved on me," he said modestly, "as an American charges d'affaires to extend recognition on February 1, 1925 to the eventually established, eligible constitutional government as found satisfactory to Washington's legitimacy requirements"—a backhanded way of signaling his displeasure with this U.S. intervention. Similarly, unlike many in his position, Dennis was not of the opinion that virtually every revolution since 1776—or, if they were more open-minded, 1789—was questionable. "Revolutions," he said, "like bodily pain or fever, are not diseases but symptoms. They are nature's way of calling attention to, and reacting protectively against something wrong in the body." As Dennis would argue, these were revolutions not least against the financial stranglehold held by investment banks over these Central American economies.

Yet even here, auditioning before another elite audience, Dennis did not spare them an indictment over the society they led in enunciating what was to emerge as one of his favorite themes—the hypocrisy of the United States, particularly on the issue of racism, and how this compromised the nation's ability to intervene sanctimoniously abroad. "European and Asiatic aliens have been lynched in the United States, and the legally contracted debts of certain states of our Union to foreign bondholders have been repudiated by law. Yet a lack of security for foreign lives and property was not on this account alleged against us as a ground for foreign intervention." Britain, he continued, "may allege a need to police and colonize the lands of the 'lesser breeds without the law' in order to secure markets and raw materials" but should the United States traverse that perilous path? Slyly though barely alluding to his ancestry, he asked "whether our highest destiny lies in assimilating the Mediterranean, Indian and Negro races and cultures found in the republics immediately to the south of us"—or leave them be. He also quickly dismissed the rationale that intervention was necessary to save U.S. lives.

"Three years' diplomatic service in Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua; intimate conversations with residents of many years; a quiet night's sleep through a revolutionary raid on the leading United Fruit port in Honduras; and the leisurely observation of street fighting in an interior Nicaraguan town with no nearby protecting Marines—these afford me a basis for the observation that Americans greatly exaggerate the dangers to non-participants from Latin American revolutions."[41]

Obviously, given such heretical views, Dennis was not long for the State Department, so he decamped to Wall Street. Still, it is hard to believe that Dennis—by his own admission a highly intelligent and perceptive man—actually thought that the world of high finance would be less bound by " 'supercilious affectations' " than Foggy Bottom. On the other hand, if he chose to reside in the class-bound Jim Crow United States what choices did he actually have? Thus it was he "got a job with J&W Seligman, who were bankers. This was in 1927. They had just put over two big loans to Peru—I think two $50 million loans and they wanted to send me down," he recalled later. "They did send me down to Peru to be their representative. I didn't really have to do anything there, but it was a very pleasant post. . . . I was there for two years and they thought very highly of me," he added with a typical hint of defensive self-esteem. Also typical was that Dennis quickly "got tired" of Lima. As with the State Department, Dennis was unable to keep his ennui to himself. "I wrote some very boorish letters and told them things were going very badly in Latin America"—and later took his unease to the halls of Congress. Dennis evolved to become a leading "isolationist," but even before then he had displayed a rare knack for isolating himself, even from other elite forces. His prickliness was sufficiently off-putting that it kept strangers at bay and away from nettlesome queries about his ancestry. And his growing alienation from these same elites, led him to the notion that they needed to be replaced—perhaps by the rising tide of fascism that he was to come to symbolize on this side of the Atlantic.

This was to come later; for the time being he was enjoying himself in Latin America. As usual, Dennis "naturally went with the top people; I belonged to the country clubs and all the good clubs," he observed with self-satisfaction. Naturally he often "talked with" the "foreign set—French and German and English"—and, like himself, they "were all very bearish on the American boom market. They thought the American boom market was all wrong and going bad and I passed that on." This was not the kind of news the official optimists on Wall Street wanted to hear. So,

"Seligman called me back to New York and put me on the carpet. This was in early 1929," as he recollected much later.

Of course, Dennis's presentiments of doom were to prove prophetic when high finance collapsed later that year and one lesson gleaned by him was of the perspicacity of Europeans—including Germans—and the stubborn inability to confront reality that characterized his compatriots in North America. "I remember one of the most interesting dinners I attended," he said subsequently, that "was given by two of the Seligman partners and Alec Henderson was there—he was one of the Henderson family" of the high-born "Cravath, Henderson law firm." They "told" Dennis that "they were very much upset by my communications from Latin America, that I was so bearish" and "they made it clear to [me] that they didn't like my line." Yet, these aristocratic scions from the summit of the socioeconomic pyramid evidently were not as well informed or knowing as Dennis, as they lost a small fortune when they failed to heed his forebodings. Dennis, who had a close and intimate gaze at the inner workings of the U.S. ruling class, was not impressed. Perhaps he had further reason to resent them because of the peculiar folkways of the United States that led to whispering about his ancestry, which would and could complicate his rise to the zenith of influence and affluence.

"I broke with them," he declared or more precisely "they fired me before the crash" and "after that I was just living a free life. I began to do considerable speaking," cashing in on his reputation as a Delphic sage. "I got a lot of invitations to speak" since "after the crash my prestige went up. I also helped to build up my reputation in [1929] before the crash when I wrote a series of articles—they were my first articles—for the *New Republic*." In a bold move that even latter-day dissidents would find hard to do, Dennis "came out against the financing of Wall Street. I attacked Wall Street. The crash came along and corroborated everything I had said." What was bad for high finance proved good for Dennis's ability to garner speaking fees.

Dennis was not unlike another son of Atlanta and Harvard, Benjamin Davis, Jr. But unlike this Negro whose dark skin in any case barred the escape hatch that Dennis could run to, Davis too was soured by his growing knowledge of U.S. imperialism and its rigid color line, so he turned sharply to the left, toward the Communist Party.[42] Dennis, instead, veered in an opposing direction. "I saw what capitalism did in Haiti and Honduras and Nicaragua. . . . I became critical of our capitalistic intervention," he observed. Dennis, like some of the left, was sensing that cap-

italism as we know it was doomed—but instead of moving leftward toward socialism, he moved rightward toward fascism. Of course, that the capitalism he knew included a large dollop of Jim Crow, which had impelled him to distance himself from his own mother in order to escape racist persecution and harassment, certainly did not improve the image of this system in his own mind. Instead, the newness of fascism, with which he invested the idea that it would be spearheaded by the "best and the brightest"—as opposed to the "best and the whitest"—probably influenced this fateful choice.

"I wasn't combative," Dennis recalled, "but I formed different views. I think my childhood had something to do with it. My mother never had influence over me, but she took me around in Europe and I got to meet people, the best people"—indulging in experiences beyond the ken of virtually any Negro child back home. I "never had much association with her [his mother] after I passed 14 or even 13. . . . she had no influence on me at all." She "wanted to make a minister of me when I was a child," he declared, "and I got over that." Thus, by his own admission, Dennis became a "dissenter."

As Wall Street was hurtling toward disaster, Dennis's opinion of the world of high finance was souring accordingly and pushing him toward the dissidence he had imbibed as a child. A scant two years before the collapse, a State Department official met with Dennis. They had a leisurely and "long talk on Saturday afternoon." This was after he had joined Seligman. Dennis said "that the New York bond-buying market seems to have a great predilection for German bonds based chiefly on the idea that the Germans are an orderly and efficient and well-governed people." But this cultural presupposition was misguided since "the effect of the obligation for reparations payments is entirely overlooked and in many cases"—according to Dennis—was "purposely underestimated by the lawyers who write the opinions on which the banking houses base their loans." Thus, thought Dennis, the international bond market—the pedestal upon which the global capitalist system was based—was resting on a rickety foundation, that was more "psychological" than economic. "German bonds, Czech bonds, and even Polish bonds and loans" were "very popular and much in demand, whereas . . . South and Central American loans, which have infinitely better backing in the natural resources of the countries"—which allowed for export earnings and could be seized in a pinch—"are not looked upon with favor by the buying public," opined Dennis. While grappling with this conundrum, Seligman was about to

dispatch him to "Yugoslavia about the middle of the winter in connection with the desire of his company to take another loan there."[43]

"I was always very pro-Latin American," said Dennis subsequently and "I became anti-interventionist in the '20s. . . . I went with the local people. They invited me around. They took me in."[44] A man accustomed to being ignored or denigrated merely because of the color of his skin—as opposed to the content of his character—found it difficult to shunt this experience aside. Such experiences led him to the conclusion that radical change was necessary.

Of course, there were other issues at play. Though Dennis may have been sidelined in less prestigious posts, for example, Managua, it was not accidental that he had been hired by Seligman despite—or, perhaps, because—this "concern floated a loan of $1,500,000 soon after the landing of American troops" in Nicaragua in "1912."[45] This revolving door leading from Foggy Bottom to Wall Street had attracted the attention of Senator Burt Wheeler of Montana—subsequently a comrade of Dennis's—who questioned if the nation's policy toward Central America was influenced unduly by those like Dennis who may have been trading on their insider knowledge. On " 'at least two occasions,' " he noted, " 'influential officials in the State Department' " had resigned and "found employment" — surprisingly enough " 'with the bankers they benefited.' "[46] Dennis, who Wheeler termed the " 'kingmaker' " of Nicaragua, was not far from his mind.[47] Casting aside these aspersions thrust upon his agency and, by inference, Dennis himself, the secretary of state pointed to the " 'conspicuous ability' " of his departing employee and his " 'most satisfactory and creditable' " service.[48]

The *New York Times,* which covered this brewing scandal with ever-growing interest, referred to Dennis in its pages. He was "tall" and "trim" and "of powerful build with close cropped bristly hair and [skin] deeply bronzed by the tropical sun." He "much resembles in appearance an army officer. He returned" to the United States "to find his activities and outspoken criticism of the department had caused a furor [in] diplomatic circles," but the unflappable Dennis "did not appear concerned," though "considerable publicity had developed concerning himself." However, the "bronzed" Dennis—he of the "bristly" hair—also had caused a stir because of "the criticism he is said to have made to the development of favoritism in selecting men for diplomatic assignment and promotion." His "long conference" with the secretary of state was " 'pleasant,' " said Dennis, but he "gave no indication of its tenor."[49]

This may have been because Dennis was being slotted to take the fall for a controversial U.S. policy in the region, for executing a policy that had not extinguished the flames of revolt but may have fanned them. Secretary of State Kellogg denied that he had instructed Dennis to engineer regime change in Nicaragua[50]—leaving the career-damaging inference that Dennis was a loose cannon, who also had the temerity to confront the class-bound system that defined the State Department and animated the U.S. elite as a whole. The "deeply bronzed" Dennis, he of the "bristly" hair, was finding that his options were increasingly limited. Yet the lasting significance of his diplomatic experience was that it converted Dennis into a confirmed isolationist, staunchly opposed to U.S. interventions abroad, be it against fascism or communism or any other "ism" presently found distasteful. Dennis also could not ignore the stage whispers about his ancestry, which may have blocked his career advancement. Increasingly he was fed up with the Jim Crow United States and open to alternatives to it.

3

Fascism

As the U.S. Congress began to awaken to the dire snares that had entrapped the nation, Dennis became a frequent witness at publicity-drenched hearings, where his words were often transfixing. Seligman had lost money by not listening to him, he thought. "I broke with them or they fired me before the crash" and "after that I was just living a free life. I began to do considerable speaking. I got a lot of invitations to speak" since "after the crash my prestige went up" as the nation reached out desperately for answers, any answers. "I also helped to build up my reputation in '29 before the crash," he remarked, "when I wrote a series of articles—they were my first articles—for the *New Republic*. . . . I came out against the financing of Wall Street. I attacked Wall Street. The crash came along and corroborated everything I had said. Then for three years I went around the country speaking and lecturing."[1]

Consequently, on a briskly chilly morning in January 1932, the well-traveled Dennis trooped to the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. to address the sensitive subject of "sale of foreign bonds or securities in the United States." This subject was deemed beyond the jurisdiction of Negroes and though Dennis had spent a considerable time in the blackest precincts of this heavily black town, there is no evidence that he returned to his old neighborhood to bask in the admiration of those who knew him when and would be overjoyed by his basking in the spotlight. Instead, dressed conservatively as usual in suit and tie and sensible shoes, he came before the man whose very name came to symbolize a hawkish protectionism—Congressman Reed Smoot. Of course, if Dennis had unveiled himself as a Negro, it is doubtful if he would have had the opportunity to address this question of the nation's lifeblood—not to mention even being in a position to accumulate the experience that had made him an expert in this otherwise arcane field of endeavor.

Dennis was then residing in New York, not the Harlem to which was consigned so many Negroes, but 27 West 44th Street, hard by fashionable Fifth Avenue, within shouting distance of the majestic New York Public Library. He had lived there since 1927 but his frequent global jaunts took him away from there for considerable periods of time. "I was in Peru from about the end of January of 1928 until April of 1929," he told the intently listening panel. "And I was there again for three months in 1929–30. And during that period of about a year and a half," he remarked, "I made extensive trips into Bolivia and the Argentine and Chile." Here he was gathering "all the information I could" from various bigwigs including the "Minister of Finance" in more than one nation.

However, this experience was less than pleasant since, said Dennis, "I was in constant conflict" with Seligman, since "I took the very strong position that it was not sound" to invest so heavily in Peru, for example, "and I immediately became involved in a long debate that went on as long as I stayed with the firm and I was constantly called upon to substantiate my conclusions. That was what I did, in very large part."

Dennis had quarreled with his colleagues in the State Department but was now entangled in similar contentious debates with his colleagues on Wall Street. He was developing a reputation as something of a stormy petrel, somewhat aloof, not terribly gregarious. What his colleagues may not have recognized was that more than a bit of this abrasive attitude may have been driven by Dennis's painful experiences, being forced to toss his mother from the train of his life in order to secure his own station. He had to suppress the most difficult details of his life and anger about this personal calamity was displaced into other spheres of his being. Moreover, abrasiveness was a shield that kept the prying at arm's length, unable to ascertain his darkest secrets.

"We were constantly engaged in argument," Dennis told Congress of his frazzled relations with his colleagues. "I had several long conferences with the partners and they said I was pessimistic and that these things would work themselves out" but to Dennis this was madness. "You only needed to get off the boat and take one look around—that the expenditures in Peru would not produce income."

For now the roof had caved in and the floor had collapsed and Dennis was portraying himself as being a seer who saw it all coming, he was one of the few not taken aback by the ravages of the Great Depression. "When you see cement streets through waste places, you know that they

are not going to produce money income," he argued. Moreover, "you have two different roads from Lima to Callao. There is no earthly need for more than one." This internal debate terminated abruptly when he left Seligman in April 1930, months after the collapse of the stock market and his firm, like so many others, envisioned difficult times ahead.[2]

With his public speaking and writing and insider knowledge based on globe-trotting and employment at the highest levels, Dennis's was a voice that was difficult to ignore. Now if his mother had been espied by those who were hanging on his every word, he may instead have wound up hanging from the nearest tree because of his presumed impudence in performing "whiteness." Acute awareness of this troublesome dilemma may shed light on why he was so insistent upon seizing the fraught moment of the Great Depression to push for more radical and far-reaching changes in the status quo—that is, toward fascism. In the cold light of retrospect it is not difficult to see that fascism may have brought far-reaching change, but it is unclear—at best—if it would have weakened the pillars of color discrimination that had bedeviled Dennis's life, though the early reports from Germany about Negroes having comparatively less difficulty there than in, say, North Carolina or Texas, were hard to ignore.[3]

So shortly after his initial congressional testimony, Dennis was again being queried respectfully by senators whose names echoed in history texts—"Gore" and "La Follette" among them—about how the nation might comprehend and dig itself out of the economic ditch in which it found itself. "There are two theories about the present depression," instructed Dennis patiently as if he were the headmaster in a roomful of dutifully curious schoolboys; "one is that this is another of a series of seven or eight cyclical depressions" but the "second theory is that this depression is or may be, very likely, a phase of transition from the existing system of private capitalism to some form of economic organization which we cannot definitely foretell." Actually, Dennis was being coy. Already he was foretelling that the "form of organization" on the horizon was quite clear, translucent as cloudless blue skies and as obvious as a rising sun—that is to say, fascism. The devastation ignited by the evident collapse of U.S. capitalism, combined with his alienation from the ruling elites of this same nation and the apparent surge of Germany and Italy, impelled him toward advocacy of ideas that would haunt him for the duration of his life—though he argued passionately that he was not advocating fascism,

simply predicting its rise, just like seismologists should not be castigated for predicting earthquakes.

Matthew Josephson, the self-described "infidel in the temple," was struck upon encountering Lawrence Dennis in the early 1930s. He had "heard of a number of pro-fascist intellectuals who considered [Huey] Long [of Louisiana] their potential Duce," along the lines of Benito Mussolini, who had captured headlines and galvanized imaginations in his own Italy and globally with his newly minted doctrine. Among this group was Dennis "who, I remember, had appeared . . . at the home of a friend of mine, Forrest Davis and taken part in a debate with a socialist scholar in which Dennis espoused fascist doctrines." The increasingly well-known Dennis "became an associate editor of *The Awakener,* a fortnightly journal issued in New York by an American fascist group." Thus it was that Josephson, a man of decidedly left-wing ideas, came to this periodical's office "located in a midtown skyscraper."

He quickly ascertained that this otherwise murky publication was something of a "front" for Rome in that the chief editor, Harold Varney, was formerly a publicity agent for Mussolini's regime and the journal itself shared space with the "Italian Historical Society, a thinly camouflaged propaganda agency" of Il Duce himself "staffed" by Italian nationals.

But with all that, it was Dennis who fascinated him. He knew that this former State Department official had been "friendly" with the British progressive, John Strachey, and "afterward he had explored" with him "the merits of communism. [Dennis] had concluded that communism would take too long to gain acceptance in America" but still being ever more critical of the status quo and desirous of far-reaching change that would shake the foundations of the nation, became attracted to fascism which—at least in its early stages—was not as controversial as V. I. Lenin's creation in Eurasia.

Moreover, said Josephson, tycoons "lived in a state of sheer terror, as if expecting a Red revolution at any moment and they were highly susceptible to appeals for funds from would-be defenders." Dennis rapidly developed a habit he nurtured to his dying days, that is, soliciting funds from the well-heeled, who were petrified by the idea of communism and had not ruled out the fascist option as a final resort. One mutual friend had told Josephson that Dennis "repeatedly pressed her to introduce him

to some of her wealthy friends." Not only was fascism a better bet in the long term than communism, in the short term it was easier to raise funds for it precisely by waving the red flag dramatically.

So before going to meet Dennis at his midtown Manhattan office, Josephson "ran down" the budding fascist leader at the Harvard Club, a place that was a favorite haunt of Dennis's. "We had lunch there," recalled Josephson and "he spent the afternoon expounding his ideas." Josephson was impressed—in a sense—since his interlocutor "proved to be trenchant in speech and as vivacious as I had been led to expect."

Like others Josephson made thinly veiled comments about Dennis's visage. "Just turning forty he was a tall man with dark complexion and black hair, handsome in his way, especially when he gave his boyish grin." Dennis's "Harvard classmates," Josephson was told, "remembered him as seeming much older than they, maintaining an air of disillusionment and keeping much to himself, though he was well spoken, especially in college debates." Continuing to reinvent himself, Dennis told Josephson that his father was a "successful businessman." Somewhat truthfully, Dennis shared his opinion that he had become disgusted with the State Department after he found that promotions came slowly—" 'except for bluebloods.' " He had become disgusted with Wall Street—that other pillar of the U.S. elite—after "the default of several billions in South American government bonds." Dennis "resigned but he kept his own records to prove he had warned his employers that the bonds would in most cases go into default." Typically, "they had ignored his warnings and even loaned fresh funds to the fraudulent dictators in Peru and Venezuela. It was the investment bankers, Dennis said, who really 'prepared the way for communism.' They played the public for suckers, passing on high interest foreign bonds, pocketing their big commissions, and allowing the bondholders to be defrauded. 'I have a very low opinion of bankers,' he exclaimed. 'If only they weren't so smug, so full of their pieties. . . . we are going over a cliff into a terrible inflation, in one year,' " he predicted as the Great Depression began to impose a death-grip on the fragile neck of the U.S. economy. " 'The New Deal is only a huge muddle,' " he argued, " 'and yet the old trading class, the bankers, the merchants, the politicians and labor leaders are still in the saddle.' " The country needed new leaders, a new elite, an elite, perhaps, that was less obsessed with skin color, an elite, perhaps, that included him—a man of rare and powerful intellect—at its apex. " 'It just can't go on I tell you,' " said Dennis, in words of equal parts confidence and hope, " 'the future is to the extremists,' he

said with feeling. 'I admire the Communists' idea of power,' " Josephson recalled him saying. " 'If I were Russian I would be a Bolshevik. But here they haven't got a ghost of a chance.' " Why was that? " 'The working class-bah!' " he exclaimed. " 'The proletariat rise? Not on your life—it isn't in the beast. The American worker won't even fight for his class.' " Unlike those in the United States with African ancestry who had turned to the left as a way to resolve the knotty contradiction of "race" and power, Dennis had seen enough of the much vaunted U.S. working class to have lost complete confidence in its ability to transcend the boundaries of color. He had seen enough of the U.S. investor class to have developed a similar distaste. Fascism seemed to him the way to slice neatly this Gordian knot.

" 'What this country needs is a radical movement that talks American,' " he proclaimed. " 'Our workers don't only 'get' Marx, they can't even *lift* him' " (emphasis in original). " 'Who will fight for power?' " asked Dennis plaintively. In impeccable fascist logic, he put forward another stratum—" 'why, the frustrated middle classes,' " he declared.

Josephson was not impressed. "There was no long-range view of anything and there were accents of a sophomoric cynicism," as if Dennis had lost faith in humanity itself and had lost sight of the better angels within us. With evident revulsion, Josephson concluded that Dennis "regarded human beings as so much raw material to be molded into the forms desired by men of power." He also detected that there was a smoldering anger festering inside Dennis, a fury at the society into which he was born. "At cocktail gatherings in New York, Dennis, in expounding his doctrines, evidently took a boyish delight in sending chills up the spines of his hearers by his blood-curdling talk of coups d'etat. He had not only witnessed such actions but had once been under fire during an insurrection in Nicaragua, when he rode about like a young kingmaker in a little car with an American flag between the lines of embattled armies, to negotiate a settlement. When he won State Department recognition of the party he favored it was afterward enforced by five thousand U.S. Marines." To Dennis, political power, and how it was gained, was not just a matter of gauzy theoretical musing, as it was to so many of his counterparts on the right and the left. " 'A successful revolution? Perfectly simple,' " said Dennis cavalierly. " 'It's like robbing a bank. Only you play for higher stakes. You have to 'case the joint,' plan the action in every detail—and time it. You'd need only 15,000 men! Then the machine gun would go off'—and Dennis would illustrate, making the sound 'put-put-

put' and giving his brightest smile," which seemed to further darken his deeply bronzed face.

Josephson found it all "disingenuous" but Dennis clearly did not. " 'Oh the moneyed people don't want fascism—*just yet,*' " he added with telling emphasis, " 'but they are interested just the same.' " How could they not be with a domestic Communist Party stirring, which made a specialty of focusing on the aching Achilles heel of the United States—Jim Crow. " 'When the time comes,' " he said with confidence, " 'they'll give rather than face socialism or communism. After all, fascism calls for a *nationalist* revolution that leaves property owners in the same social status as before, though it forbids them to do *entirely* as they please with their property' " (emphases in original)—that is, the bourgeoisie would prefer the heavy hand of state intervention directed by experts like Dennis, as opposed to state expropriation mandated by Reds. " 'The corporative state would preserve the elite of experts and managers, the people who understand production and can keep the system running. The men who have been earning ten thousand a year have been going down badly,' " he remarked in reference to those taking home a then princely sum. " 'They will follow a good demagogue,' " said Dennis reputedly.

But what about those bourgeois elements who disdained fascism and communism? What would happen to them? " 'Oh,' " said Dennis breezily and off-handedly, " 'we'd liquidate them if they gave trouble,' " employing the sanitized language of a calloused era. " 'We have to redistribute *some* of the wealth, you know [emphasis in original]. After all the military power has the last word. Take Hitler,' " he said in a reference to the headline-grabbing German leader, " 'he uses the industrialists now, but he can shoot them whenever he wants to, as he did Captain Roehm!' "

Now Dennis's sensibilities were not as world-weary as these comments first appear. He spoke of the "various 'shirt' movements"—for example, brown-shirts in Germany and black-shirts in Italy—"with scorn. He would have no truck with the brawling groups of native fascists." Also—and this was a hallmark of Dennis's brand of fascism—"his mission for the present was to carry on with education and propaganda in peaceful style" and, above all, "Dennis also intended to avoid the line of religious bigotry and race hatred . . . holding such doctrines unsuited to our melting-pot society."

Thus, Dennis sought to square the circle. With the seams of capitalism seemingly bursting under the weight of the Great Depression and with

newer socioeconomic arrangements bubbling to the surface—fascism and communism in the first place—he opted for what he thought to be the wave of the future. A future whereby the elites in the military, the State Department, and Wall Street—elites drenched in the odium of color discrimination—would be compelled to take a back seat to a new set of elites, symbolized by Dennis, for example, who would be catapulted to prominence based more on the firepower of intelligence rather than complexion. Yet the hard-boiled Dennis, whose life experiences had seemed to inure him to idealism, like many before him had miscalculated the staying power of bourgeois democratic capitalism—and, as fascism came into sharper conflict with this system, he barely escaped imprisonment as a result of his wildly premature predilections.

But that was to come much later. In the meantime, he "remarked with pride" that a potential leader of this fascist upsurge was more than a passing acquaintance: " '[Huey] Long reads my stuff,' " adding that "he had visited him in Baton Rouge." Dennis thought him " 'smarter than Hitler,' " as he felt, inter alia, that the Louisianan had not strolled down the perilous path of malignant ethnic and racial chauvinism, thereby multiplying potential enemies and creating a powerful tool of countermobilization among one's foes. "Long was being cautious about connections with fascist movements, but he had asked Dennis to help him write a book on the redistribution of wealth." Despite the potency of this demand, "Dennis replied rather shrewdly that the rich really need not fear such men as Long. He might promise gold to the rabble to win their support, but once in power he would quietly put aside the more extreme remedies. Capital would remain as before 'in the hands of those who know how to manage it.' "

Dennis, perhaps conscious of drawing too much attention to himself that might lead to searching questions about his family background, did not see himself as the leader of this movement, "his real interest lay in theory and strategy; he would like to be the mind and voice of the 'coming American fascism.' " Dennis, thought Josephson with a mixture of awe and apprehension, was an "odd and clever fellow [with] great gaps on the human side."

Josephson was also struck with those with whom Dennis was sharing time. This list included Esther Murphy, "almost six feet tall, an Amazon with a fine big head and a squint. She dressed with a mannish elegance and talked withal in an endless stream." Just as he hinted Dennis was not

altogether "white," Murphy was portrayed as being not altogether "female," markers not only of their eccentricities but also, perhaps, their fondness for the outré politically. She was a sister of Gerald Murphy, a charter member of the "lost generation" and a buddy of F. Scott Fitzgerald; her grandfather, Ben Butler, was a former Massachusetts governor and she too was friendly with John Strachey who she had met around the same time that Dennis encountered this influential intellectual, in 1929. It was "at the instance of one of her friends, Lawrence Dennis" that "she herself was just then reading a biography of Mussolini." Suitably impressed and well on the path to the political and other margins, she joined "some queer colony of Utopians in the sand dunes near San Francisco," at a time when "the old rentier class was growing uneasy" and confidence in the status quo was fraying.[4]

This state of affairs was driven by the painful economic condition then enervating the nation, a condition that Dennis had seen up close and with ever-growing dismay and uneasiness. But unlike some within Wall Street he did not hesitate to speak out against the financial "system" but opted for alternatives, even if their roots were in European soil—a condition that was disqualifying in the eyes of many Euro-American elites, precisely for that reason. After all, the United States itself was born "in terms of opposition to Europe. . . . In *The Federalist No. 11,* Alexander Hamilton himself had linked national greatness to a separation from Europe." George Washington, demigod of the nation's birth, was not alone when he "pitted a pure, virtuous American against a corrupt, degenerate Europe[an]."[5] The dislocations in Europe brought by the rise of Mussolini and Hitler seemed to confirm the value of this distaste in the minds of some. However, Dennis—who had been visiting Europe since he was a child and knew that his homeland's obsession with the nearby Negro was not as developed as that of the old and distant continent—was not predisposed to be as hostile to this transatlantic neighbor.

It was not long before Dennis had become the public face of fascism. Thus it was that in the turbulent decade that was the 1930s he found himself sitting next to other luminaries in Manhattan's Town Hall, close by both the bustle of Times Square and clear witness to the human wreckage brought by the devastation of capitalism's latest crisis.[6] This gathering could not be approached casually by Dennis, for when he addressed a similar meeting in Newark, New Jersey, police had to be summoned to

"quiet a group of hecklers"; they "dispersed more than 300 persons" organized by the Young Communist League and their Socialist Party counterparts.[7] They were targeting the man termed by the press the "'unofficial leader of the Fascist movement in America.'"[8]

At this more sedate Manhattan meeting, Norman Thomas, the avuncular Princetonian, was there to represent and advocate on behalf of socialism while New Dealer Raymond Moley was to address the merits of "democracy" (the euphemism deployed to describe the capitalist nation that was the United States, where bourgeois democratic norms reigned—except, of course, for those millions of Negroes and others deprived of the right to vote). A. J. Muste was recruited to discuss "communism." And it was Dennis's task to deliver praise songs on behalf of fascism.

Suggestive of the dangerous moment faced by the nation, this debate, which in coming years would be deemed to be farcically unnecessary, akin to a circus or a discussion of the merits of life versus death, was taken quite seriously and broadcast nationally on radio on NBC. Dennis was described by the moderator as one of the "prominent Americans" invited to participate in this critical discussion mandated to determine "which way America." Dennis was greeted with stormy applause as he approached the microphone. His deep and resonant voice with echoes of his New England upbringing—there was not the faintest hint of the drawl that characterized so many Negroes—was typically forceful. "What we need is a new system," he demanded as he launched a bitter philippic against the New Deal. There had been a "total collapse of public credit and currency," a blight for which he felt Wall Street deserved a share of the blame. There were "wholesale foreclosures" and the attempt to "borrow a nation's way out" was as bankrupt as the system it was designed to rescue. "A new system is indicated as the alternative to chaos" and this meant the "state must plan a new social order." There was a pressing need for a "new theory of social order" that included the need for a "planned economy" and that, unlike the system then developing in Russia, "respects private property rights." Yes, "certain revolutionary changes" were required to "enable government" to plan amid the rubble of capitalist anarchy.

Repetitively he emphasized that it was "not necessary to expropriate all private property rights"—Henry Ford could relax and, in fact, be energized since the state would ensure his suppliers would not go belly up, thus jeopardizing his own existence. Still, Dennis wanted to "redefine all

private property"—a door once opened that could lead to unanticipated consequences—and viewed such "rights as mere licenses," that is, basically the right to enjoy this property but not to own it. He wanted to "nationalize all banks" and "give [the] state the monopoly" of credit, so as to better direct the economy, shifting capital to winners and starving losers into submission. He wanted to "liquidate Wall Street and its tyranny over our credit" and have its bluebloods supplanted by a new elite of experts—persons like himself, for example. Dennis's ten-minute peroration was greeted by fervent applause.

Norman Thomas said he thought that a good deal of what Dennis was describing was socialism—a riposte that reflected the then-growing prestige of the socialist experiment in Russia and the opprobrium heaped upon its capitalist rival. But Thomas was not fooled; he assailed Dennis, fascism, and Huey Long—and was interrupted frequently by hoots of support and the rhythmic pounding of palms together. Strikingly, neither Thomas nor Dennis had a good word to say about Wall Street or the U.S. Supreme Court, suggestive of the crisis of legitimacy faced by the status quo.

In his rebuttal, Dennis did not retreat. "I consider Senator Long, Father Coughlin"—the fascist priest of the airwaves—"and other champions of the discontent of people as precursors of fascism. . . . I salute Senator Long, Father Coughlin and a great many other honest leaders. . . . I don't agree with their particular views entirely," he said, leaving himself a narrow escape route, but "[they] deserve to be heard and will be heard." Scattered boos and gasps of derision accompanied these explosive words. Then Dennis turned to Thomas and asked if the state could develop an economic plan without confiscating all private property—which was his considered viewpoint. Thomas replied no, saying he wanted to get rid of all private ownership of productive property. The "state" was the "executive committee of a dominant class," he added with good measure. In this different day that seems like it took place in another country a long, long time ago ended with words by Voltaire on "defending to the death one's right to say" unpopular things—then concluded with a spirited rendition of "My Country 'Tis of Thee."[9]

Such charged debates were becoming a staple of Dennis's existence. He was touring the nation regularly, tossing rhetorical thunderbolts, such as the time he "debated Upton Sinclair" in the Far West—and developed "new ideas" as a result.[10] The pamphleteer and polemicist, George Seldes,

was not far wrong when he asserted that "the first writing in favor of an American Fascist Party and movement appeared" in H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* and "the writer was Lawrence Dennis."[11]

Dennis was exacting a measure of revenge against the color-obsessed nation whose elites he had crossed swords with in the State Department and Wall Street. His face with its hints of Africa was haunting those who had flummoxed him. He was "the most strongly fascistic intellectual in the pro-Nazi American movement," according to one analyst. "Significantly," it was declared, "Dennis was opposed to the flagrant and irrational Nazi groups, headed by Fritz Kuhn; instead of adhering to Himmler and Hess, he owed much to Alfred Rosenberg. Although he did not entirely concur with Rosenberg's extremist support of the theories of a restoration of the ancient Norse gods and a renunciation of the Catholic Church, he believed in Rosenberg's adherence to a vision of world Fascist power. . . . More than any other of his kind, Dennis was an American who had worked out his thoughts and feelings into something approaching a philosophy and he was in direct contact with German agents" as well as influential Washington personalities, for example, Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana. "He constantly played on Wheeler"—a "close friend"—with "flattery, support and contributions siphoned from German agents. . . .." Dennis traveled to Germany during this time, where he sought to "establish major Nazi connections" and was "entertained by Rosenberg at several meetings" and "received warmly at the Propaganda Ministry." "More and more" Dennis "hoped for a palace revolution or coup d'etat that would eliminate Roosevelt," a fond wish of a number of industrial barons who wished to rid themselves of "that man." Dennis was "praised consistently in the German press as a savior of decent Americanism."[12] Dennis was riding high, he "even referred to himself on occasion as the 'American Rosenberg,' "[13] apparently without a hint of irony.

Such self-characterizations were then not as off-putting as they are now. Despite his bashing of the mavens of high finance, Dennis "was offered a job with E. A. Pierce"—a firm not that different from those he had been scorning. He was still invited to the most high-born gatherings, such as one "given by Ruth Draper" just after Roosevelt's meteoric rise to the White House. "She had several prominent people of the Roosevelt crowd there," Dennis recalled later. "I was just talking over the drinks and after dinner" and "said, 'I'm sure that when Mr. Roosevelt comes into office

he'll spend more money than Herbert Hoover.' " Dennis "had gotten to know quite a few of the Roosevelt people in Washington—people like Tommy Corcoran," the fabled "Tommy the Cork," lobbyist extraordinaire and all-round fixer. "I had met them socially" and with his typical self-bolstering added, "I was in demand as a speaker because I was very much of a dissenter and very much of a critic." "I had criticized the Hoover Administration for not rising to meet the Depression," which removed the possible taint that he was a special pleader on behalf of the GOP. "I took," he said choosing his words carefully, "what was then considered a pro-fascist view. I said that Hitler and Mussolini were rising to meet the economic crisis and that we would have to do much the same thing. . . . I defended them and tried to explain them; and that," he said with resignation still lingering years later, "[brought] me under considerable criticism and attack as being a fascist. I said, 'the United States will have to go fascist in the same way that Germany and Italy have gone,' " as a matter of inevitability, not necessarily his policy choice, he added with careful distinction.

Again, flaunting his ties to the aristocratic, as a preemptive strike against any questioning of his own bloodlines, Dennis added, "it was at that time I met Boothby, who is now Lord Boothby" and "I sat up many times way into the night talking with Boothby about the British economic situation." Yes, it was true, Dennis added in an attempt to burnish his interlocutor's credentials—and, by inference, his own—Boothby was "Eton and Oxford," parallel to Dennis's own Exeter and Harvard. "I had other contacts with important Britishers," he added, "and spent some weeks there," which "got me branded as a fascist, which I wasn't," he noted retrospectively. "I was merely taking an objective view and I was taking a prophetic view"—should the meteorologist be blamed for predicting a hurricane or should her words be heeded and prophylactic measures adopted?[14]

The captivating architect, Philip Johnson, gave the FBI a different perspective on Dennis's relationship to the New Deal, when interviewed about a man he once knew quite well. Johnson came to be known as the dean of U.S. architects and was the first winner of the "Pritzker Prize, the $100,000 award established" by the family of the same name. He was "passing" in a sense in that he was a gay man in the closet. Born in Cleveland in 1906, the son of a well-to-do lawyer, he too graduated from Harvard and, also like Dennis, had a calculated veneer that included "a dignified bearing and elegant, tailored suits" that gave him the image of

a "distinguished, genteel aristocrat"—as opposed to a fop. His crisply outlined and round face was marked by heavy and round black spectacles of his own design that underscored his role as a champion of Modernism.[15]

In Dennis he found a kindred spirit. There was a "steady contact" between the two that led to Johnson's "preoccupation" with the older man; Dennis was a "mentor" to him and was "in the forefront of Philip's consciousness," though Johnson's penchant for "making degrading judgments of ethnic groups like the Czechs and the Danes" cannot be ascribed solely to Dennis's influence.[16]

However, by the time the U.S. authorities began to question him about Dennis in the early 1940s, he was hastily retreating from the idea that he was ever influenced profoundly by a now hounded Dennis. Instead, he bolstered the notion that Dennis's animus toward the New Deal was partially personal—the "personal" being "political" taken to an entirely new level—in aid of fascism. As he recalled it, one Beatrice Weller of New York had "known" Dennis "since World War I," was "very friendly" with him, "having frequently visited him in his home" and "had always been a good friend" of the predictor of fascism. "While discussing Dennis's Cynic philosophy, Miss Weller recalled that she been told by an old girl friend of Dennis name[d] Millie"—making this twice-removed hearsay and, therefore, susceptible to severe challenge—"that prior to the first inauguration of President, Dennis had a long talk with [FDR] and discussed with him the financial condition of the country at that time." It was "suggested to Roosevelt that he [Dennis] be permitted to construct a [plan] which would alleviate the financial embarrassment of the country" and the president-elect "would make him a member of his Cabinet. This [Roosevelt] is reported to have refused to do and, consequently, Dennis has ever since been very anti-Administration."[17]

Alienated in the military, at odds with the State Department, rejected by Wall Street, then—apparently—rebuffed by the president-elect, Dennis was becoming increasingly estranged from those who ruled the nation of his birth. He was becoming an example of the "frustrated elite" that he was to assert later would become a principal foundation for fascism. This estrangement was garnished by a volatile dash of racial resentment for he had been compelled to banish his family into oblivion in order to reach the point where he could even aspire to these lofty posts, thus augmenting his boiling resentments and contributing to an isolation that made it difficult to share his true anger with others. Dennis was ripe to be

recruited to a new movement that had arisen on a continent, Europe, that historically had been regarded by the United States as a region to be differentiated from and invidiously viewed. This European connection, to the contrary, made this movement even more attractive to him. Dennis had been primed to become the voice—and face—of fascism in the United States.

4

The Face—of Fascism

As the New Deal accelerated in the midst of severe deprivation, economic royalists and captains of industry were enraged at the presumed curtailing of their prerogatives. In such a feverish atmosphere Dennis found that more and more were willing to lend an ear to his prediction that fascism was the only way out. That his was becoming the none too friendly face of fascism was ironic indeed in light of the fact that when some cast their eyes upon his features, they had to stare and squint, not sure if they should believe their very eyes. For the man predicting—and these "predictions" fell just short of glowing policy prescriptions—fascism's imminence and the presumed rise of the "Aryans," had more than a hint of ebony. Arguably and contradictorily, Dennis's countenance complicated the ascension of the regression that was fascism, though such bias about facial facades was in itself regressive. For his less than "white" face was bound to raise searching questions about the words flowing from behind his protuberant and fleshy lips. This was fortuitous in the sense that hurdles strewn in the path of fascism are easy to welcome but in another sense Dennis's fall did not address the roots of a unique U.S.-style fascism, which would inexorably be fueled by racist bias, but, instead, set the stage for—possibly—its future advance.

Dennis, perhaps because of his at times gruff exterior—a shield meant to repel inquiring minds who might innocently pose intractable questions about his family background—did not attract a bevy of undying, unflinching admirers. This was also true to a degree of the opposite sex though it is indubitably true that a number of women found him irresistible—though it is unclear what they would have thought if they had been able to examine his family tree.

Her attitude may have been influenced by the suited, taciturn FBI agents who confronted her, but his appropriately named former fiancée,

Mildred Blackman, was not helpful to his cause when interviewed about him in the spring of 1943—though, admittedly, former sweethearts are not necessarily the least prejudiced of witnesses. She dumped him—not vice versa she was quick to add—and, apparently, this was not unrelated to the point that back then, in the early 1930s, "he very frequently complained to her about his poor financial status"; the "delay in their marriage plans was also due to his financial condition and had it not been for this worry she would have probably married" him. Dennis "complained to her that at the time she was going with him he was in the lowest financial condition of his entire life." Dennis's eruptive departure from Seligman and the State Department may have frightened potential employers who may have thought quite properly that they would have been the next object of his enraged wrath if they pursued policies with which he disagreed. This meant also that for much of his life Dennis was dependent on contributions from individual men of wealth with reputations for eccentricity as well developed as his.

Thus, the impecunious Dennis adopted a monkish lifestyle. He "read the Congressional Record very religiously and especially scrutinized the speeches of certain members of the United States Congress." Dennis, she said, "was a great admirer of the former [Senator and Governor] Huey Long. He also read extensively the works of Friedrich Nietzsche," "as well as a Sir William Keynes" (she was possibly thinking of the famed economist John Maynard Keynes). He had a "wonderful memory" too.

Ms. Blackman did not sound as if she were the type who would be enamored by such stiff-necked rectitude. She did not sound enthused when she recalled that instead of romantic evenings at fashionable bistros, she "attended numerous meetings" with him "which were held by Germans and German organizations." Damningly, she added, "they were German meetings inasmuch as all speakers would begin and end their speeches with 'Heil Hitler' " and he "appeared to be well known to those present" and "he appeared to be very sympathetic to Hitler and his movement." This was not the only touch of Deutschland in their encounters. "He would attempt to explain to her his political theories [and] he would often refer to 'Das Kapital.' "

Dennis, she thought, was irked with the New Deal since his "aspirations to a Cabinet position in the first Roosevelt Administration" were foiled. When she first met him, "he was in the midst of his campaign in support of Roosevelt and she stated that he had often told her that he expected a rich reward." Dennis "had received his introduction into the

inner circle of the Roosevelt Machine [*sic*] at that time through Adolph Berle, with whom Dennis had attended Harvard" and "who she believed at that time was a close friend of Dennis." His "failure" to receive a Cabinet or other high-level post, she thought, "made him very bitter towards Roosevelt."

But what was particularly uncomplimentary in her less than flattering appraisal of him was her riveting recollection—not just that he "was an ardent admirer of Hitler"—but, more so, "when they were in attendance at a theater and a newsreel flashed a picture of Hitler, Dennis would stand and [declare] 'Heil Hitler.' "[1]

Dennis was burning with grievances to the point where he was not only ready to throw overboard his own country but his erstwhile allies as well. The alleged slight from the New Dealers was just the latest in a slew, piled on others, from other elites. He was ready to see this group of elites replaced with another—that included himself.

What made Dennis's impassioned words persuasive was that he included liberal doses of antipathy toward entities that were worthy of searching critique but did not necessarily receive it consistently. The attraction of fascism in the United States was not necessarily its transatlantic ties but its often stinging analysis of the shortcomings of bourgeois democratic capitalism. The catch was that fascism would have changed things decisively—but for the worst. Though he sought to moonwalk away from fascism later in life, Dennis never really came to grips with this dilemma.

Still, from the margins, he raised points that liberals especially disdained. Taking to the pages of Mencken's *American Mercury*—a frequent recipient of his diatribes—he argued against the then popular idea of "collective security" globally. That was not all. It was "equally absurd" to "talk about equality of economic opportunity in a world in which the British, Americans and French dominate nearly two-thirds of all territory and resources and virtually exclude immigrants." He mused about "another world war" in which the "Haves" would seek to "check expansion of the Have-Nots."[2] This was an aspect of Dennis's approach: he did not hesitate to invoke nettlesome matters of class that barely concealed the question of "race" which had done so much to complicate his own existence.

But what helped to endear Dennis to many and cause them to downplay or even ignore his fascist leanings was his repetitive denunciations of Communists. "The Communists have only one real worry these days," he

thought, "and that is Fascism. For this danger, as for most others, they have a formula—a Kilkenny cat-fight between the Democracies and the Fascists"—precisely what occurred when the United States and United Kingdom lined up against Italy and Germany. Dennis had another approach: "it is time—if it is not too late—for America to wake up to the Communist menace."[3]

But Dennis's own insensitivity toward those who were Jewish and his inured Anglophobia made him not the ideal trumpeter of this ideal. He could not stand what he perceived as "the chief emotions" being "exploited," in the run-up to war, that is, "hatred of anti-Semitism and love of the British." It just "so happens," thought Dennis, "that our Eastern seaboard aristocracy and our most elegant Eastern universities and private schools are steeped in the Anglophile tradition."[4]

But Dennis was developing a hardly disguised contempt for this "Eastern seaboard aristocracy," which dominated Wall Street and the State Department and now, with the rise of FDR, was controlling the White House. More than that, though he admired some British elites—Eton and Oxford and all the rest—there was much about them generally that he despised. There was "no doubt," he said presciently, that "Britain will decline in years to come: her present birth-rate dooms her to the rank of a second-rate power in another fifty years." Almost giddy, he beamed that "the European scales are now controlled by the Rome-Berlin axis rather than by England and France, because Hitler and Mussolini are more daring than any Liberal democratic government can possibly be, they having less to lose and more to win by extreme tactics. England and France," he concluded triumphantly, "could not possibly win anything out of a defeat of Hitler and Mussolini, and even if completely victorious in a military way, would suffer incalculable losses."[5]

Unlike others on the right, he made distinctions they usually abjured. Thus, he proclaimed, "the only imperialism that works or pays is that of land colonization and national security. Financial imperialism"—his bugaboo, stretching back to his star-crossed relationship with Wall Street—"like moral imperialism, neither works nor pays." Thus, the morally hardened and calloused Dennis thought highly of the U.S. seizure of California and Texas. But "should we intervene to check Communism in Mexico," he asked rhetorically at a time when that nation's seizing control of its oil wealth had roiled relations with Washington. "Certainly not," he harrumphed. He was to argue not inconsistently later that he was as opposed to U.S. intervention against communism, just as he was

opposed to intervention against fascism—the former did not make him out to be a Communist sympathizer, he contended, just as the latter did not convert him into a feckless advocate of the Fascist. The more measured Dennis, who also rebuked Liberals for their "tolerance of, or cooperation with, the Communists," thought that "we should first check [communism] at home" before veering abroad. Such effrontery warmed the cockles of his fellow rightists, but few were pleased by his accompanying admonition that "we should neither intervene nor exert strong diplomatic pressure on behalf of defaulted loans" by Wall Street pashas. This bashing of Wall Street was nothing new, nor was Dennis opposed to slyly slipping into this discourse, subversive racial propaganda. "As we are not prepared to colonize Mexico or any other Latin American country, and as we do not want racial assimilation, our only hope in Latin America lies in developing native governments more respectful of our rights."[6] Typically, Dennis was rubbing the U.S. elite's nose in the muck of its racial dilemma, as he was making comments otherwise comfortable to these same forces. At times it seemed Dennis was driven by a desire to revel in and expose the contradictions of a society often blind to its own demerits, as much as anything else.

In deriding "Roosevelt's Class War," his supposed "re-distribution of wealth," he stuck the knife in this patrician's party. Sure, said Dennis, the Democrats once stood up for "the underdog region," the South, but prior to FDR "it showed little solicitude for underdog number one, the Negro, or underdog number two, the poor white." As is evident, Dennis was not above borrowing rhetoric from his antagonists on the left, but more than this, his nervous tic of finding a way to refer to "the Negro" in those days ineluctably meant that at times he would sound left. "Marx's idea," said Dennis, "that the poor have a separate political interest as a class is the biggest political idea of the past hundred years."[7]

But with all his dalliances with left-wing rhetoric, there was no mistake that Dennis was viewed widely as a raw acolyte of fascism. While others were mourning or lamenting "appeasement" in Munich, Dennis was of another view. Prague—a prime victim of Munich—was gaining sympathy but Dennis was decidedly unimpressed, not least since as he saw it, the marginalizing of the Slovaks by the Czechs was too glaring to ignore. The latter had "assumed the role of virtually monopolistic holders of governmental offices in the country," which "permitted only an insignificant percentage of men of other races to be appointed to governmental jobs. This is especially marked in the military service" and had contributed as

well to allotting Czechs a "privileged economic position." Viewing Central Europe through a North American lens, he objected that "in order to hold their abnormal country together, they have had to boss other racial groups; by bossing them they irritated them further and further." Thus, he shed no tears for Prague and, indeed, in a harbinger of the splitting of this state in the wake of the ouster of Communists from power decades later, he argued that the "Czechoslovak State" should be "reduced to its normal racial proportions."[8]

Hence, Munich was no tragedy as he saw it. "Fortunately for America and the world," he announced, "Chamberlain and Daladier were uninfluenced by American public opinion." For, he continued in words that would return to bite him, "unpalatable as it may be for us to accept the idea, it must be recognized that Hitler, when analyzed simply on the basis of historical fact, is not only the greatest political genius since Napoleon but also the most rational." The Chancellor, thought Dennis, like other "Germans" was "as rational as going to the pantry when you are hungry or to the fire when you are cold. Eighty million German bellies crave the food of Central and Eastern Europe and take steps to obtain it. What could be more rational?" British North America needed labor to work the fields, what could be more rational than kidnapping and enslaving Africans to do the job? Like fascists generally, Dennis had been coarsened but, unlike most of his fellow believers, his coarseness was shadowed ineradicably by his reality, which included similar rationalizations for the rankest of color discrimination. For Dennis now believed that "rights and security will be determined by the force factors" and "our first task is to stop sentimentalizing over these trends"—might makes right, get over it, Dennis seemed to be saying.[9]

Dennis refused to see a meaningful distinction between fascism and the bourgeois democratic capitalism that had caused his mother's side of the family so much grief. "To demonstrate this fallacy" of believing otherwise, Dennis said "it is necessary only to point out the legal rights and status of Japanese in California, Jews in Germany, Negroes in Alabama, natives in South Africa (who are not even allowed to walk on sidewalks with the Europeans) and kulaks in Russia." How could the United States purport to be superior, given its "race inferiority theories . . . of which" the nation had "its full quota."[10] But what of the policies of his presumed patrons in Berlin? Weren't they inconsistent with Dennis's views? The short answer was yes—as even Dennis admitted. "I don't see how any movement which was anti-Semitic could succeed in this country," he ar-

gued in 1934. "Racism could never become the plank of a successful political program. . . . Hitler says that the Jew cannot be a citizen of Germany. I consider that position to be unsound nationalism" and "as for any persecution or organized violence against Jews in this country, I consider it unthinkable."[11]

Dennis denied that the United States had the moral—or any—authority to challenge fascism, as long as it enjoyed brutal ideologies of racism. He, on the other hand, saw fascism as "a revolutionary formula for the frustrated elite"—a telling and accurate phrase this—"in an extended crisis of the prevailing social system of liberal capitalism," which was also not an incorrect perception, in light of the devastation wrought by the Great Depression. As he saw it, this frustrated elite were "more revolutionary in temper than the unemployed proletarian and more skilled in the techniques of effective group action. For our purposes," he delineated perhaps overoptimistically, "the elite may be considered to [include] one-fourth to one-third of the population" and "would include all the professional classes, all businessmen, all farmers, all persons having incomes well above the average." The "Communists expect," he opined, "that the elite will be declassed in mass by a prolonged capitalist decline and that, in their adversity, they will go over to the proletarian revolution." Dennis thought this fanciful: "things are not likely to happen that way. People don't ordinarily prove turncoats in class war, certainly not the elite," but one thing could be relied on and that was "the elite may be expected to change the game when too many of them begin to lose at it"—and Dennis, scraping for handouts, was more than ready to "change the game" and oust the "ins" on behalf of the "outs."

Though at times it seemed that Dennis had removed the human element from the arrival of fascism, making it seem that its emergence was akin to night following day, occasionally he was more subjective. Then, at other times he argued that "big business has been making fascism inevitable" for "no country in the world has a larger army of little Napoleons of business and yes-men than the United States. . . . we have perfected techniques in propaganda and press and radio control which should make the United States the easiest country in the world to indoctrinate with any set of ideas." Thus, he said, "we have on every hand the makings of an American fascism both in potential causes and in operating social mechanisms." How so? The impending "war"—ironically with fascist powers—would contribute mightily to the "fascization of America" and "would be effected by the General Staff in secret conferences at

Washington, just as the fascization of business through the large trust and combine has been already effected in closed conferences in the lower canyons of Manhattan." He turned to his old friend from Harvard, Adolph Berle, for substantiation of his viewpoint since "the exposition of the logic of an American fascism has been stated by Berle and [Gardiner] Means in their book 'The Modern Corporation and Private Property,' " which provided "the objective conditions which might furnish some of the causes of an American fascism."

Dennis also sketched a blueprint for U.S. fascism emerging that seemed to dovetail with the approaches of the very Dixiecrats he otherwise abhorred. Though he did not employ the phrase "states' rights," so resonant of the justification of Jim Crow, Dennis perceived in the power of states the seeds of fascism. "The late Senator Huey Long," he observed, "furnishes the best example of our nearest approach to a national fascist leader" and exposed the "strategic importance of the state governments in this country." For "control of a state government at once gives command of public funds, the taxing power to get more, and armed militia and a judiciary." Yes, "through control of state governments in this country, the full force of powerful regional and sectional feelings can be exploited in the struggle for power, although as soon as a movement sought national control, it would have to repudiate regionalism in the interests of the inevitable nationalism." Such a flip-flop did not particularly bother the cynical Dennis. In any case, "the complete control of one state government" should be a strategic objective of U.S. fascism, since it was "easier to obtain, and it is worth more than control of the American Federation of Labor and two or three farm associations put together." From there U.S. fascists could more easily and "quickly develop a militarized organization" since "no country boasts more militarized organizations, which wear distinctive uniforms and have discipline, than the United States." "Communism in Russia triumphed chiefly," he reminded, "because Lenin captured the loyalty of the troops" while the "Ku Klux Klan showed the possibilities of vigilante groups in this country." These armed terrorists provided a template for what Dennis was suggesting though, perhaps, aware of what their seizure of power might mean for him if he were to be unmasked as a "Negro," he spared his readers the details.

But the fact was that the KKK had risen in states—even midwestern states like Indiana—and seemed to have all the earmarks of the fascist nucleus he was describing. Here Dennis backed away from the precipice scoring the KKK as "hardly more than the racket of skilled organizers,"[12]

as he was practically arguing for a more refined Klan, a kinder and gentler Klan, just as it seemed that he himself represented "fascism with a human face."

There was a reason why Dennis seemed to frequently eliminate the human element in sketching the imminence of fascism: such thinking corresponded with his philosophy. " 'I am a fatalist,' " he argued in 1933. "I am prepared to take my medicine in the bread line, the Foreign Legion or with a pistol shot in the mouth and I ask no sympathy." This was typical of his heartless, pitiless, and desensitized approach to life and politics. It was as if the pain he had had to endure, not only in his career but also having to exile his mother and family to the Siberia of his faintest memories, had left him devoid of feeling. "I should like nothing better than to be a leader or follower of Hitler," he remarked tellingly, since "this mechanistic philosophy saves me from a feeling of inferiority, guilt, or personal failure." The answers were not in the stars, nor in God's hands, but in the impersonal workings of politics and economics. This materialist approach had a unique attraction for one like Dennis, who had ditched religiosity for reasons that remain as obscure and mysterious as his crossing the color line, though it may have been motivated by the fact that religiosity was all too intertwined with his earlier life as a Negro.[13]

Dennis may have been scraping for ducats but his becoming the face of fascism in the United States was not without its benefits since this European-based movement was in desperate need for U.S. contacts, especially those with the high profile he displayed. His appearances before Congress, his public speaking engagements, his prolific writing, all had brought him attention to a wider audience, an audience not limited to a nation with which he was increasingly at odds. Thus, when he visited Italy in 1936, "an official car" was "placed at his disposal because fascist officials called him 'an important American fascist.' "[14] The "Nazis could not have found a better native American for their purposes than Lawrence Dennis," said the prosecutor, O. John Rogge. Not only was he in close touch with high-level German functionaries but also while in Rome on this "official" journey, Dennis proudly mentioned "I had an hour's talk with Mussolini alone." He offered advice to his European colleagues, though they seemed to not embrace it. While in Berlin he met with Karl Boemer of the Propaganda Ministry and told him, " 'why don't you treat the Jews more or less as we treat the Negroes in America? You can practice discrimination and all that, but be a little hypocritical and moderate and do not get in conflict with American opinion.' " This sneer-

ingly cynical advice was repeatedly offered to Berlin, to no avail. Dennis also acknowledged receiving funds from Germans but it was not what his detractors thought. He claimed "he had won the money playing cards, taking some of it from members of the staff of the German Embassy" in Washington.[15]

It was not just the Italians and Germans with whom Dennis was consorting. It was not unusual when Dennis was found rubbing shoulders with Maurice Garreau-Dombasle, commercial attaché of the French Embassy, who had given a reception with music in the foyer of the main ballroom of the exclusive Plaza Hotel in Manhattan for "Mme. Paul Claudel" wife of the ambassador. Yes, "Dennis the Negro" would have been barred at the door, while "Dennis the Fascist" was welcomed and embraced.[16] The perverse illogic of Jim Crow had brought the United States to this cruel point, that the accident of birth was deemed more important than the adoption of ideology—this was a point that the nation began to retreat from haltingly and reluctantly after the fascist powers had waged war on this nation, almost bringing it to its knees.

As Dennis began to emerge in the 1930s as the "brain" behind U.S. fascism, he became a target of invective—a bête noire, so to speak. On the other hand, others were welcoming him with open arms. When Dennis toured Portland, Oregon in 1937, the trip was "most successful" as "principals of every dealer house in the city" attended, including "senior officers" of major banks. The "reaction" was "splendid" and, said one attendee in a "personal and confidential" message, "nearly every one of the seventy-five present has either called me by phone or called to see me personally to say they felt that this was by far the best and most logical talk along these lines that had ever been given in Portland."[17] In Los Angeles he was also "very enthusiastically received. . . . this program was broadcast over a local station and the Club claims a radio audience of 30,000."[18]

What kind of message was he delivering at these gatherings where he was rapturously received? The United States was headed for fascism, he declared. It was inevitable.[19] "What I defend at present," he said, "is more or less a socialistic managerial state" involving "economic planning and vast public investment," that is, "pursuing much the same objectives under Fascism, Nazism and Communism. . . . I see no ideological conflict between any of these currents of the wave of the future," he declared. "To avoid confusion, why not call it 'Collectivism for America'? I shan't particularly mind it being called by my opponent an American Fascism on the ground that the approach to the problem is closer to that made by

Italian fascism or German National Socialism than to that made by Russian Communism."[20]

Despite his idea that his schemes carried some resemblance to communism, the beleaguered U.S. left, then struggling against formidable foes on the right, demonized him repeatedly, particularly with the onset of the "popular front" which sought alliance with the New Deal. Thus, one left-wing analysis expressed horror and fury when in 1939 a "self-styled 'group of New York business and professional men' met in the Lexington Hotel in New York City and founded the American Fellowship Forum." A "tall, well-groomed, former Professor of German Literature at Columbia University, Dr. Friedrich Ernest Ferdinand Auhagen"—reputedly a good friend of Dennis's—"was appointed Director." To announce their debut "polite, expensively printed cards announcing the founding of the Forum were mailed to prominent professional and business men. On April 19, 1939, the first public meeting of the Forum was held in New York City at the hotel capitol. The subject of the lecture delivered at this meeting was 'America and Germany—Contrasts without Conflicts.' " Who was invited to address this critical subject on this auspicious occasion? Who was deemed sufficiently weighty to hold the attention of the mighty assembled. Lawrence Dennis, of course.

Again when the isolationist and putatively pro-fascist "America First" grouping held a "mass meeting" in Manhattan shortly thereafter, "newspaper photographs showed among the crowd the faces of August Klapprott, New Jersey German American Bund leader; Edward James Smythe who had recently negotiated joint activities between the Bund and the Ku Klux Klan"; and "Lawrence Dennis."[21] However, it was Dennis's face that was better known, not least since he was so articulate and such a prolific writer.

Dennis, of course, sought to deny what seemed to be obvious to many others—that he was at the center of a vast right-wing conspiracy. Auhagen, he maintained, was a "naturalized American of German birth" and "has never been a Nazi Party member." As for another presumed Nazi agent, he had only "exchanged social amenities" with him and as for Berlin itself, well, huffed Dennis, the highly regarded Ivy Lee, the doyen of the entire field of public relations, "had as one of his clients the Nazi government"—so what was the big deal about Dennis associating with Germany?[22]

Moreover, unlike his comrades among the Forum and America First, Dennis was more connected—not only to Charles Lindbergh, the ulti-

mate in celebrity, but also to a range of New Dealers and well-placed Exeter and Harvard graduates. This lengthy list of luminaries included Huey Long. And it was this relationship that sparked so much concern among the U.S. left, for the "Kingfish" was not some obscure stump speaker or German émigré, he was a potent politician whose aspirations for the White House were not unrealistic. As noted, the roots sunk by Long and his movement in Louisiana were a prototype of what Dennis envisioned for the nation, that is, a state by state march to power. The words do not necessarily ring true but one left-wing writer cited Dennis as praying for the day when Long "'could get up before 500 of our big industrialists in a secret meeting, he could give them a proposition they would prefer to the Roosevelt disorder. He needs to take a good look at Hitler and Mussolini. He needs a Goebbels.'"[23] Might that be Lawrence Dennis? On the other hand, if Long's Louisiana constituents—soaked as they were in the bile of racist bias—had been made aware of Dennis's background, both he and Long would have been in deep trouble.

Nevertheless, these remarks attributed to Dennis were not simply idle musings. The Klan had shown that protofascism could be the basis of a mass movement. "The Nazis succeeded in electing Fred C. Gartner to Congress from the Fifth Congressional District in Philadelphia in November 1938. Gartner says he isn't Nazi. But he is the President of the Alliance of German Societies of Philadelphia and this alliance is Nazi dominated."[24] De Witt Wallace, the fabulously wealthy owner and publisher of the *Reader's Digest* "told his staff he did not want Hitler defeated." "Foreign fascist propaganda written by Mussolini, Ribbetrop, Goebbels, Goering, etc. was first introduced to America by William Randolph Hearst," the powerful press mogul, said the left-wing propagandist, George Seldes.[25] Fascism seemed to be becoming less of a sideshow with the "swarthy" Dennis as the ringmaster.

The brilliant architect, Philip Johnson was so "inspired by the fascistic writings of Lawrence Dennis" that he and his comrades "created their elitist National Party in 1934."[26] So convinced were so many that fascism was the "wave of the future," that even some of the more affluent in the U.S. Jewish community were said to "finance anti-Semitism"; this included, it was claimed by a writer of the radical left, officers and directors of Florsheim Shoe Company in Chicago who were "responsible for giving money which was used to distribute the 'Protocols of Zion.'"[27]

Whatever the case, fascism was beginning to catch the spotlight and Dennis himself was becoming the acceptable face of this movement.

5

Fascism and Betrayal

On friendly terms with Senator Huey Long, meeting one-on-one with Benito Mussolini, an acerbic commentator on radio and in the press of the United States, praised in elite circles in Berlin, Lawrence Dennis had come a long way since his beginnings as a Negro child preacher. But a larger audience knew him best from his abundant writings, particularly his books, especially *The Coming American Fascism* published in 1936. With these books he established himself firmly as the authentic domestic voice of fascism, though what he was saying in these pages was not exactly the popular impression of this burgeoning ideology, making one wonder if these books were actually read by those who were buying these tomes—or were they simply bought to adorn bookshelves and coffee tables by those who wanted to appear to be cognizant of a trend that was sweeping Europe?

Though Jim Crow Louisiana and the Klan and like-minded paramilitary groupings were seen by many as nuclei for a genuine U.S. fascism, Dennis was trapped in an inconsistency that made him an utterly contradictory spokesman for this movement. For he spent considerable energy in this book and elsewhere in seeking to reconcile fascism—which if it were to grow had to be grounded in a wrenching racism—with racial equality. Now Dennis was an agile verbal and intellectual acrobat but even this feat was beyond his strenuous and dexterous efforts. Still, as the United States itself gradually came to recognize that white supremacy was imperiling national security—notably as the Pacific War was unfolding—Dennis's admonitions certainly presaged the proposition that became heartfelt subsequently, that is, that conservative and center-right politics in the United States should at least acknowledge racial equality as acceptable. Ultimately, this welcome transformation may be his lasting legacy.

*

By the summer of 1936, Dennis was ensconced at the Central Hotel in Berlin and enthusing about his reception. "I have been driving extensively over Germany, Belgium, Holland, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Switzerland and Austria." He had met with Mussolini "alone, as well as [having] numerous talks with important people." In London, "John Strachey. . . with whom I spent several hours, had read my latest book and considered it a thoroughly sound and adequate exposition of the subject," he added with typically defensive conceit. Dennis too disagreed with the "general attitude" in the United States that "Mussolini is merely a clown and Hitler merely a nut." To make sure, just as he had engaged Il Duce, he added, "I expect to get interviews with Hitler. . . . then I go to Russia for a month's run around."[1]

Berlin was as enthusiastic about Dennis as he was about Germany. The FBI intercepted and translated a letter from Berlin's America Institute which was both blunt and effusive: "to get right to the point, I should like to suggest that you visit Mr. Lawrence Dennis. . . . you need only contact him by telephone and give him my regards. Mr. D is a 'big shot' and through him you would undoubtedly be able to make all the desirable and currently possible connections with regard to the most recent developments," it was added cryptically.[2]

Dennis's journey to Berlin was facilitated by his frequent visits to their embassy in Washington. "I went there," he recalled later. "They gave dinners and I was invited to their dinners" and "they took me out to dinner"; yes, "they regarded me as a friendly ally," he admitted. That is how he was able to cross the Atlantic "in 1936. . . .I went to the Nuremberg party" rally and, of course, "the annual dinner of the Harvard Club of Berlin" said this true son of crimson. "I never had any contacts with the anti-Semitic movements in America," he said—which may be accurate depending on how one defines "contacts." "I had worked for three years for a Jewish firm, Seligman," he added defensively.

Dennis's meetings with Mussolini—"he talked with me . . . he didn't say anything and I didn't say anything"—and other top fascists have to be viewed in the wider context of this European tour. Thus, he also met in France with the top French leader, Pierre Laval, and in Moscow with George Kennan, who "invited me to dinner, lunch and . . . took me to some parties (naturally, the Communists "didn't have" Dennis "rated as well as the Germans did and the French"; he "had no access to the top people").

"One of my most esteemed and valued contacts over there was Keynes," said Dennis, the inveterate name-dropper, of his visits in London. "One morning I got a call at my hotel from Keynes . . . he said, 'I'd like very much to see you. Will you come around and have lunch with me today.' . . . before that Keynes had published an article by me in the 'Economic Journal' which he edited and ran. He was very pleasant. He thought quite highly of me." Again, reflecting his desire for esteem, he added, "Frank Breckenridge told me after the lunch that Keynes had talked to him and spoken very highly of me. Keynes had a very high opinion of me. That was very flattering. . . . I was very greatly touched by the fact that [he] had read my book and read my stuff and he had a high opinion of me. That was one of the most flattering friendships I ever had. I saw my friend Strachey then. . . . he [also] thought very highly of me"; Strahey was "an aristocrat and had lots of money," he added fondly. "We used to sit up and talk till way in the wee hours of the morning. He was one of the smartest Englishmen I knew," while he and Keynes agreed that "government had to intervene in depressions and spend our way out of the depression." Once more expressing indirectly what he hoped for himself, he added, "he lived in a beautiful house. He had a lot of money. He had two or three servants there. He lived in complete detachment." Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, was "rather guarded"; "I never liked him very much," added Dennis since he—Dennis—"didn't approve" of his Munich agreement, which seemed to be a subsequent revision of his earlier opinion.

Yet it was those meetings in Germany that caused blood pressure to flutter in Washington, not sessions at Keynes's mansion. Yes, said Dennis, he met with Rudolf Hess—"he was more of an intellectual than the others," a "man of considerable learning. He talked to me more than the others." The "others" being Goering and Goebbels: "we talked about war and we talked about the Jews and national socialism. They didn't express violent anti-Semitic views," he reassured. "Goebbels was something of an intellectual," akin to the "German" he "met" who "had been a Professor at Harvard when" Dennis matriculated.[3]

But Washington had another concern about Dennis's gallivanting. An "informant stated that as long as she had known Dennis he had never seemed to have any money and he would not have been able to finance this trip himself to the best of her knowledge. . . . he had always given the impression of being distinctly short of funds and on her visits to the Den-

nis home in New Jersey, she had observed it [to] be a rather dilapidated house with no indication of prosperity."[4] The FBI was pleading inconsistent counts, positing Dennis's affluence when that served to indict him and the opposite otherwise. On the other hand, the Bureau's suspicions that Dennis may have been traveling to Berlin to receive instructions—or at least, inspiration—were not misguided.

Suspicions about Dennis reached a fever pitch when during his tour of Germany, he was photographed standing next to a uniformed swastika-bearing Nazi in a portrait that was circulated widely, particularly by Henry Luce's *Life* magazine. This one photo caused Dennis much grief. In this case, a picture was worth more than a thousand insightful words. Dennis conceded, as he had no choice, that he was "beside a uniformed young Nazi on the grandstand of one of the colossal stadia at Nuremberg"; but, he explained, it was all rather innocent: "these young Nazi elite guards assigned to act as our hosts and guides lived with us in our hotel. They had breakfast with us around 8, bundled us off in large buses to the first function of the day around 9, brought us back to the hotel for lunch, took us off to another afternoon function, brought us back for dinner, and took us to the evening function and brought us home around midnight. We were with them the best part of eighteen hours a day,"[5] he explained with growing exasperation and this picture had to be viewed in this context. But images speak louder than words and this portrait proved to be extremely damaging to Dennis.

"I wrote a long letter to LIFE telling them that their paragraph about me was a mass of lies," said a frustrated Dennis later. "I never entertained a German diplomat in my home. I never entered the German Embassy. I never had any correspondence with it or its personnel," yet another "fact" he subsequently revised. The depth to which he had sunk was exposed when he observed that he was thinking of filing a "libel suit" but "with my reputation how can I show I am damaged by such libels?"[6]

"If in the discussion, it be assumed that one of our values," Dennis announced, "should be a type of racism which excludes certain races from citizenship, then the plan of execution should provide for annihilation, deportation, or sterilization of the excluded races. If, on the contrary," he continued, "as I devoutly hope will be the case, the scheme of values will include that of a national citizenship in which race will be no qualifying or disqualifying condition, then the plan of realization must, in so far as

race relations are concerned, provide for assimilation or accommodation of race differences within the scheme of smoothly running society."

Dennis was either terribly naïve or fiendishly and devilishly slick in devising a fascist blueprint when he sought to deflect attention away from the traditional object of frustrated passions—the Negro—and toward the elites he sought to replace, for example, Wall Street. Whatever the case, Dennis's *The Coming American Fascism,* which contained these and other provocative words, was the extended version of his prediction of what awaited his homeland. Strikingly, it received significant attention though—for whatever reason—few chose to focus on what he had to say about racism.

For Dennis went further than many analysts, trying to accomplish the virtually impossible by reconciling fascism and racial equality by calling for an overarching nationalism, or even internationalism. "The more inclusive the unifying principle," he argued, "the more conflict is avoided and the greater cooperation is achieved. Nationalism would be more inclusive in the United States than any formula of unity based on race, religion, profession or tastes. As Americans, we are all of one nationality, though not of one race, religion, profession or set of cultural tastes. Of course, a perfect internationalism would be still more unifying and inclusive."

Was he serious? The Germany with which he was all too familiar was rising on a towering mountain of corpses of outcasts, while Italy was whipping up chauvinism by invading hapless Ethiopia. The "kinder and gentler" fascism that Dennis was espousing seemed out of touch with reality. Dennis desperately wanted a radical alteration of the status quo, but the domestic right-wing forces he was relying upon to bring this about needed the instrumentality of racism to bring this about—a reality he seemed reluctant to confront. Still, he did qualify his vision in these pages, touting a "coming American fascism," by asserting that "this book is essentially one man's definition of what a desirable fascism, in his way of thinking, would be like."

Now Dennis was not opposed to class exploitation, he simply requested that it not be intertwined so seamlessly with "race," just as he was certainly not opposed to class—or elite—rule, he simply wanted that this too not be racially exclusive. In this sense, he was not that different from mainstream opinion-molders in the United States in the twenty-first century.

There was "the inevitability of the leadership of the elite," he said. "The elite do rule, as liberal theory does not recognize; that they, and not the majority of people, make most of the important choices. . . . their acts are not subject to popular control by the ballot or the enforcement of the Constitution in the way liberal theory supposes possible." The problem, he thought, was not elite rule per se but the kind of elite rule being exerted by those now in power, those he sought to replace. The "shirted legions of fascism," said Dennis, "are the answers of the popular will to correspondingly effective uses of power by economically mighty minority groups." But Dennis was ensnared in gnarling contradictions. In the United States these "shirted legions of fascism" would *not* be "racially" integrated and even if by some weird stroke of fate they were, all the incumbent elite had to do to disrupt them effectively would be to ply the age-old tool of divide and conquer on the basis of "race," just as the budding fascist movement would have been derailed effectively if Dennis's own controversial ancestry had been exposed.

Though Dennis was seeking to reconcile "race" and fascism, he was decidedly old-fashioned when it came to gender. "The fascist insists," said a man who should know, "on ranking far above all other values attainable by women those of wifehood and good motherhood. He holds that the paramount objectives of public policy, so far as women are concerned, should be to make good wives and mothers and not to make as many soft berths as possible for old maids and thus to put a premium on the avoidance of marriage"; "one of the effects of [the] liberal," he said, "is to encourage spinsterhood and sterility among the classes best suited to reproduce."

And though Dennis advocated a kind of internationalism, his vision of fascism had not ruled out more powerful nations expanding at the expense of their weaker neighbors. "The underprivileged fascist nations," he declared, "will have to pay more dearly in individual sacrifices for their bid for expansion than the now liberal nations had to pay for grabbing South Africa from the Boers, or Texas and California from Mexico, just as the American settlers in the middle of the 17th century paid more dearly for the rocky shores of New England snatched from the Indians than the American expansionists of 1848 had to pay for the fertile lands of Texas and California taken from Mexico in a war which was little more than a summer picnic." Actually, Dennis would argue later that this was not advocacy on his part, just ruthless realism. For as he also said, "the British mercantilism of the 18th century and the southern planter-

slavery system of the pre-industrial-revolution period each fought on American soil an utterly futile and foolish war to save what was doomed by the inevitable and irresistible trend of social changes."

"Inevitable" was one of Dennis's favorite words and he was to argue passionately later that he was not actually advocating "American Fascism" but, instead, simply announcing its inevitability and trying to make it more "desirable" by smoothing out its rough edges, for example, on the matter with which he was intimately familiar, that is, racism. "Economic conditions and events in the world today, the subjects of early analysis in this book," he said, "are providing the pressures which are driving this country and President Roosevelt towards fascism." Don't blame the messenger, Dennis seemed to say, for announcing what was coming. Still, he did not seem particularly perturbed with the demise of the status quo.[7]

Likewise, when in 1932 he penned his provocative book, *Is Capitalism Doomed?,* this seemed to be more a prognostication than a question. Here he acknowledged his "deep appreciation" to his old Harvard chum and then leading New Dealer, Adolph Berle, along with the prominent intellectual, Raymond Leslie Buell, "for having read the manuscript and having offered extremely helpful criticisms." That such leading figures would deign to be associated with Dennis who was already controversial was suggestive of how calamitous the obtaining situation was in the United States at that moment and the groping—like a man in a pitch-black room—for the way out.

Here too Dennis was unsparing, observing that the "main difference between the stock exchange and Monte Carlo is that the players in Wall Street draw dividends and interest on the stakes they keep in play, while at a casino the players only play and pay. This is why gambling on a roulette wheel develops few insane ideas." Unlike those right-wing intellectuals who followed him, Dennis—who was hostile to a society that compelled him to leave his family behind if he wanted to get ahead—announced with grim satisfaction, "of course, no intelligent person can be expected to imagine that capitalism, or any other pattern of social institutions, is perpetual." War did seem "perpetual," he proclaimed, as long as Wall Street dominated society. "The more we allow our foreign investments to grow and the more our statesmen and bankers involve us as a nation in international situations to protect these interests, the more certain becomes our participation in the next . . . war, which is as inevitable as the last war."

Again, "inevitable" was Dennis's word of choice. He was simply predicting coming events based on current trends; don't blame the marriage counselor for correctly predicting divorce, he seemed to be saying. Yes, this was disingenuous for Dennis, the counselor, also was not shy about making policy prescriptions to rescue the nation—as he saw it—from these current trends.

Just as fascists in Germany described themselves as "national socialists," Dennis was also not bashful about making declarations that would not have seemed unusual coming from the mouth of a Communist. Actually, this allowed him to make perceptive analyses about contemporary capitalism with an incisiveness far beyond the skills of his liberal counterparts. This also meant that he could attract the wavering and unsure rocked by the catastrophe that was the Great Depression. "The real grievance of the industrial nations against the Bolsheviks in Russia," according to Dennis, "is that communism has closed Russia as a field for inflation by foreign capital. Communism has eliminated Russia from the list of countries that formerly imported vast quantities of goods on credit, about 3 billion dollars having been lent to Russia by France alone by 1914." Dennis described himself as an "isolationist," particularly in his later years when the odor of fascism had become suffocating, but this tendency was also evident in his thinking early on, as he was generally critical of foreign interventions, which he perceived as just another excuse for bolstering the interests of Wall Street and other moneyed interests. "The Boer War, the present war of the United States on General Sandino in which over 100 American Marines and over 3000 Nicaraguans have uselessly lost their lives, or the present war of the Japanese on the Chinese in Manchuria are all concrete modern examples of the protection of foreign investments."[8]

Dennis thought that the ability of U.S. capitalism to run up debt outstrips the nation's ability to produce goods, thereby leading to crises and depressions—which was no lunatic notion.[9] However, contrary to popular perceptions, fascism became popular not because it advocated genocide and ethnic cleansing, it shrouded these noxious policies with a rapid flurry of rapier-like incisions against the weaknesses of contemporary capitalism, in a manner that liberals and other mainstream forces were incapable of replicating. This is what helped to bring them—and Dennis—adherents.

Though there were inherent and glaring flaws in much of what Dennis espoused—certainly his thinking that fascism and racial equality could be

reconciled in the United States was literally akin to fantasy—his critics generally were not up to the task of dissecting his ideas. One dismissed *The Coming American Fascism* peremptorily, asserting that "for him liberalism is only the mistress of capitalism and a pliant mistress" at that.[10] Another declared that "this book is far too long"; besides "he has no use for any foreign country mentioned, except perhaps Italy and Germany." With evident disbelief and horror, the reviewer concluded, "his adversary is Liberalism rather than Communism."[11] Francis Coker of Yale in the *American Political Science Review* concurred, noting in almost awestruck tones that Dennis "is as extreme and detailed as any Communist in attacking our existing capitalism."[12] But the legendary scholar, John Commons of Wisconsin in the *American Economic Review,* thought that Dennis "should, in my opinion, rate even above Pareto in Italy and Spann in Austro-Germany as a theoretical prophet of fascism. . . . I rate this book by Dennis [as representing] the leading theory of fascism."[13]

The larger point was that Dennis the Fascist was given a respectful hearing in a manner that generally eluded the most talented of Negroes, who generally were barred from having their critiques of the society into which they were born taken seriously—irrespective of whether their analyses indicted racism. What Dennis's critics did not realize was that Dennis the "Negro" had pervasive grievances against capitalism that were not assuaged by the rise of the New Deal, which—after all—had to compromise with its Dixiecrat wing, thereby lessening its ability to address Jim Crow. The obvious question that Dennis failed to address was whether fascism would prove better than liberalism in addressing racial equality. Yet, considering the viewpoint of some contemporary historians who have rebuked liberals in the United States for their abject weaknesses in addressing racial equality,[14] one comprehends more effectively why Dennis opted for extremism.

The hatred of a corps of businessmen for the New Deal to the point where some were not hostile to the notion of the president himself being deposed by extralegal means—this atmosphere provided fertile soil for the growth of fascism. It was in such soil that Dennis took root, growing to be deemed the "brain" behind this movement. Like a lodestar he was beginning to attract other minds deemed to be brilliant, including the talented and charismatic architect, Philip Johnson. Ironically, Johnson also "became warm friends" with that beacon of liberalism, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who described him as "brilliant and charming" with a

"bizarre political past" who was "thrilled by the Nazi rallies." He was also, according to Schlesinger, "impressed as well by the intelligent American fascist theoretician," that is, Dennis. That Johnson was considered "perhaps the most influential American architect of his generation" was reflective of Dennis's own magnetic appeal.[15]

This "architect of elegance" designed the Seagram Building in Manhattan and Lincoln Center. This "bachelor" was considered quite a catch, including—if one FBI informant was to be believed—deemed to be such by Dennis's own spouse,[16] though it is hard to swallow this claim easily in light of Johnson's homosexuality.

The U.S. Department of Justice thought it "was quite possible that Dennis has behind his activities the support of Philip Johnson," then of Cambridge, Massachusetts, "who is reported to be quite wealthy. Dennis received considerable sums of money from Johnson in 1940, totaling some $5200." Looking toward putting Dennis behind bars, it was noted that "none of these sums was reported as income by Dennis in his income returns."[17] The authorities also knew that "Philip Johnson has been a frequent visitor at the Dennis home."[18]

The FBI came to discover that Johnson too was well connected in prominent Nazi circles in Berlin ever since he visited there "in the summer of 1938." It was Dennis who "told me," said Johnson of a leading figure there and "I looked him up," said the architect. It was Dennis, said Johnson, who directed him to "a woman in Heidelberg," a "salon hostess at the time of the inception of Nazi Socialism and was apparently a brilliant conversationalist." Dennis, he acknowledged, "was a well known intellectual theorist in Germany," which evidently made him attractive to Johnson.

The inquisitive FBI agent interrogating him asked Johnson bluntly, "then we can state definitely that you had been furnishing Dennis approximately $100 a month from the time he left E. A. Pierce & Company up until the summer of 1940 and that in addition to those sums you furnished Dennis additional sums." Johnson replied, "that is correct. . . . it is perfectly possible that I might have given him more [and] larger sums than the regular $100.00." But in 1940, as the fascist powers marched inexorably to war with the United States, he broke with Dennis, though "out of pure friendship, I may have advanced him a few more checks" after that, Johnson explained. "My break with Dennis," he said, "was an intellectual disagreement on the values of theories and practices of Fascism"—"it was not a personal disagreement," he stressed. "Yes," John-

son acknowledged, "I would [say]" Dennis had fallen on hard times by then. Dennis had other mysterious sources of cash, he thought, that is, "it was cash—it was given him as he walked out of [his office] building, as I understand it," that is, anonymously, as if this were straight from the plot of a tawdry dime novel.

This was a rather damning admission, raising the specter that agents of Berlin or Rome were financing Dennis's crusade, and saw him as a possible U.S. leader if they were to prevail over this nation in war. But Johnson quickly bolstered Dennis's own frequently repeated assertion that he —Dennis—"does not" advocate fascism but "regards it as inevitable. . . . I think that he would not be displeased with it because it would make him more or less of an important personage, having predicted it. I do not feel he is a propagandist for it." Yet, this was a fine distinction, particularly since the German leader, "Von Gienanth arranged for Dennis to go the [Nazi] Party Congress" in Germany.

Johnson apparently was unaware of Dennis's family background—at least he did not comment on the irony of Dennis's meeting not only with prominent U.S. politicians, for example, "Ham Fish and Homer Bone" and "Senator Cutting, of course" but also segregationists, for example, "Representative Collins of Mississippi." The FBI no doubt was struck by the fact that Dennis read the "Frankfurter Zeitung, which has an economic supplement, which is widely read" and he did seem to know the prominent German personality "Von Trempel more than merely casually." But Johnson absolved himself of any taint to a degree by emphasizing "I have no information of his [Dennis's] life after the fall of 1940."[19]

Johnson's answers evidently did not please the FBI, so they "reinterviewed" him, and, expansively, he conceded that he had supplied thousands of dollars to Dennis over the years. The Bureau remained wary, skeptically declaring that it was "evident his ability to remember details of any type was very poor"; Johnson, amazingly, "never knew at any time what his bank balances were" and "he gave this money to Dennis always in the form of cash and always in $100 bills," which in their mind suggested that he did not want these contributions to be traced—and, if so, why? Was it because he thought there was something seditious about these exchanges? Yet, Johnson also "expressed surprise that Dennis should have had so much money"; "he stated that he was quite sure now that Dennis had received substantial funds from sources which were unknown to him prior to this time." Seemingly expressing a sense of be-

trayal, Johnson "said that he felt he had almost entirely supported Dennis." Perhaps feeling added pressure, Johnson also exposed more negative details about his erstwhile comrade, Dennis, as he "recalled that when planning his trip to Germany in 1938 he desired to attend the Nazi Party Festival at Nuremberg and Dennis suggested that he go to Washington to see Von Gienanth [of the German Embassy] who would probably supply him with the tickets."[20]

Johnson had been a good friend of Dennis but, like his former sweetheart, Mildred Blackman, he now was helping to dig his political grave. But this architect would be replaced as a source of funds and bonhomie by others—just as Blackman was supplanted by another woman. After their possible betrothal disintegrated in recriminations, Dennis met Eleanor Simson, born and raised in New York City—where they met—and where she "was operating a ballet school on 57th street." She had "studied dancing in France" and, therefore, had the European cosmopolitanism that he admired. She was also "about fourteen or fifteen years younger than Dennis" and in her prime child-bearing years. They married, had two daughters, and, for a while—as a result of Dennis riding the wave of a rising fascism—"they had two maids," and residences ranging from western Massachusetts to the affluent suburb of Bergen County, New Jersey, just across the George Washington Bridge from Manhattan.[21] It is unclear—yet another mystery of his mysterious life—if he ever shared with her the true story of his ancestry or, for that matter, if it would have mattered if he had. It is clear, however, that they were to divorce in the 1950s when his popularity had plummeted.

However, if Michael Ross, then of Philadelphia is to be believed, Dennis was to possess yet another reason for anger—or even racial resentments—for his own spouse was seeking to betray him, even early in their marriage. Ross, said the FBI, "first met Dennis in 1937 at the apartment of Manion Paschall, secretary to Doris Duke," the wildly eccentric and fabulously wealthy heiress to the tobacco fortune and namesake of the famous university. She was one of the many of affluence who were attracted to Dennis—and vice versa. But as the Bureau interpreted his words, "relations" between Dennis and his spouse were "somewhat strained over a period of years and an unhappiness exists between them"—or so it was said in early 1943. "Mrs. Dennis had been very friendly with Johnson and this was illustrated by the fact that Johnson had given the money to her when he was assisting Dennis" and "it was very obvious that they were very fond of each other. Informant stated," continued the FBI, "that it

was his belief that Mrs. Dennis was trying to 'hook Johnson' and would have married him if it was at all possible." She was also close to yet another gentleman, known simply as "Sumner," and it was "an unusual relationship." She "frequently calls at Sumner's office to visit him, at which time she announces herself as Mrs. Bishop." Of course, all of this could have been perfectly innocent. Mrs. Dennis could have simply been acting as an aggressive spouse acting attentively to advance the interests of her husband, who was reserved and not known as being convivial, though his livelihood depended on speaking fees and gaining subscriptions to his newsletter from the wealthy. The FBI may have been reading more into this than reality allowed. Thus, an agent of the FBI today might raise an eyebrow at the allegation that Doris Duke was "very fond of Mrs. Dennis"—though this may have been as innocent as her ties to Johnson and "Sumner"—or maybe not, as the mystery persists.[22]

Consider also that when FBI agents showed up on one's doorstep demanding answers to pointed questions about a controversial figure like Dennis, there may have been a tendency on the part of those queried to be intimidated and to give them what they thought was wanted, be it salacious detail or inculpating evidence or simply feral rumors. Or it could have compelled accurate though derogatory details that otherwise may not have seen the light of day.

Consider then Gilbert Redfern of "English birth" who met Dennis in Bucharest in the 1920s and bumped into him again in Manhattan in the mid-1930s. When queried by the Bureau, he "recalled in 1937 asking Dennis what the German government planned to do about the Czechoslovakian situation. At that time Dennis answered prophetically that the Germans anticipated taking over the Czechs"; this did not surprise Redfern since Dennis's "knowledge of foreign affairs" was "unusually extensive." It was at Dennis's request that Redfern arranged "an interview for him with Herbert Hoover," who termed Dennis a "crackpot revolutionary." Dennis, said Redfern, "knew and admired Oswald Mosley," the British fascist leader, which he knew since Redfern "had spent some time" with Dennis before the advent of World War II. Thus, Redfern knew that Dennis "was a close friend of Burton K. Wheeler," the powerful senator from the Far West. He had "heard that Dennis was part Negro but knew nothing about his personal affairs." He did know that Dennis was a "professional fascist—one who would have gladly become a Communist were the rewards sufficiently large. Being an opportunist, he made it a point to know all the possible Fascist rulers in America." As for Mrs. Dennis, she

was a "parlor pink," he thought, who "told her husband he was asking for trouble [by] soliciting Fascist writings."[23]

Now Dennis was controversial but as evidenced before the war, he could afford to employ two maids and he may have been tempting fate—and imperiling his style of life—with his notorious political stances. Yet, before December 1941, it was not easy to say that Dennis was skipping along the precipice of disaster when, for example, his positions against the United States entering the war were not that different from those of Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh—or the young Gerald Ford and Kingman Brewster (former Yale President), who also sympathized with this viewpoint.

Dennis, for example, had raised funds sufficient to place an advertisement in the *Yale Daily News,* outlining his position on nonintervention, an ad which "caused plenty of comment on the campus and we non-interventionists have hailed it as a brilliant expression of our viewpoint."[24]

Part of the controversy that ensued was one that was to dog Dennis for a good deal of his life, that is, who provided his funding. The leaders of the *Yale Daily News* " 'went to considerable trouble to investigate Mr. Dennis's backers and,' " they said they were " 'perfectly willing to reveal his name to any responsible person who should ask for it.' "[25] Well, replied a critic of Dennis, "in the hope that you may consider me such a responsible person, I now ask whether you would be good enough to let me know the name of Mr. Dennis's backer."[26]

It is unclear if this critic received a satisfactory response to his inquiry, but his question—who was funding Dennis?—was one that had occurred to a number who wondered how it was that he could survive while peddling predictions that many of his compatriots found odious. Soon, the FBI began to pose this same question—systematically.

6

Approaching Disaster

Dennis was leading what appeared to be a charmed existence, with a growing public profile that generated handsome speaking fees, increased subscriptions to his self-published newsletter, where he was able to pontificate about matters large and small, and, consequently, multiple residences. There was a material basis for Dennis's relative success—or so thought an investigator for the House Un-American Activities Committee, which ordinarily hounded Communists while giving fascists a pass. However, one of their investigators, James Metcalfe, observed in 1938 that "American firms in Germany were among the first to contribute to Hitler's religious program," and this list was a veritable all-star team of the corporate world: "Ford" and "Woolworth" leading the pack, while "the largest single contributor was the American Steel [company] in Dusseldorf, that is the United States Steel corporation"; the "Ford Motor Company has hired," it was said, "a large number of people who are today members of the German American Bund," a grouping known for its fervent pro-fascist sentiments.[1] Dennis would argue that this U.S. sympathy for fascism was also a material basis for his own prosperity but the FBI was not as certain. His "standard of living," it was said, "is in excess of his known income indicating money from undisclosed sources," believed to be Berlin-based.

His newsletter had a paltry "two hundred subscribers" at $24 per year, yet he had an office in the high-rent district at 205 East 42nd Street in Manhattan, a home in Bergen County, and another in western Massachusetts in the picturesque Berkshire Mountain district. He had two automobiles—a "Mercury and a station wagon"—at a time when many families had none.[2] With incredulity the FBI noted "in Becket [Massachusetts] he maintains a very nice home, living quite comfortable [*sic*], not wanting for any necessities and for very few luxuries," though he "makes $400 a month from his paper." Dennis's "doctor" who was in-

terviewed, told the Bureau "that he had visited Mr. Dennis's home on various occasions and Subject used to have an autographed picture of Mussolini hanging over the head of his bed"—"that was about five years ago," it was reported in 1942. "Subject has remarked to the doctor on numerous occasions that he feels the regimentation and efficiency of the Fascist and Nazi governments are far superior to our own type of government for getting things done."[3]

"If he's not on the payroll of the Nazis," huffed Senator Joseph H. Ball of Minnesota, "he should be," given his service to Berlin.[4]

But if Dennis, a man who was proud of his intelligence, just as he derided that of others, had applied his acuity more effectively—he, a man known for the perceptiveness of his predictions—he would have been able to foresee that seeming to advocate fascism would bring him to the threshold of disaster, sooner rather than later. Perhaps he should have recognized as well that his taking a view at odds with that of the dominant ruling elites he so cuttingly denounced would cause their agents to investigate more carefully the family background he had hidden so effectively.

One talent Dennis had cultivated effectively was that of the courtier. This skill was evinced in his courting of Charles Lindbergh, the celebrated aviator and personality whose sympathies for fascism were similarly evident. Writing from his comfortable home in Englewood, New Jersey, Dennis reached out to Lindbergh "at the suggestion of Colonel Truman Smith, with whom I had lunch yesterday. I am sending you a copy of the last number of my 'Weekly Foreign Letter.' "[5] Their exchange of letters led to a meeting "at the home of a common friend," an encounter that left Dennis "recalling" it "with pleasure." Dennis wanted to take this tie a step further as he sought to "talk over with you ways and means by which I might be of use to the America First Committee." Modestly and thoughtfully, Dennis said, "I have no wish for publicity in this connection—or compensation—and recognize that my name might be harmful. I can understand also that some of my more extreme views might be antipathetic to many"—a frank acknowledgment that Dennis was becoming radioactive. But Dennis was also accurate in asserting, "I do feel, however, that—along the strictly isolationist—Keep-America-Out-of-War—or Let-Europe-Work-Out-As-Best-It-Can—line, I could contribute valuable ideas and propaganda collaboration. The facts are, as you well know, that most of the brains—for propaganda or educational purposes—are on the interventionist side and that most of our influential isolationists are no match on air or on paper for our best interventionist tal-

ent." The inference was not misleading: Dennis was far and away the most skilled propagandist and spokesman for nonintervention. Magnanimously, Dennis—the courtier—conceded that "there are a few exceptions, like your good self, your wife's excellent book, John Flynn—but by and large—the best talent is on the other side."

And then there was Dennis, whose resume included "seven years in our diplomatic service and six in Wall Street" which had "taught me something about discretion in methods"—a trait sure to catch the eye of Lindbergh, who was wearying of his time in the glare of perpetual publicity.[6]

Dennis and his spouse paid a courtesy visit to Lindbergh's estate in posh and fashionable Lloyd's Manor on Long Island, then he sent Lindbergh "two copies each of the 'Princetonian,' 'Harvard Crimson' and 'Yale News' for May 23rd, in each of which publications appears a full page ad entitled 'Shall America start the war on the Axis?' signed by myself." The "harshest criticism of this ad came from faculty members," said Dennis, but not students nor the administrators, which was heartening to him. He pronounced himself "delighted by your recent speeches" though he apologized since he "did not go to Madison Square Garden" to hear Lindbergh "because," he said, "I did not wish to have an issue made of my personality and views in connection with America First"—which was simultaneously an oblique reference to Dennis's own importance and an acknowledgment of his thoughtfulness.[7]

Dennis's tending of the relationship was not without effect. It was not long before Lindbergh asserted, "I would like very much to talk to you again in regard to recent developments and hope we can get together soon."[8]

This deepening relationship had not evaded the attention of the FBI. An "avowed pro-Nazi" force, they thought, was "trying to sell Dennis on the idea of a secret political organization with Dennis the brains and Lindbergh the front man."[9] This was a curious marriage of convenience since Lindbergh "believed that the West was about to 'commit racial suicide' . . . by entering 'a war in which the white race is bound to lose' "; the " 'West,' " he thought, "should unite against the real threats: 'dilution' of 'European blood' " and forge an " 'international racial alliance.' "[10] If Lindbergh had realized that the man he had invited into his home was a walking example of "dilution" of "European blood," he may have reconsidered this relationship.

Then again, Lindbergh, who had his suspicions in any case about Dennis's ancestry may have decided to swallow this contradiction or may sim-

ply have been overwhelmed by Dennis's persuasiveness. As one analyst put it, Dennis "used Pareto's distinction between the 'in-elite' and the 'out-elite,' the latter being the group 'which would be running things if there occurred a shift in power'" and "in Dennis's view, he himself belonged to this group, and so did Lindbergh."[11] Even the jaded Lindbergh, well accustomed to both flummery and flattery alike, apparently found Dennis quite persuasive. Dennis's ability to change the discourse from "race" to class—or elite status—was effective in allowing him to win friends and influence the influential, while obscuring the knotty issue of his family background, particularly the existence of his dark-skinned mother.

Thus, "when Lindbergh spoke at America First . . . meetings in Chicago and New York City in 1941, Dennis was on the platform." And "when Anne Lindbergh published her fascistic book *The Wave of the Future* in 1939, Eleanor Dennis stated (and it was not denied) that her husband had given Mrs. Lindbergh the idea of writing it."[12] Dennis later admitted the obvious, that is, that he "met with Lindbergh at the flier's home several times to discuss his isolationist strategy and that Lindbergh no doubt learned a lot from him."[13] "I knew Lindbergh," Dennis recalled years later; they "first met I think in Washington," he said, because "Lindbergh wanted to meet me." He "had a long conversation with him and after that I met him several times in New York. Two or three times I was out to his house on Long Island and spent the night there and discussed with him the political and economic situation."[14]

Dennis's book, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution,* was not as provocatively titled as *The Coming American Fascism* or *Is Capitalism Doomed?*—but it was, perhaps, more controversial, not least since it was the most explicit articulation of his grasp for real power as the fascist movement globally waxed, along with fear of it in the United States. By now Dennis was emboldened, confident that he was on the right side—literally and figuratively—of history. From virtually the first page, he came out swinging: "The gravamen of the criticism against this book will probably be that it is defeatist, fatalistic, depressing, cynical, immoral and lacking in faith in democracy and in the intelligence of the masses." Well, said Dennis, by now quite accustomed to all of these accusations and through bitter experience utterly lacking confidence in the better seraphs of humanity, you're right: "to make the task of my critics as simple as possible," he exclaimed, "let me say categorically that I do not believe in

democracy." No, he asserted, "this book is addressed not to the masses but to the elite of the ruling groups, actual and potential. It is the growing minority of wealth, prestige and power, economic and cultural, present and future, which determines whether, when, where, how and whom we fight," since "mass behavior and mass reactions are irrational." Reverting to his effective tactic of attacking from the left when convenient, he launched a withering broadside against the United States and its vaunted Constitution which so many among the "masses" lauded though it effectively failed them: "a Bill of Rights which does not include the right to a job or an old age pension, but which is rather incompatible with this type of security, is today an absurd anachronism."

Wielding adroitly the rhetorical stiletto of racism—another favorite tactic of his—he scorned the United States and its principal ally: "the essential difficulty with Anglo-American ethics of distribution is that they assume that certain races like the Germans and Japanese can be treated as we Americans treat the Negroes or as the British treat the darker races under their rule. It is as easy to rationalize an Anglo-French regime for Germany as it is to rationalize our regime for our Negroes. The only trouble," he cautioned, "is that the Germans are not Negroes," leaving hanging the inference that maltreatment of the Negroes created a momentum and inappropriate analogy that could backfire horribly. "Germans who try to be liberals are as naïve as Mississippi Negroes who try to vote in democratic elections. Germans can no more enjoy equality of opportunity in a liberal, capitalistic Anglo-Saxon world order than Negroes can enjoy equality in White America." Then, seeming to rub the noses of "White America" in the mire of its maltreatment of the Negroes, he added with a flourish, "The Negroes cannot do much about discrimination by Anglo-Saxon democracy but the Germans can." It was almost as if Dennis was signaling that he was aligning with Berlin so as to better wreak vengeance against his tormentors.

He did not stop there, accusing "White America" of rank hypocrisy. "It is good form in America," he declared, "to be indignant over the frustrations of European minorities and to ignore or deny the frustrations of the American unemployed or farm minorities. We cannot tolerate European oppression of minorities but we have never been without [it] in America from the day the first African slave was landed [and] the first Indian aborigine was murdered for his land by the white man." At this moment of crisis and impending danger when the United States was revving up its rhetorical engines, proclaiming near and far that it was on the verge

of launching the "good war" by the "greatest generation," the chinks in the nation's armors stood out incongruously all the more, giving resonance to Dennis's claims. Of course, his remedy—or, to take him at his word, his "prediction" of fascism—would not take the nation forward but backward. Yet he could counter that present trends of discrimination against minorities in the United States were leading inexorably toward fascism—whether he advocated it or not—so why should the nation expend blood and treasure to extirpate a phenomenon that it was evolving toward and, indeed, underwriting?

Dennis was not finished. In this book he poured out like molten lava the pent-up frustrations of a man who was furious with a society that had compelled him to make his family disappear in order to advance. "Democracy, when it flourished," he spat out angrily, "when it was revolutionary, militant and successfully imperialistic, never respected the rights of the weak except as it suited capitalist or nationalist interests. Example: the British conquest and the two and half century [*sic*] long [oppression] of the Irish, the African slave trade, the extinction of the Indians in North America to make it safe for white democracy." Unlike many liberals of that era, Dennis did not hesitate to point out that what was called "democracy" in the United States was a quite limited herrenvolk democracy. Similarly, he pondered how "Anglo-America" could rebuke Germany for violence given its own bloody record. "Chattel slavery, a fundamental American institution of the founding fathers of our democracy, was based on the most naked possible use [of] violence." The vaunted "Greek democracy was also based on slavery and war, a fact often overlooked by those who idealize Hellenic culture." What was striking was that Dennis had adapted the tropes of the Black Left, which often cited such examples to discredit the United States in the interest of pushing the nation toward socialism, but he was employing similar examples to push the nation in an opposing direction. Dennis's tome was a shot over the bow, warning U.S. elites that the heedless pursuit of racial chauvinism was leading the nation over a cliff, weakening it in confrontations with foreign powers who were even more bloodthirsty in pursuit of racism. For not only were "Negroes" of the left becoming alienated from the nation, but those of the right were as well.

Dennis, a victim in a sense of theories of "race" superiority, also turned this philosophy on its head. "All races are not equal," he began provocatively. "No peoples are more given to acting on this generalization than are the Americans and the British. If there are superior races, it is obvious

that the Germans and the Japanese belong in that class. Yet it is a first principle of British policy that the Germans shall be kept down and of American policy that the Japanese shall be denied not only equal rights with whites in this country but also equal rights with the British to expand in the Far East."

Then as now Thomas Jefferson was cited in the United States as the ne plus ultra of democracy, with his enslavement of Africans regarded as a niggling though not vitiating detail—but this was a nonstarter for Dennis. "American intellectuals like Jefferson could write and talk endlessly about our government's being founded on consent and law rather than force and violence, having all the while a plantation full of slaves, with armed overseers and manacles, and while fighting Indians and the French more or less all the time. Thus was born Jeffersonian or Jacksonian democracy. Both Jefferson and Jackson, like the Athenian democrats, were slaveowners," a point often overlooked by their hagiographers. "According to these canons," said Dennis, "anything the Anglo-Saxons do in the furtherance of their interests is, by definition, not a use of force or violence. If they have slaves, theirs is still a government based on consent." Well, suggested Dennis, by these pinched standards, fascism too could be deemed admirable, given how twisted standards had become—or, more precisely, Dennis's experiences in the United States had left him twisted.

With apparent glee he recited the logic of demography that confronted "white supremacy." "We can be sure that the white population of the world will not double itself during the next hundred years and we can reasonably surmise that a hundred years from now it may not be much larger than it is at present. It may well be not as large then as it is now." However, he said, "if the dark races increase as fast as the white races have been increasing during the past fifty years, the dark races, now numbering a billion and a quarter, thus doubling every fifty odd years, would number ten billion within a hundred and fifty years." Dennis avoided the troublesome detail that this demographic projection also made life complicated for his patrons in Berlin.

This was the fatal—and gaping—flaw in his analysis, as he sought to rationalize Nazi bigotry. "Hitler realized at the outset of the war on international capitalism that it would be good political strategy to blame everything on the Jews, since the moronic public mind is not capable of assimilating abstract ideas or developing indignation against a multiplicity and complexity of evils."[15]

Yet what was striking about the reaction to his book-length tirade was how so many of his critics simply refused to confront or even acknowledge that racism was near the center of Dennis's argument, no matter how hypocritical or twisted it may have been—it was still there—but it seemed that critics were so caught up in the fiction of terming the United States a true democracy, they could not engage his points about deprivation of minority and particularly Negro rights, just as subsequent analysts have danced around the obviousness of Dennis being a "Negro." This was even more strange since all these earlier critics had to say was that sure, the United States had weaknesses in this realm but fascism was not the way out: end of discussion. As it turned out, Dennis's book was saying a lot about him, his critics, and the society he had come to spurn. It was also saying that many anti-fascists crippled their cause by their failure to engage frontally the question of white supremacy, as Dennis most certainly did.

In the journal of record of U.S. historians, one critic asserted, "unfortunately, Mr. Dennis's research is not very thorough. Statements are made with a finality which often are generalizations made on insufficient evidence. . . . surely no fair-minded reader can accept unchallenged the castigation of Christianity as having 'never produced a civilization or been identified with one which was not continuously characterized by war.' " The writer noted in passing Dennis's "difficulty in finding a publisher after the fall of France and the 'fifth column hysteria in the United States' "[16]—but he ignored what was near the heart of the book.

So did the reviewer in the *American Political Science Review,* though he did note other relevant points. Dennis, said Waldemar Gurian of Notre Dame, was a "brilliant writer and a master in the coining of sharply ironical formulas," who was "indebted to the ideas of Oswald Spengler." Dennis "believes further that the incompetent elite ruling the United States will provoke her participation in the fight between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' He announces that he will do everything to help the United States to win this war if it comes," which was a point often ignored by Dennis's harsher critics, along with his typically controversial allegation that "the unity of the American nation was disturbed by Russian and South European immigration."[17]

Other critics likewise ignored the racial implications of Dennis's argument, while addressing—like Gurian—other relevant points. The well-known historian, E. H. Carr, sarcastically referred to Dennis as a "superior person"—and an "intellectual snob," who was "fervently anti-

British"; he "believes that Britain's day is done, and . . . thinks that the more of us who get killed in the present war the better for our own sake, since it will simplify our post-war problem of supporting our population on our insular resources instead of our nineteenth century fat." Carr, who himself had been excoriated for writing what was perceived as overly positive analyses of Soviet Russia, felt that Dennis "has something to say" and was not unappreciative of the point that "the American publisher who had accepted and printed the book got cold feet at the last moment." Still, concluded Carr, "I have not yet been driven to share his pessimism. But I find it hard to disagree with his view that the problem of unemployment is a crucial test which democracy has so far failed to meet."[18]

Dale Yoder of the University of Minnesota in the *American Sociological Review* was struck by yet another idea Dennis had borrowed from the left, that is, that "political democracy and private capitalism are insoluble. They must stand or fall together. . . . the author's style is epigrammatic, clever and stimulating. Thinking is generally orderly, logical. If the author's convictions and assumptions are accepted as data, most of his conclusions are inescapable."[19]

John Commons, the dean of scholars of labor, in the *American Economic Review* observed that Dennis "makes the closing of the American frontier in the decade of the 1890s the beginning of the decay of capitalism. . . . Dennis rightly bases his entire economics on the inability of the capitalist system to maintain continuous and full employment."[20]

All of these reviewers made telling points but, remarkably, they elided Dennis's points about racism, preferring to engage his points about class, for the most part. It was almost as if anti-fascists recognized that the idea of white supremacy was a potentially mortal weakness of "Anglo-America" and this was a point better avoided. Interestingly, according to one report, "U.S. Nazis have attempted to carry their propaganda into the colored sections of large metropolitan cities," while the "[German American] Bund is . . . busily engaged in proclaiming the friendship of the Nazi regime for the colored peoples of the world." Alarmingly, Dennis was cited on Germany and the anti-fascist commentator added in a fashion more telling than he, perhaps, realized, "if ever there was an Ethiopian in a woodpile, it is here!"[21]

It was a sad commentary that the United States particularly was not sure of the loyalty of its "colored" population, even in a confrontation with the devilish Nazis. It was equally clear that theories of race superiority would have to yield in the face of national security.

But this would be a long, hard slog. In his own unique way Dennis repeatedly pressed on this sensitive contradiction in his self-published *Weekly Foreign Letter.* In block letters, he blared, "WE REPEAT THAT A LYNCH SPIRIT IS NOT A WAR SPIRIT. LYNCHERS DON'T FIGHT AND LYNCHERS DON'T FIGHT BACK." With his usual cynicism Dennis was seeking to link what was happening to Negroes with the attempt to rein in Berlin. "The Army's recruitment campaign shows that the regions furnishing the largest number of volunteers are those in which the Lynch-Hitler spirit runs lowest and the regions furnishing the smallest number of recruits are New York, Boston and the east where the Lynch-Hitler spirit runs highest."[22] Like many Black Nationalists, Dennis also sought to link Japan's conflict with "Anglo-America" with prevailing racial currents. "The Navy crowd," he said months before Pearl Harbor, "are extremely cocky about Japan"; they, "of course, assume that once the Japanese navy were destroyed, the Japanese would take their proper place as one of the colored races in the East easily governed or exploited by Anglo-American imperialism."[23] Dennis, the "Race Fascist," also dismissively referred to FDR, asserting that he was "to the American people what Father Divine is to the denizens of Harlem," suggesting that the beloved president was a fraudulent trickster akin to the famed evangelist.[24]

Before the onslaught at Pearl Harbor, Dennis was blasting London and Washington with both barrels. "Our troops landing in Egypt or Syria or Persia could immediately be sandwiched in with the British and would be probably as good as the colored troops which the British have in such large numbers in these theaters. The main trouble with any such campaign, however, is that it would not appeal to the American people. They would not relish American troops serving as interchangeable cannon fodder with Indians, Arabs and Sudanese and the other lesser breeds. . . . They would not grow sentimental over the fact that our boys were dying to protect the oil fields of Britain or the British Empire." As for Japan, they were simply seeking "imitation of the British," acting "like white folks (when the latter were industrializing) and Mr. Roosevelt opposes this logical development with a categorical veto."[25] Tokyo's "ideology" of a "union of the yellow races against the white exploiters"—a "pan oriental yellow race autonomy propaganda"—seemed to be welcomed by Dennis: "the first impulse of every Asiatic once he belongs to a unified international power group will be to avenge the insults of American immigration policy to all members of the yellow race."[26]

The Axis powers, according to Dennis, were simply adapting creatively the policies that allowed London and Washington to surge ahead. He seemed to take a fiendish delight in pointing this out. The British Socialist, Harold Laski, had written of "The Race Myth," said Dennis, but "it was Disraeli, I think, who insisted that 'everything is race.' German historiography won much of its lead in the world of scholarship by refusing to accept that mysticism." But peering more closely Dennis asserted that "Disraeli . . . made Queen Victoria an Empress and Britain an Empire with the aid of the race myth. Hitler is paying one of the greatest Jews of the 19th century and one of the great statesman of all time the sincere compliment of imitation."[27]

Now surely this was demagogy of the lowest order. But the problem was that neither Washington nor London, given their own lamentable records in the now touchy realms of colonialism and racism, were in an advantageous position to point this out. The alternative was to simply silence Dennis and place him behind bars—then take the agonizing and halting steps away from doctrines of "race" supremacy so as to deprive a future Lawrence Dennis of such a powerful weapon of propaganda. In other words, like the gunmen of the Old West, the decision was made to back out of the saloon—with both guns blazing.

Strikingly, in analyzing Dennis's words, the FBI concluded in early 1942 that two matters of concern were his "anti-British" rhetoric and what he had to say about "the race question." This does, it was intoned, "amount to sedition under the law." Yes, it appeared to "comprise more of an adverse opinion to our policies rather than a *seditious interference*. There is, however, one instance in which a contrary view might be supported, namely," his editorials "concerning the Negro question, which comes perilously close to an incitement of insubordination, or an obstruction of enlistment" (emphasis in original).[28]

Ironically, Dennis, who had strived so assiduously to put distance between himself and Negroes, was now being hoisted on this petard, as he was about to be indicted, not least because of his writings about this persecuted minority. The "Race Fascist" was about to be impaled on the razor sharp pike of "race."

But if one FBI informant was to be believed, there were other more mundane forces driving Dennis. This unnamed woman, speaking in early 1943, "expressed the opinion that she believes Dennis is a very lonely man and that he desires to talk to individuals who will listen to him expound on his particular theories of Fascism. She stated that Dennis's line

at the present time seems to be that Hitler made his fundamental error by fighting the Russians and that now Russia will totally defeat Germany." She "described Dennis as being very pessimistic in all of his reactions. She said that he is very pessimistic about the United States and democracies in general, but that she believes that if Fascism actually came to this country, Dennis would change and be just as critical of it as he is the form of Government we now have."[29]

Maybe. Still, Dennis was lonely, bereft of the nourishment of family and the reasons for this solitude—color discrimination of the vilest sort—embittered him further against the United States and certainly induced pessimism within him about the future of such a nation.

But was his pessimism legitimate or a crafty tactic designed to buttress fascism? The FBI seemed to believe it was the latter, though they had been tireless in ferreting out the grimy details of his troubled family background and, thus, had reason to believe it was the former. "In comparing Dennis to the Nazi propaganda line," it was said, "informant stated that Dennis pursued the regular procedure in that he first spread profound pessimism and gloom and then blamed the present system for all this wrong and quickly followed with the solution, which was nothing but the preaching of the principles of Fascism. . . . informant stated that he personally considered Dennis more dangerous to this country than any ten German agents could ever be. He expressed this statement by reason of the fact that Dennis takes an intellectual approach to the subject and always ends up by stating the principles of Fascism are the only possible solution to the problems facing the world at the present time."[30]

Dennis tried to place distance between his intellectual brand of fascism and the more soiled versions of this doctrine, as exemplified by Father Coughlin, Gerald L. K. Smith, and other rabid demagogues. But this was no easy task, particularly when Major General Smedley Butler "revealed" that he had "been asked by a group of wealthy New Yorkers to lead a Fascist movement to set up a dictatorship in the United States"; he was tasked to "organize 500,000 veterans into a Fascist army."[31]

Fascism, in other words, was not just a high-flown articulation of ideas, as Dennis might have it, it was a full-fledged movement with real life consequences, as General Butler's revelations exposed. Not surprisingly, this movement took the form of a vile anti-Semitism; thus, in the booming West Coast metropolis of Los Angeles, the 1930s witnessed "considerable Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda, the [latter] particularly vicious and bitter," that was "disseminated from the local Nazi (Friends

of Germany) headquarters" downtown. That there were "45,000 German speakers" in this town was viewed as not insignificant.[32] Shortly after this report was filed, "Nazis held" their "first open meeting" in L.A., "wearing their brown shirts and red, white and black swastika arm bands." There were an "estimated 150,000 Germans" in L.A.,[33] it was then reported—though it was unclear whether this figure was accurate or, instead, concern about the fascist presence was expanding exponentially.

If it were expanding, this was understandable. In late 1942 when the nation was ensnared in a bloody war with fascism, one government agency observed nervously that "several of our correspondents mentioned growing anti-Semitic feeling in their communities. Two of them felt that it was strong enough be a serious problem."[34]

7

Framing a Guilty Man?

Lawrence Dennis should have known that with the United States entering the war against the Axis powers, his incendiary rhetoric—if left unchecked—would lead to his indictment. Yet, he proceeded recklessly, though by his own admission he thought the idea of real civil liberties in the United States—for example, freedom of expression—was vacuous. He had attained a certain notoriety and perhaps thought it provided license: he was wrong, terribly wrong. Thus, the *Washington Post* said in late 1940 that Anne Lindbergh's now infamous phrase that fascism was the "wave of the future" was "first advanced" by him.[1] *Life* magazine termed him "America's no. 1 intellectual fascist."[2] But were these tributes to be welcomed when the nation was about to go to war against fascism?

By the summer of 1940, FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, was informed that "Lawrence Dennis is definitely and positively a German Agent. . . . this man has an unwholesome and un-American background."[3] He was a "revolutionary Nazi" who "enjoys excellent connections in Japanese, Italian and German circles."[4] By September 1941, "telephone toll calls" were "requested on Dennis's home telephone" by the U.S. authorities. There was an intense "examination" of his "income tax" returns (his gross income for 1939 was listed as $5,957.00). A "mail cover" revealed that he received mail from questionable German émigrés, the "Japan Institute" (there was an arrow pointing to this signaling its importance), the "Consul General of Japan," and the fascist demagogue, Gerald L. K. Smith—though most of his mail came from colleges and universities wishing to invite him to speak or subscribe to his Newsletter.[5]

At times it seemed that the authorities were more interested in Dennis's putative ties to Tokyo than to Berlin, which made sense since Dennis's race rhetoric distinguished him sharply from his like-minded comrades in the United States but was similar to discourses emerging from Japan.

Dennis's name "appeared in the address book of Tsutomi Mishiyama, who is in charge of the Japanese Financial Commission."[6] According to the FBI, "Dennis mentioned that some members of the Japanese Financial Commission had approached him and suggested that he, Dennis, make a trip to Japan in the nature of a good-will tour." Dennis's 1941 diary, which somehow the Bureau obtained, "contains the following entries under the dates given. 3/4/41 . . . Japanese, Hotel Plaza . . . 6/4/41—Japanese dinner, Waldorf."[7] Supposedly there had been an attempt to "get him to take part in a special mission to Japan in 1940 to consult with the Japanese Ministry of Finance on American-Japanese relations. Dennis declined the proposition," though the "Japanese Finance Commission" subscribed to his newsletter and Dennis "admitted attending [a] banquet . . . in honor of the Japanese Ambassador" to the United States in 1941.[8]

This fascination with Tokyo was not unique to Dennis. His comrade, General Robert Wood, chairman of the powerful America First grouping, objected to FDR directly the day before the bombing of Pearl Harbor about the "sabre rattling in connection with Japan. Why are our sons wanted to fight a war 10,000 miles" from these shores, "merely to guard and defend the capitalistic holdings of millionaire corporations of this country and England?" To the general it was "obvious that if Japan does not conquer disunited China—some other force will—and it probably will be COMMUNISM" (emphasis in original). But the General, who had ties to "millionaire corporations" himself, may have been too big a fish to haul in: Dennis had to suffice.[9]

Thus, the flyspecking of Dennis continued. The FBI thought that Dennis received a "rather substantial amount" of income. "For example, the 'Reader's Digest" plied him with funds, it was said. His book, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution,* had a print run of 4500 and 1500 were "gifts to universities," while the "balance was sold" and "there was a profit on it." His newsletter had a "gross" of "$9700—thereabouts." Dennis received a "thousand dollars per week" from real estate investments, but had no "stocks and bonds." He had a financial angel, Paul Palmer, but the FBI was convinced that there was a German subsidy that was keeping Dennis afloat.[10]

The FBI also thought that "alleged pro-German propagandists have been known to receive funds from the 'Reader's Digest' magazine directly or indirectly"; there was a "possibility that an arrangement with the 'Reader's Digest' magazine providing for the payment of funds to propa-

gandists in this country made by a foreign principal would provide a very good cover for these payments, a cover which would be difficult to penetrate."[11]

FBI agents were interrogating Dennis's neighbors. One reason possibly was their cooperation in an "attempt to search" his Massachusetts home; "local real estate agents could probably be helpful in this regard."[12] An interview with Mrs. S. G. Moore who "resides directly across the road from the Dennis home" was arranged. The FBI was not deterred when she "said she knew little about the Dennis family"; she added that he was "very friendly and almost always brings his guests over" for a "social visit." She promised to "obtain the name" of "a man from California" that Dennis was "expecting" and "any others that visit the Dennis's and furnish the information to the [FBI]."[13]

A "patriotic citizen" told the Bureau that Dennis had "many followers and has many mysterious characters around all hours of the night" at his home. "He makes many night trips" up and down the East Coast—no doubt from his homes in Massachusetts and New Jersey to Washington. "He is supplied with gas for his trips and also has his tanks filled by other Nazi sympathizers."[14] Another "informant also advised that Dennis purchased considerable gasoline from a filling station" near his home in Massachusetts, "which was owned and operated by a man with a French name." Suspiciously, "this was the only filling station owned by a man with a French name" in that region. Suspiciously, Dennis also "had a large store of liquor and . . . kept six or eight five-gallon cans of Cuban rum in his wine cellar."[15]

Another neighbor confided that "Dennis was known to be quite an argumentative type of person but was careful to whom he spoke and caused no ill-feelings in the community"; he "never attempted to influence their thoughts on politics but that he is a very self-centered, egotistical individual."[16]

Such assertions were part of the besieging of Dennis's persona; recall that what we know about his ancestry comes largely from aggressive FBI digging. One interviewee "explained that Dennis's brother-in-law is his only close relative. . . . he said that he considered Dennis as a 'minority' man, who has accepted that view after having been thwarted and kept down so much with his big ideas. He said Dennis has become sort of a smart-aleck type of an individual, and he seems to take great delight in daring anyone to question his ability to analyze and make predictions." But he added strikingly, that "Dennis always entertained and consulted

with Jewish individuals [that] had caused him to wonder if Dennis was really a fascist at heart."[17]

J. Edgar Hoover thought he was; he recommended that Dennis "be considered for custodial detention in the event of a national emergency."[18] Dennis, according to a former U.S. secretary of war, "marched with the German army into the Sudeten, Austria and Poland"[19]—and this amazing statement apparently was meant to be interpreted quite literally. Dennis was being portrayed as if he were a fascist general; he had "large maps of U.S., Mexico and South American countries in his home, on which are listed by means of pins, data showing among other things the male and female population, their employment and ages."[20]

FBI agents were monitoring Dennis when he went to the House of Mercy Hospital in Pittsfield, Massachusetts to get "treatment for carbuncles." They wanted to know if he paid by cash or check.[21] Even Dennis's subscribers were turning against him. When John Piper, "financial editor" of the *San Francisco News,* was placed on a list to receive Dennis's Newsletter, he immediately contacted Attorney General Francis Biddle Duke since he thought this mimeographed document "seditious"; "it occurred to me possibly," he said, "I might render a public service by calling that [publication] to your attention."[22]

In a sense the U.S. authorities were responding to public opinion. Dennis's notoriety meant that he was not exactly obscure and after the United States entered the war, letters poured into the Justice Department demanding his indictment.[23] "Why are men of the Lawrence Dennis type permitted to spread their poisonous venom unmolested," the attorney general was asked.[24]

Dennis had been playing a dangerous game. Picking at the loose thread on the suit of the U.S. body politic—racism—could potentially lead to a severe unraveling, raising dramatic questions about the loyalty of Negroes during times of war, encouraging foreign foes to appeal to this persecuted minority. He should have known that the U.S. government would crack down on what they perceived to be dangerous sedition. Dennis was no dummy and perhaps realized that wartime pressures would lead to a retreat from Jim Crow—as it certainly and predictably did—but I think he was too cynical to have unleashed incendiary rhetoric in order to bring about this result. He was an intellectual flamethrower, not a strategist for Black Liberation.

Government agents were probing "funds received by Dennis from unknown sources," along with "suspicious items of income received by

Dennis" and "unidentified cash deposits in Dennis's accounts."[25] "Rudolph Wullen" of Mahwah, New Jersey, for example, was found to be "correspondent for the Deutsche Ueberseeische Bank" in Berlin; he told investigators that he subscribed to Dennis's Newsletter and bought his books "in response to the request of the various South American branches of the German Bank."[26]

These German ties were of grave concern to the authorities. "Mrs. H. de Terra," an employee of Dennis's received close scrutiny. She had married a German citizen, Dr. Friedrich Jensen, in 1929, then lived in his homeland where the couple got along on "income derived mainly from stock owned in a Hamburg newspaper," which suspended publication "for three weeks in March or April 1933 by the Nazi government on the pretext that its editor was a Jew." The "Jew was removed, a Nazi editor installed and thereafter the income sank to about half." She and her husband separated, then divorced and she married "Mr. Hellmut de Terra" in 1939, and he too was German, though he had taught at Yale. She arrived in the United States in 1939 and read Dennis's work after being apprised of it by a Nazi sympathizer. She started working for him and he paid her "dollars" and "in cash" daily to type and stencil his Newsletter: "he never asked me about conditions in Germany," she said. "I never saw him speak with nor have any correspondence with anyone connected with the German government insofar as I could recognize such person." She thought there were "about five hundred [subscribers]" and she "stopped working for him either in March or April 1941."[27] Government agents were left to wonder why Dennis—of all the people who could have been hired to work in Manhattan—chose a German émigré.

The FBI suspected that Friedrich Ernest Auhagen was a German agent residing in the United States and, therefore, blazed a path to his door. He termed Dennis an outstanding economist but "too radical politically" and, in any case, "could not read, write or speak German with sufficient fluency to use German source material," weakening his potential as a Berlin functionary—though others disputed this precise point. He was "accustomed to meet" Dennis "at least once every two weeks in 1938, 1939 and 1940"; he knew him well enough to know that Eleanor Dennis "operated a dancing school" and "made considerable money." He had "doubts"—"very much [so]"—that "Von Gienanth or Von Strempel of the German Embassy ever gave any money to Dennis," though he "reiterated that Dennis was an opportunist and out of money" perpetually.[28]

A "highly confidential source" advised that Dennis "was in Central America with [deleted] of the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. and they became very good friends. Subject frequently has telephone conversations. . . . and they converse in Spanish and meets him personally." Dennis was "believed to be anti-Semitic but does not openly advocate anti-Semitism" and, indeed, was cited in this FBI report as saying that fascism " 'might also be tainted with some of the unfortunate race and religious prejudices now cherished by large numbers of our people.' " And though he had viewed Louisiana as a template of a future fascist movement, Dennis disdained the racist and anti-Semitic Ku Klux Klan, which comprised an essential part of the ultraright movement in that state. " 'This organization,' " the FBI cited him as saying, has " 'no leaders with vision of a social program. Obviously, four million men would not forever get dressed up in night shirts if, politically speaking, they had no place to go and nothing to do. Making faces at Catholics, Jews and Negroes cannot long seem virile, or even amusing.' "[29]

"Kurt Sell, German news correspondent," was equally unhelpful to Dennis's cause, as he "advised it was common rumor among German Embassy officials that Von Strempel was furnishing funds to Dennis and making suggestions as to the context [*sic*]" of his Newsletter.[30] Gerald L. K. Smith, a bona fide fascist demagogue and virulent anti-Semite, was similarly not helpful to Dennis. He recalled the rally he addressed "in the New York Hippodrome in 1935 or 1936," which was "well received and widely publicized. The following day Smith was interviewed in his hotel room at the Warwick Hotel in New York" by Dennis. But Smith also "explained" that Dennis was "non-interventionist but not Fascist." He also said that "Dennis was inclined to be cynical about religion and tended to be atheistic,"[31] which did not endear him to some fascists and probably hurt him with the FBI too. At the same time, this was an abrupt turnabout from his days as a Negro child preacher and indicative of how far he had come—or fallen—since he had deserted his family. His loss of faith—in Christianity and the United States alike—was quite telling.

Belatedly, the FBI began to examine more carefully Truman Smith, who was "very pro-German," having "Colonel Lindbergh as one of [his] best friends" and also "spoke German fluently," having served as "Military Attache for the American government from 1935 to 1939" in Berlin. He was "much impressed by the brilliance of Dennis's intellect" and told the Bureau that the influential writers "Claire Luce and Dorothy Thompson have probably used Dennis's ideas," along with a legion of others. It

was feared that Smith with his language ability, years in Berlin, military ties, and closeness to Dennis might be a key man in any plan for subversion in the United States.[32]

He was only one of a number of military men and industrialists who looked to Dennis for guidance. His words were not necessarily inaccurate either. Dennis confirmed later, for example, that he "knew Claire Luce quite well," terming her a "very interesting woman." In the mid-1930s they lunched, as "she wanted to go over to Europe then. She wanted to go to Germany" and, recalled Dennis, thought "I could help her get a visa. . . . I mentioned her to some of my acquaintances in the German Embassy." She was "quite critical of her husband," the powerful publisher, Henry Luce, who publicized negatively Dennis's ties to Berlin; "he was something of a liberal," said Dennis contemptuously of the conservative press baron.[33]

Later, he recalled that "Claire Booth Luce invited me to lunch in the early part of 1941 and I went to her apartment in the Waldorf and spent three hours with her. She was anxious to know about Germany. She did not invite me to talk about that," he said of the noted courtesan. "She talked about other things."[34]

Dennis was also quite close to General Robert Wood, who operated at the highest levels of management of the mass merchandiser Sears-Roebuck, in addition to possessing high-level military ties. Dennis and Wood were both tied to America First, the isolationist grouping that opposed war in Europe. "I went to their meetings, some of them," said Dennis. "I had more contacts with them than with any of the extremist groups," which happened to be true for they had the elite class ties he craved, unlike some of the more scruffy fascists. "I went to dinners and I spoke several times to the America First group," he said. "I spoke for them in New York . . . Washington . . . Chicago and two or three places in the Midwest," where "one of my friends," he recalled, was "General Wood of Sears-Roebuck."[35]

General Wood was a leader of America First and was also close to Senator Wheeler, Dennis's crony.[36] He was also close to the powerful Robert McCormack, who controlled the megaphone of midwestern isolationism, the *Chicago Tribune,* and provided "very generous" donations to Wood's —and Dennis's—cause of keeping the nation out of the war in Europe.[37] General Wood was as controversial as Dennis, once attracting critical attention for his "project of handing over South America 'below the bulge' of Brazil to the Axis."[38]

Dennis did have an extraordinary range of ties to the powerful and—accuracy aside—his blistering assaults on U.S. racial policies were not helpful to "wartime unity." General Wood was to act later as if he and Dennis were not as close as they were—but that was not his stance before Dennis's troubles increased. Then he was showing Dennis "kind hospitality," and Dennis was also lauding the "pleasant visit" he was able to enjoy with Colonel Smith. Dennis was proposing a "publishing concern" focused on foreign policy matters, "commissioning people like Dr. [Charles] Beard, Dr. [Harry] Barnes, [H. L.] Mencken," et al. "to write pamphlets and books." Already sensing deepening troubles Dennis preferred this approach since "meetings and organizational activities of all sorts" could lead to "accidents," that is, "the wrong people . . . get in and say and do the wrong thing . . . contriv[ing] embarrassing [episodes] or [fomenting] discrediting happenings or disturbances."[39] General Wood thought this a "splendid" idea that "should be carried out."[40]

Dennis thought Wood was a good comrade, but when FBI agents came calling on the latter, to discuss a man Wood referred to in his letter to J. Edgar Hoover as the "No. 1 Fascist in the United States," he backed away from Dennis, declaring that "my acquaintance with Mr. Dennis has been very limited. I do not suppose I have seen him more than five or six times altogether." "I have never had the pleasure of meeting you," he added unctuously to Hoover, though he did add that Dennis was "intellectually . . . very brilliant" and "has been hounded beyond belief in this free country of ours."[41]

Dr. Frederick D. Baerwald, Professor of Political Science at Fordham University, also drilled a nail into Dennis's legal coffin. He recounted how Dennis "predicted a revolution in the United States" that "would have as its purpose to throw out all foreigners." Dennis reputedly "said that this would be a white-native movement, sponsored by anti-Semites, Catholics and other such groups" and "suggested that the intellectuals in this country would have to be eliminated." Now this blood-curdling scenario is not reflected in the larger corpus of Dennis's writings, public and private—which does not necessarily suggest Herr Professor recalled their conversation inaccurately. Yet, again, Dennis—a bomb-throwing provocateur—was probably extrapolating from his intimate and little-known knowledge of the Negro experience (or "predicting" as he might put it) and not necessarily making a policy prescription, though admittedly he often blurred this already fuzzy line.[42]

Dennis prided himself on his intellect and was fond of deriding the intelligence of others—particularly Euro-Americans—perhaps a reaction to the widespread notion that "African blood" somehow made one dumber. He also liked to be provocative and edgy, which was one thing when the world was not at war and quite another when it was.

For Dennis it made no difference and he particularly liked to test the limits of acceptable discourse on racism, especially the submerged part of this iceberg and for many Euro-Americans the most sensitive: Asia. "Our fighting the yellow races is, for us, a mug's game," he announced in early 1941. "The Japanese industrialists . . . we shall fight would like nothing better than to go on imitating the whites, being our customers and . . . our debtors, whereas Mr. Roosevelt's pet Chinese nationalists are anti-foreign, anti-capitalist and prone to communism. They will enjoy nothing better than giving their erstwhile white allies the bum's rush out of Asia as soon as they can."[43] A few months later he declared that the "Navy crowd are extremely cocky about Japan. They talk of knocking out Japan in six months. . . . they, of course, assume that once the Japanese Navy were destroyed, the Japanese would take their proper place as one of the colored races in the East easily governed or exploited by Anglo-American imperialism. They do not see the rising forces of Communism and nationalism among the darker Oriental peoples. We see forces at work in China and throughout the Far East which will never allow it future stabilization of Anglo-American hegemony."[44]

Dennis's rhetorical device was to look critically at the towering body of cadavers upon which was constructed the British Empire and the United States, then ask why the Axis was not allowed to do the same. This brought him into conflict not only with liberals and some other conservatives but also even some Communists, who at this moment were seeking to stress how they were somehow the logical inheritors of the traditions of Jefferson, thereby downplaying his less savory aspects. In a sense, a central problem for Dennis was his refusal to accept reigning national myths which entailed glossing over or rationalizing distasteful episodes like the African Slave Trade and dispossession of the Native Americans, which—if they were not rationalized—were viewed as not outweighing the "benefits" brought by the advent of the United States. Dennis took this "end justifies the means" approach and sought to apply it to fascism. Objectively, the range of potential domestic recruits to Dennis's approach was not large, which suggested that he was throwing the dice for a global fascist victory that would obviate the need to win over adherents at home.

Days before Pearl Harbor, Dennis announced that "Germany and Japan are embarked on perfectly natural and highly traditional courses of frontier-expansionist development. Such was the ruling pattern of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Britain, the United States, France, Russia, Japan, Austria-Hungary and even Italy, in a small way at the end of the 19th century, all did it. Now FDR says that all that sort of thing that has been going on since the dawn of history has to be stopped." Audaciously, Dennis even reduced further the potential range of his supporters at home by rationalizing Tokyo's assault on white supremacy. Japan had no choice, he thought, but to call for "union of the yellow races against the white exploiters."[45]

After Pearl Harbor Dennis in boilerplate fashion declared that "like every other good American," he "unreservedly supports the government and the President in waging the war . . . all such opposition ceases. We are for the United States and against all its enemies"[46]—however, Washington must have thought that this support was like the support of a noose for a hanging man. For it was not long before Dennis was back to his old tricks, denouncing the "Four Freedoms" as an empty "Utopia," suggesting it was only a ruse to induce the otherwise alienated to fight for London and Washington. With his typical pragmatic cynicism, Dennis said he was "willing to pay taxes, sacrifice, fight and die" for "this or any other ideology of the American people" but "cannot bring himself to believe in it."[47]

As time passed, his emphasis was on the latter part of this idea—skepticism about the war aims of the Allies—rather than pragmatic support of it. "Our guess," he said in March 1942 "is that the Asiatic masses will let the whites and the Japs [*sic*] fight it out." Signaling the tensions between Tokyo and Berlin that undermined the Axis ultimately, he observed that "the collapse of the British Empire is as great a blow to Hitler as it is to Churchill" for the "Japs [*sic*] are smashing Hitler's dream of white world supremacy and an eventual partnership with the British in the exploitation of capitalistic imperialism."[48] Such raw candor could not have been pleasing to Berlin or fascist sympathizers at home.

Yet it was a theme he hammered home repeatedly. "Hitler's fatal weakness," said Dennis in mid-1942, "is the cult of the white race. Stalin's great strength is his utter lack of this cult." He chided the German chancellor for his lack of insight. He "doubtless did not see," said Dennis, "that German choices were subjugation under Anglo-Saxon world hegemony or a Communist partnership with Russia. His absurd principles

would not allow him to enjoy a partnership with Russia. So we have become the ally of Russia. We have no principles which would inhibit such a partnership."[49]

"Capitalistic imperialism and white supremacy" were "going up in smoke" after the crushing defeat of the Allies in Singapore at the hands of Japan, he chortled. Dennis tended to "agree 100% with Pearl Buck that to wage a rational crusade for world democracy, we must accept race equality here in this country. Curiously enough, in the South where there is the greatest ardor for a world crusade for democracy, they have grandfather clauses to keep Negroes from voting and high poll taxes to keep poor whites from voting. Pearl Buck is eternally right when she says, 'if we intend to persist blindly in our racial prejudices, then we are fighting on the wrong side in this war.' "[50]

Dennis has to be given credit for being more perceptive in analyzing the dramatic antiracist changes that were unfolding that virtually any others on the scene—right or left—tended to ignore or downplay. "Ideology," and "agitation," he suggested, were "forcing our government war propagandists and grand dialecticians" to make adaptations on the "race question." One "extreme would be that preached by the Communists and practiced in Soviet Russia, namely complete racial equality, which can only mean intermarriage"; another option would be "to make a supreme value of race purity; to recognize that prolonged propinquity always eventually brings about assimilation; and, accordingly, to arrange for the transportation of the Negro population from this country." "The third or middle course is the one we have taken," that is, to "soft pedal race relations. This is the American way. Its essence is hypocrisy, compromise, evasion of issues, exploitation of the Negro for economic purposes and denial of complete racial equality, always letting sleeping dogs lie." But now FDR felt constrained to adjust the rhetoric on race but that was "incompatible with the American way of hypocrisy, tolerance of racial prejudice, intolerance of certain race mixtures." Yet this was only creating further problems down the road since "the colored man does not enjoy equality in a practical sense. If he is told that that is what he is fighting this war for and if he is not, for the first time in our history, given practical equality, there is likely to be race trouble over natural race ambitions and broken promises, just as in India for the British now. . . . let's buy allies with honest coin."[51]

Still, while liberals and others were moping and sobbing about Tokyo's successes, in May 1942, Dennis predicted boldly that "in the end, Japan

will be defeated"—but, perceptively, he observed that white supremacy itself, notably in Australia, would be transformed too. "Imperialism, special privilege, including that of 7,000,000 whites to monopolize a continent nearly as large as the United States, economic inequality, and exploitation, as well as the possibility of war in the future are all to be eliminated. Then the Japanese, under a new regime, as well as all the other Orientals, will have equality of access to Australia, and to this country as well."[52]

Dennis not only raised searching questions about Berlin, but he also made appreciative comments about Moscow. Repeatedly until his death he was reproached "with having turned pro-Communist." Again, he would argue that he was simply describing and predicting a state of affairs; thus, he lambasted the "absurd idea that we are not fighting to make communism master of Europe when that is patently what we are doing,"[53] by undermining its counterweight—Germany—thereby creating a power vacuum that only Moscow could fill. But he went further than this, hailing the "pardoning" of U.S. Communist leader Earl Browder since "to fight the war, we need revolutionary ideas for export. Where are we to find them if not in a Communist international revolution?" Why keep him imprisoned when "thousands of American corporate heads are guilty of equally criminal offenses against our anti-trust laws" and "obviously these men will never be prosecuted. The jails wouldn't hold them all."[54]

What was Dennis thinking? Exposing U.S. hypocrisy on the sensitive question of racism, casting doubt on the authenticity of war aims, invidiously comparing corporate heads to Communists—how long did he think he could get away with this in wartime? Washington swiftly came up with an answer: not long.

Dennis had long been the subject of intense scrutiny by the government, with his tax returns pored over, his neighbors interrogated about him, his mail examined, his telephone calls monitored. Finally in the spring of 1943 as the outcome of the war against fascism teetered in the balance, the U.S. authorities invited him in for a chat. It was a typical bravura performance by Dennis, defending his most recent book—its "argument" was that "*economic planning means fascism*" (emphasis in original), and that is why he felt the United States was evolving toward fascism and that is why he predicted that this phenomenon would sweep the planet. "I was always against anti-Semitism," he exclaimed. "I always said it was the great mistake of the Germans to both attack Russia and to

make racism the basis of their Fascism." Typically, he could not resist name-dropping, perhaps feeling in this context that it might cause his interrogators to retreat. "I was down in Washington a few weeks ago" where he "invited Senator Wheeler and his wife and [Congressman] Ham Fish and his wife to lunch and we talked. . . . Alice Longworth wanted to come" but Theodore Roosevelt's daughter was unable to make it. "She came in the afternoon to tea. Senator Taft and his wife came down. Senator Clark was asked. He couldn't come but his wife came. We had a nice time. [Senator] Nye and his wife were there and I went out to dinner with Nye and his wife." Though official government rhetoric was trumpeting the "rise of the common man" and the like, Dennis, ever the elitist, averred, "I think the government has to be somewhat aristocratic in principle."

The U.S. authorities were not impressed, continually pressing him on his opinions about the British Empire, implying that opposition to this colonial monstrosity—and wartime ally—was seditious. Dennis sought vainly to impress upon his interlocutors that making predictions was not the same as welcoming outcomes, but they refused to accept this crucial distinction. "The Asiatics may come from the East and Russia and Asia may dominate Europe"—this was not what the U.S. government, which was still pursuing an official policy of white supremacy, wanted to hear. "I do not think of these historic possibilities in terms of what is preferable," Dennis continued to insist. "I try to think of them in terms of what is probable and actual"—but it was not easy for those who assumed that white supremacy and capitalist hegemony were not only natural and God-given but also eternal to entertain alternatives. Though Dennis had made bold pro-Communist statements, they also pressed him on whether he desired a triumph by Berlin over Moscow.

"I said that there was, fundamentally, little difference between Communism and Fascism so far as the institutional pattern was concerned." He saw "little difference between the two except in degree and regional variety, regional local features, I mean." This was a premature expression of the popular postwar concept of "totalitarianism"; Dennis's problem was that he enunciated this idea at the "wrong" time, when it was unacceptable to insult the heroic Soviet ally by associating it with fascism. Dennis felt that "if Hitler fought Russia, he would be stymied, both would be weakened and our position would be stronger if we let them at each other"—not far from what Harry Truman was saying earlier. Dennis warned of the "disaster of winning a war of which Stalin is the

beneficiary" and stressed that he declined to "aid" in "setting up an American Fascist Party. . . . I said I am not interested in that. I said: 'I am not an ardent Fascist.' "[55]

"[I] never promoted or advanced Fascism in this country," cried Dennis, "[I] never belonged to or [have] been connected with any organization for the advancement of Fascism or any other ism." He conceded that he "did not even vote for President Roosevelt," but was that cause for indictment, particularly for a man who tellingly—in more ways than one—repeatedly described himself as one who "called a spade a spade"?[56]

Almost morosely, the FBI concluded in late 1942 that "this case has been exhaustively investigated in an effort to obtain conclusive evidence that Dennis has acted as an unregistered German propagandist. To date we have been able to show only that his writings can be considered propaganda; that he has been a close associate of several convicted Nazi propagandists and others known to hold pro-German sentiments; that he was a close associate of the former members of the German Embassy staff, and that his expenditures greatly exceeded his legitimate sources of income."[57] But was that sufficient for a criminal indictment or imprisonment?

It was said of the criminal trial of former professional football star O. J. Simpson, when tried for murdering his ex-spouse and her friend, that the authorities were seeking to frame a guilty man. Dennis may have been guilty of something but prosecuting him in no small part because of his criticism of the British Empire and his acidulous comments on racism went too far. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., certainly no friend of Dennis not least since it was his brand of liberalism that was often on the receiving end of his barbs, lamented the fact that "liberals sat by and applauded while a wildly expanded doctrine of conspiracy ran berserk under [the government's] guidance in the fantastic mass sedition trial of 1944–45."[58]

8

Fascism on Trial

Dennis was to pay a costly price for his outspokenness, his "prediction" of fascism's imminence, and his pointed analyses of race. But, for all that, it was a book that helped to bring him to the brink of imprisonment. Ironically, the author, John Roy Carlson, was "passing" in a sense, since he was of Armenian descent and later in life adopted his authorial name that echoed Britain,[1] not to mention the fact that in the irony of ironies, he posed—or "passed"—as a fascist in order to gain Dennis's confidence. Perhaps this ethnic plasticity provided Carlson with insight for one of the points he highlighted in his best-seller—though, curiously, this tabloid-like assertion gained little traction—was that Dennis was probably a "Negro." It was almost as if Dennis's critics were reluctant to confront the fact that his roots were among a persecuted minority for that might involve unwanted soul-searching about racism—which many would prefer to "normalize," take for granted, assume as God-given, and certainly not engage in the bruising battle with the Dixiecrats to force this phenomenon into retreat—and might provide succor to Dennis's now officially scorned ideology and why he might have turned toward it to strike back at a society that had wounded him.

In fact, this was one of the many curious aspects of a book that the wildly popular journalist, Walter Winchell, touted as "the number one best-seller in nearly every leading city";[2] Winchell was the "biggest booster" of this work and used his foothold in radio to extol its glories, where he was joined by other airwave stars and celebrated writers such as Max Lerner, Victor Riesel, and Rex Stout.[3]

Carlson's lurid exposé also received a gigantic boost from the government. Apparently, the author made a "promise" to the authorities that he "would submit the proof sheets" of the book "for review" by Washington "before it is set in type."[4] Carlson was a "confidential informant" for the authorities, who knew that for whatever reason he had multiple

aliases, including "Thomas Decker, George Carlson, George Pagnanelli" —in addition to his given name, "Avedis Derounian."[5] With such boosting, this book sold an astonishing 800,000 copies in a matter of months.[6]

What the battalions of readers learned when they cracked open this book by Carlson was bound to raise questions not only about Dennis and his fascist cohorts but, as well, the nation that gave birth to both.

"It was on September 23, 1940," wrote the author dramatically, "that I first heard 'Heil Hitler' shouted out in Harlem. There were a dozen street speakers with their dark groups of listeners stretched from 114th Street to 135th Street on Lenox Avenue. They were fanatic speakers" ballyhooing the presumed virtues of fascism. The perspicacious reader had to consider the import of a persecuted minority in Harlem turning toward a growing foe of the nation and what it was that could give rise to such a dreadful state of affairs.

Meanwhile, back in Harlem, Arthur Reid, "Director of the African Progressive Business League shouted, 'I like Hitler. . . . let the white man kill his brother white man. It'll leave fewer whites to bother with later—when the black man can step in and get justice for himself.' "

Then the scene shifted downtown to Dennis—in his "stuffy office"—whose perceived irregular physical features were described in detail. It was "amazing to me," said Carlson that this " 'dean' of intellectual fascism . . . kept in close touch with leaders of the so-called 'lunatic fringe,' " though when they "spoke of the Bund . . . Dennis criticized its use of uniforms and swastikas."

Dennis, readers were told, went to Europe in 1936 "and was honored in Italy and Germany. He conferred with Mussolini for an hour and dined with Count Ignazio Tahon de Revel, Secretary of the Fascist Party Abroad. In Germany Dennis met Baron Ulrich Von Gienanth who later became pay-off man to Laura Ingalls." Back home the ultraright General George Van Horn Moseley observed that, yes, he did " 'enjoy reading [Dennis's] weekly letters and generally' " tended to " 'agree' " with him. Dennis himself "minced no words" in talking to Carlson, asserting, " 'I do not believe in democracy or the intelligence of the masses. This book,' " referring to his latest, " 'is addressed not to the masses but to the elite or to the ruling groups, actual and potential. . . . I am for national-socialism in America.' "

Now the allure of Carlson's book was that he had supposedly gone "undercover" and convinced Dennis and his other interviewees that he was a "fellow fascist," thus, he wrote, Dennis was more forthcoming,

veering sharply away from his usual line that he was only "predicting" and not advocating fascism. Certainly what he presented was quite disturbing with Dennis supposedly suggesting that " 'American national socialism will begin with a wave of anti-Semitism in which both rich and poor Jews will eventually suffer. The process will be completely reactionary.' " According to the author, Dennis also added, " 'I am prejudiced against the Jews . . . but I have a good friend in George Sokolsky,' " a reference to a conservative commentator.

Other than these hair-raising stances, what was striking about this surreptitious interview was Dennis's utter contempt for his erstwhile comrades. "I asked," said Carlson, "if he knew Ham Fish. 'Very well, very well,' " Dennis replied, " 'but Fish has no brains. . . . he is dumb.' " What about the conservative and race-baiting Senator Robert Reynolds of North Carolina? "Dennis brushed Reynolds down with a gesture of the hand. 'Dumb. No brains.' " What about Robert McCormack, powerful publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*? " 'Dumb. No brains,' " was Dennis's terse reply.

Maybe it was "dumb" for conservatives and race-baiters to be led by a reputed Negro. Or maybe Dennis was wreaking an unconscious retribution against those conservatives and race-baiters, who had over the years inflicted such hellish damage against those like his mother by deriding their intelligence. Perhaps, once more, Dennis was reacting to the stereotype that Negroes were "dumb" by asserting forcefully that the melanin deficient had their fare share of those of lesser intelligence.

One thing was no mystery: Dennis had powerful friends in high places, as Carlson quickly discovered. Senator Gerald Nye said, " 'I respect Lawrence very much. He is fine stuff. I see him frequently. He always comes up when he comes to Washington.' The tone of reverence in Nye's voice toward Dennis was distinct and unmistakable.' " Senator Burton K. Wheeler was "too busy to see me, his secretary said. That is, he was too busy until I uttered the magic words: 'I am a friend of Lawrence Dennis'. . . . Senator Wheeler kept another caller waiting while he received me briefly.' "[7]

Though intended to be a progressive contribution to the anti-fascist cause, Carlson's book is hard to interpret apart from its prime audience, that is, a nation with an official policy of white supremacy that was being told that the leader of the demonized domestic wing of the global foe was actually a "Negro." Was that a reason why fascism should be opposed at

home? And what of the threshold question: Was it ethical to "out" Dennis or is all fair in war?

Whatever the case, Carlson's book and the publicity it generated during wartime brought Dennis to the attention of a highly unappreciative audience. It was in the late summer of 1943, as disturbing reports of war crimes were beginning to filter across the Atlantic, that Carlson took to the airwaves of radio station WQXR in New York City, interviewed by Bennett Cerf, soon to be a popular television and publishing personality. Carlson termed Dennis "one of the most sinister men of our wartime unity," yet somehow was "still at liberty." He was a "friend of important Senators, Representatives, businessmen and newspaper publishers." His visit with Dennis was termed "my most sensational interview during my four years of investigating." Cerf's program was part of the "Books are Bullets" program and certainly Dennis was wounded near-fatally by the time this show had ended.[8]

Dennis did not accept Carlson's portrait with equanimity, raising it when he met with the prosecutor, catching him "off-guard at one point in my conference with him enough to betray the bias and pre-conceptions on the racialist question shown by the groups behind 'Under Cover.' . . . I told him I had never been a racialist, that I had pointed out that racialism was a mistake and misfortune of German national socialism and Italian fascism but not, in my opinion, the most essential quality of either revolution, more or less as African slavery was a mistake and misfortune and never the essence of the civilization developed in the American colonies. Rogge [the prosecutor] insisted that racism was the essence of fascism. I promptly rejoined that the American people had always been and still were more pronounced racists than the Germans." Dennis also asserted that he "should be most happy to see racism or the race problem eliminated from American life. I told Rogge as such, I have always said as much," but, he added, "I am, as a matter of deep conviction, unalterably against racism or race prejudice in this country. I say this, not as a racist or anti-Semite, which I am not and never have been, but as one opposed to any doctrinary [*sic*] or ideological racism. I say it because, in my judgment, nothing could contribute in the long run more to the spread and intensification of the ugliest features of the racialism epidemic in this country than to have anti-racist or anti-anti-Semitic crusades waged in this country with the aid of powerful resources furnished by private groups or by the federal government itself."[9]

Yet Dennis was not just a punching bag, this strange symbol of fascism seemed to be gloating over the pratfalls of his presumed comrades. As he so often did during the war, he lambasted the Dixiecrats—the fount of racial animus. "I learned last week from one who had recently been in Washington," he said in early 1942, "that many Southerners, notably of the Foreign Relations Committee . . . are now quite sick over what is happening. They are sick over the leftward orientation and the implications for race relations. But it is too late for them to reverse the trend. They did not want the labor and race relations policy the Administration has to follow in order to fight this war any more than they wanted to fight the war. They merely wanted Britain to win. War or peace is never the issue. Nor is socialism or capitalism."[10]

Dennis was bound to attract hostile attention since he had been so effective in alienating those—for example, Dixiecrats—who might provide him a protective cloak. Shortly after these pointed comments, he was again grilled by the U.S. authorities about his beliefs. They were determined to show that he was on the take from Berlin, but "Dennis stated that he had always had money and known where to get money. He also asserted that this money was 'not always visible.' He said that he did a lot of speculating after the last war in foreign exchanges and was also doing some at the present time." Again, he denied being anti-Jewish and repeated his oft-stated idea that in talking to the Germans, he said, " 'I suggest that you handle the Jewish problem differently. . . . I said why can't you treat the Jews like we treat the Negroes? Be hypocritical about it, discriminate but don't make it so vicious.' " In response a leading Nazi instructed him coldly, " 'we don't tell you what to do with the Negroes and Chinese and why should you tell us what to do with the Jews?' " " 'I was never anti-Semitic,' " Dennis explained.

Again, he denounced Berlin's chief supporter in the United States, the German American Bund, as a " 'very bad thing. . . . the very fact of having those uniforms and flaunting German Swastikas in this country is offensive to Americans' "; he posed a distinction lost on many between being " 'pro-German and pro-fascism.' " He criticized German short-wave broadcasts as " 'very dull' " with " 'propaganda that is very clumsy. . . . if I had been advising the Germans in their propaganda,' " he added tellingly, " 'they would have done an entirely different job than what they did, you can be quite sure of that. Everything they did was wrong, very stupid, of course.' " He would " 'simply try to promote good relations' " between the

two nations and " 'say that you can do business with Germany and leave us alone, we leave you alone. . . . I told many of them that.' "

He defended his overall philosophy while conceding that " 'every isolationist is today under fire,' " though he thought " 'the isolationists will come back after the war. But when there's a big fight going on like now, that's one reason the people like myself are so much under fire by certain people because they're afraid of isolationist sentiment. There's nothing pro-German, there's nothing pro-foreign government' " about isolationism, he insisted, it was " 'just a matter of America minding her own business. . . . I don't think Gerald Nye ever had any interest in the German government. I don't think Gerald Nye ever took a penny of German money. I don't think Wheeler ever did. Of course the Germans would have been much more interested in distributing Wheeler['s] and Nye's stuff than they would have mine. My stuff was not nearly as useful to them as Nye's and Wheeler's.' "

Though the United States was at war with Italy, Dennis confided, " 'I have a pretty good opinion of Mussolini. I think Mussolini is quite different from Hitler. . . . Mussolini was a man I thought a great deal of [particularly] his statesmanship.' " He was " 'received courteously' " in Rome, which may have influenced the opinion of the sensitively prickly propagandist, though he "got the impression that neither the Germans nor Italians were particularly interested in America or American writings," while in Moscow he discovered unsurprisingly that "his being the author of 'Coming American Fascism' did not help his reception in Russia."

As for Japan, a leader of Mitsubishi Bank "invited Dennis to lunch several times" and he accepted, though he "denied receiving any money from him." He "denied ever owning any Japanese bonds. When it was pointed out that his office records reflected several numbers written next to the word 'Japanese' he stated that [these] were stock quotations."

But Dennis's performance was not convincing to the authorities. He was questioned about a particular name and he said he did not "recognize" it—though this name was found prominently in his "pocket diary," whereupon Dennis "expressed profound surprise." Dennis, it was reported skeptically, "was very evasive in the answering of questions concerning the manner of payment of the expenses of his office, he stated that some were paid in cash and some were paid in checks." " 'To tell you the truth,' " said Dennis, " 'I have always been irregular with money. I have lived this way all my life. I never expected,' " he said huffily, " 'that I

would be subjected to this kind of investigation to prove what I did with my own money and so on and where I got it from.' "[11]

While progressives and anti-fascists were lining up behind FDR as the war seemed to grind on endlessly, Dennis took a differing approach, aligning with powerful politicians, businessmen, and the disgruntled. With his typical bravado he drafted a "somewhat lengthy memorandum" —18 closely argued pages—on "Grand Strategy for the Republican Party." Cautiously, he told General Wood that it was "not suitable for general circulation, even among friends" though he believed that "many mid-western Republicans and industrialists will share my general point of view." Pointedly, he excluded recent GOP presidential candidate "[Wendell] Wilkie" and his allies, "the eastern internationalists," who if they had "their way and succeed in committing the GOP to endorsement of FDR's post-war internationalism and repudiation of our traditional American foreign policy. . . may well doom the Party." The "only chance for the Republicans," he advised, "is to ride in on a post-war wave of anti-war and anti-foreign-intervention reaction." Wilkie's path, a sort of FDR-lite in Dennis's estimation, would ensure that "the election of '44 will be like the like the election of '40." To Dennis then, "the terms Stalinism, Hitlerism, and Rooseveltism are interchangeable. . . . the only winning Republican slogan is 'bring the boys home' " though, realistically, he realized that "it is obviously out of the question to raise any such cry now or until Hitler and Japan are defeated."

What Dennis did do was pick on the most contemptible component of the New Deal order. "The South," he said scornfully, "is for bigger government checks to Southern farmers, especially the well-off farmers. The South is against equality for the Negroes. This means the South is for the New Deal and against one of the consequences of the war. The South more than any other section, is for the war, and, more than other section, against the inevitable consequences of the war." Delivering a knockout blow to the South, which was not that difficult as postwar developments exhibited, would disrupt—if not destroy—the New Deal. But for the GOP to deliver the blow would require forthrightness, he thought. "Republicans who say 'on with the War and Down with the New Deal' are naïve. They make the same sort of sense a Russian would have made who cried out during one of Stalin's purges, 'hooray for the purge and to hell with communism!' " For, said Dennis, "this war makes sense only as a crusade for the international New Deal," while isolationism should be the GOP's preferred path. "You can't tell the Chinese," said Dennis, "that we

are fighting to put the British back in Hong Kong, and the colored people in their place."

No, said Dennis, "this is not a war like [the] Mexican War or the Boer War. For us this has to be a war purely for ideals"; current "war ideology has had to denounce imperialism and nationalism," not embrace it. "It has, therefore, had to extol the economic and ethnic democracy of Soviet Russia. It is impossible to be for the war we are fighting and against the New Deal, against race equality, against collectivism and against economic as well as political internationalism." It wasn't just Wilkie's approach that was problematic either—"the Luce Republican line about a soft war, of course, is the Communist Party line." He warned finally that "if the Republicans repudiate the only sentiments, that of anti-war isolationism, which can sweep them to power in '44 or '48, they may miss the bus."[12]

Former GOP presidential nominee, Alf Landon of Kansas, told Dennis, "I have read and reread a half dozen times your letter of August 5 and have given it to some of my friends to read," suggesting the gravitational pull of his ideas.[13] Dennis seized this opportunity to embroider further his unsolicited advice to the GOP. "The Republicans," he said, "have been sold the idea that foreign policy is like the British Crown out of politics and above criticism," and this was an "error" that was "fundamental." This was "not only pusillanimous. It is dumb. It is worse than a crime. It is an error." Wilkie "and Wall Street" and the "boys downtown, who have seen some lean years of late, now see a chance of fattening on a world WPA run by Uncle Sam"; "here's how it will work—Uncle Sam will guarantee public and private corporation issues all over the world to be sold by Wall Street houses as Peruvian and German bonds were sold in the twenties," leading to "a progressive expansion of public debt." There would be an enlarged sphere for this debt since "it seems fairly certain that by next Spring Hitler and his regime will either be gone or visibly on the skids," said Dennis during the summer of 1943. "[It] seems likely that the coming test in Europe will be between the United States and Russia over the future of Western Europe."[14]

To New Dealers and their allies, much of this was not just a simple political disagreement. No, as far as they were concerned, Dennis was engaging in mischievous defeatism, bordering on treason and moral bankruptcy. While FDR was seeking to mobilize the nation against the Nazi hordes, Dennis—as they saw it—was playing into Berlin's hands: Was this an accident? Asking the age-old question of "who benefits," New

Dealers concluded easily that only the Axis would profit if Dennis's ideas gained in popularity. Did not this dangerous man belong behind bars?

General Wood thought Dennis's approach "splendid" and "distributed a number of copies" to the like-minded, but he issued a cautionary note indicating that he was behind his comrade—way behind him. "A young man from the FBI was out here to see me the other day" and "asked me if I knew you, how many times I had seen you and what were the circumstances of our meeting." The perceptive general "judged" from these queries that "you were still under attack. He also asked me whether I knew whether you had written any ghost speeches. . . . he asked me whether I knew [of] your acquaintance with any of the members of the German Embassy Staff."[15] As already seen, Wood did not exactly provide Dennis a ringing endorsement, one of many disappointments in Dennis's disappointment-filled existence.

This was not the first time the authorities had sought to recruit those closest to Dennis as witnesses against him. Just before his criminal trial began, Dennis "went out to dinner with" his "former secretary" and she "gave" him "the latest on the FBI attempts to get material to frame" him. "For several years past," said Dennis, "I have had scores of young men coming to me after reading something I had written. In this case, I took a liking to him and invited him out to my home. In this way I met his wife," the woman with whom he was now having dinner. "He told me about his family background. He seemed high class," not a trivial consideration in Dennis's book, and "he told me had worked for the magazine 'Newsweek.' His wife's brother also worked for 'Newsweek.' " He added that "he had a former connection with Father Coughlin's [movement]. He suggested I make such a connection which he said he might be able to arrange. I thanked him but, obviously, was not interested, having nothing in common with Father Coughlin except opposition to American entry into the European war." Because of her "zealous loyalty . . . personally" to Dennis, she shared with him further details about how the FBI had sought to turn her into a weapon against him. They queried her, "they showed her a collection of photos of German agents. They would point to one and ask if he had ever been to my office. When she naturally and truthfully said 'no,' one or more of the FBI would shout 'you lie.' The intimidation and bullying only made the girl more defiant." Again, accidentally signaling his "minority" status, Dennis concluded, "a situation is fast developing in which I may become another Dreyfus."[16]

In a "personal and confidential" letter, Dennis told Wood that he had "been receiving similar reports from friends all over the country over the past eighteen months. . . . German-Americans, naturalized, have told me of pressure and near third degree methods applied to them to make them say something against me. . . . the FBI and other governmental agencies are under pressure from certain groups and persons to 'get' me." In fact, Dennis was "[just] served by a uniformed soldier with a summons . . . informing me that an inquiry is in progress to consider the question whether military necessity requires the issuance of an order excluding me from the Eastern Military Area."

"I called my friend Roger Baldwin" of the American Civil Liberties Union, "who went to bat for me over the recent exclusion of my book from the mails. He came to lunch with me yesterday at the Harvard Club," said Dennis who could not stop name-dropping even when stressed. "He was horrified to learn that this action was being taken against me, the first of its kind to his knowledge to be taken on this coast or anywhere against a native born citizen."

Actually Dennis was not being pretentious. This was a huge matter. Quite accurately Dennis observed that "this is the formula on which the Japanese and some prominent Italians on the west coast have been either interned or forced to take up domicile in a restricted mid-western area." Would Dennis be exiled to Peoria? It didn't occur, instead he was put on trial and slated for deposit in a dank prison cell. At their lunch, Baldwin told him that the ACLU "will go down the line with me in fighting this move" and that their top lawyer, Arthur Garfield Hays, will "go with me . . . to the secret hearing Wednesday."

The energized Dennis also reached out to Henry Epstein, Democratic candidate for attorney general in the state of New York; "we know each other well from college days," said Dennis, "when we were on the Harvard debating teams. . . . he is handling a big defense case for some Communists . . . for which he was asking a big fee." Dennis may have wanted to recruit him to his defense team for reasons other than his formidable forensic skills, deeming his Jewishness a plus factor in draining the presumed anti-Semitic juice out of the electric charge that he was the nation's leading fascist.

But Dennis was not exclusively on the defense. "There has never been permanent peace and never will be," he thundered in response to wartime claims. He expressed bitter disdain for the crown jewels of wartime

rhetoric—the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms. "[I] had lunch last week with a Captain Gammans, a British MP," he told General Wood, "who was over here for a conference." This "staunch Tory . . . fears Russia will make a bid for European hegemony. For that event he wants an all-purposes Anglo-American alliance to stop Stalin as well as to lick Japan and reconquer the lost white empires in the East"—and for Dennis the isolationist this was precisely what he feared and opposed, which opened him up simultaneously to charges of being both pro-fascist *and* pro-communist, the walking taproot of totalitarianism. "My guess is," said Dennis presciently, "that President Roosevelt and Churchill would try for a time to compose differences and compromise with Stalin but that, eventually, they would be driven by the exigencies of domestic policies to fight Stalin."[17]

Dennis's stark words "filled" General Wood "with a deep depression"—and he was not the only one—but he recovered sufficiently to say, "if I am not mistaken, the general in charge of the Second Services Command is General Phillipson, a New York Jew, and it may be that this order was instigated by him."[18] So, was this why Dennis might be banished to Peoria, just as he was being banished ideologically?

Whatever the case, Dennis was coming to find that being a blunt dissident was not without a price. "I am off to Boston with a U.S. Marshal," he told General Wood. "I am contesting removal proceedings from Massachusetts. . . . This action here will be a habeas corpus proceeding, which will be handled by a Mr. Joseph Welch," who—ironically—was to gain in regard later for challenging Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The good news was that Dennis would not be subjected to internal deportation. The bad news was that he would be charged with sedition. Dennis, who often had to rattle his tin cup in the face of the affluent, now had to put this policy in overdrive. "If a defense fund of $100,000 is not raised, before it is over, this is likely to be a big legalized lynching," which would be chilling even for those not deemed to be a Negro. "Couldn't Mr. Ford or Colonel McCormack be interested in this fight," he asked General Wood pleadingly.[19] In response he sent Dennis $250[20] and a "couple of checks"[21] of comparable size later, a nice gesture but far from the war chest that was required.

For the government was bent on placing acerbic critics like Dennis in the darkest dungeons. In the run-up to the indictment, a reporter using a pseudonym and "breathing a plausible degree of anti-Semitism, wrote to numerous anti-Semitic agitators seeking samples" of their ravings, ap-

parently in league with prosecutors; such "notorious methods employed caused such a protest in Congress," even in the midst of an anti-fascist conflict, that the attorney general "removed his assistant, William Power Maloney from the case and retained O. John Rogge,"[22] who—in a case replete with ironies—was to become a chief witness against Dennis's top competitor as the nation's most influential "Negro," W. E. B. Du Bois when he was placed on trial a few years later for being supposedly an agent for yet another foreign power: Moscow.[23]

Rogge—a "massive" man with an "incongruously boyish face" and prone to "sonorous orations"—in turn had been "discharged from his post" as assistant attorney general "in October 1946 when he sought to make public certain secret connections that American politicians and big business had maintained with Nazi Germany." This "renegade" and "confirmed devotee of Sigmund Freud would no doubt explain his metamorphosis as the product of intricate subconscious compulsions," not unlike, perhaps, Dennis's attitude toward dominant elites.[24]

The writer, Harry Barnes, an admitted ally of Dennis resorted only somewhat to verbal inflation when he argued as the trial was unfolding, that the "present Sedition Case is the most striking and ominous challenge to civil liberties in the whole history of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence and that covers a lot of ground. . . . if a person like Lawrence Dennis can be convicted now on the basis of the indictment and bill of particulars in this case and the newspaper and radio attack, then it may be possible five years from now to hang Morris Ernst [civil liberties lawyer] and Rabbi Wise [prominent Jewish leader]."[25] Actually, about five years later, Du Bois was on trial on spurious charges.

In January 1944, Lawrence Dennis found himself back in Washington, D.C., where he had spent some of his earliest years and where Negro relatives of his continued to reside. He was within hailing distance of his old haunts, residing at the Carroll Arms Hotel near Capitol Hill at 1st Street and C Street, N.E., but he dare not be seen consorting with them, as this could jeopardize his already vulnerable situation. The war had altered the dynamics of racism in the nation—but not that much: Washington, D.C., remained a strictly Jim Crow town with violations of this edict treated harshly. On the other hand, given the charges and the wartime atmosphere of strict unity and solidarity, even the presence of Dennis's Negro relatives sitting in the courtroom cheering him on might not have worsened the horrible mess he was in.

For it was in this courtroom that the U.S. government's extensive investigation of him culminated in a criminal trial before a jury, involving a "three year plot to incite mutiny in the armed forces, unseat the government and set up a Nazi regime."[26] "Back in 1937," it was reported, "a group of prominent American Senators and industrialists met with a couple of Nazi representatives to discuss 'changing the spirit of our nation' and 'rapprochement' with Germany." There were about thirty defendants but the "fruit of that discussion"[27] was principally brought to fulfillment by the "brain" behind U.S. fascism—the "deeply bronzed" Lawrence Dennis. It was a seditious conspiracy so immense—or so it was thought—that it boggled the imagination.

Though not confronted head-on at the trial, it is remarkable in retrospect that the press continued to make skimpily cloaked references to Dennis's ancestry, his being allegedly a "Negro" and the "brain" simultaneously, which was rather jarringly dissonant given dominant stereotypes. Similarly, the idea of Dennis as the evil genius of a diabolical plot to dislodge the status quo was, in a sense, consistent with the idea of Negroes as "troublesome property," fundamentally unpatriotic, and unwilling to defend the nation against foes.

One befuddled member of the Daughters of the American Revolution was "puzzled and apprehensive over the fact that in nothing which I have read about Lawrence Dennis has mention been made that he is the son of a Negro mother. This fact was known to thousands, at least up to his sixteenth year when I knew him." "I do remember," she said, "when he arrived, accompanied by a fat, very dark brown Negro mother, whose very demeanor was unpleasant." She ruminated about the "probable *psychological* reasons for his character and activities" (emphasis in original), turning on the nation due to maltreatment. Yes, "it may be true that the fact that he is half Negro has no bearing upon the case against him"—but this was unlikely, it was suspected. One magazine "states" that Dennis was "part Indian and Irish. Again, why was the Negro strain not mentioned?" "I have found a lengthy clipping," she said, from "January 26, 1909," and "at that time he was regarded by everyone as a Negro." Back then "he was an insincere, though loudly vociferous preacher. He knew all the tricks of old fashioned revival technique." Dennis and his mother insisted on taking home "the entire collections" at this particular church; "this, no doubt, laid the foundation for his later specialty in the field of finance," she concluded sarcastically.[28] Sarcasm aside, this correspondent

had a point: Why did so many play along with Dennis's "don't ask/don't tell" approach to his ancestry?

With a nimble pirouette, one newspaper spoke of how the "swarthy" Dennis "incited loud cheering from the defendants when he evened the score" with the prosecutor for deeming him " 'Alfred Rosenberg' "—referring to the Nazi propagandist of an ethnic origin thought to be inimical to his party—by referring to his tormentor as " 'Vyshinsky,' " the once derided Moscow prosecutor of the current wartime ally.[29] This was one of the odder moments in an entirely odd trial, yet it was a fraught moment that prefigured the postwar climate when red-baiting—then deemed beyond the pale, became au courant—and race or ethnic baiting, theretofore as "American as apple pie," was deemed out of bounds. It was even more peculiar that this reversal had at its center, a "Negro" fascist. When Dennis "asked severance of the case against him from that of the other defendants," in a, perhaps, subconscious acknowledgment that he was different from those sharing the defense table, he was referred to as "swarthy" and "curly haired."[30]

It was as if there was an implicit bargain of "don't ask/don't tell" with those who chose to "pass." But how could the U.S. fight an effective war against, inter alia, racism, while effectively race-baiting the principal domestic symbol of the despised opposition? Something had to give—and it did.

9

A Trial on Trial

As it turned out, the trial generated 20,000 pages of transcripts[1] in eight months—then the judge died. By the time new indictments were drawn up the war had ended[2] and with it the hysteria that had sparked this trial in the first place; now the nation was consumed not with a "fascist threat" but a "communist threat." Thus, though Dennis's reputation was tarred beyond belief, he was able to escape prison.

The trial opened in April 1944, a few months before the invasion of the Allies at Normandy, which annihilated fascist dreams, and—ironically—lessened pressure for a conviction of Dennis and his codefendants. But that reality was not evident as Dennis and his spouse walked into the courtroom. "There were armed guards on all sides. Practically every large newspaper in the United States had a representative present. Photographers and radio script writers were on hand. The feature services were represented. Nothing was overlooked or left undone to give the impression that a group of desperate, dangerous people were being brought to trial. The courtroom was packed with overflow crowds filling the vestibule and stairway reaching outside and down to the street. A big black van pulled up to the ground floor rear entrance of the courthouse, carrying the seven defendants who had been convicted a few months earlier. There was a clanking sound as the handcuffs and leg irons were removed. Flanked on all sides by officers bearing arms, these bewildered little men who did not have a dollar with which to defend themselves, were whisked upstairs and ordered to take seats held for them" in the courtroom.[3]

Dennis wound up defending himself. He and his wife had met with Robert Epstein at the Harvard Club in Manhattan to discuss his taking on the case but the skilled attorney told them both that he would not consider him as a client if he was anti-Semitic in his views. Dennis denied that this was the case though he readily admitted that he was unsympathetic

to fascism and conscientiously believed everything he had written on the subject. Fine, said Epstein, indicating that a $20,000 retainer would secure his services. Both Dennis and his wife indicated that this was a sum beyond their means. Epstein was unenthusiastic about the case, in any event, and may have hiked his fee to repel this potential client. He remained unconvinced that Dennis was not anti-Semitic and he suspected that taking this case might hurt his reputation, and not only with the Jewish community.[4]

For this community—or at least, many within it—found it difficult to accept Dennis's protestations about his supposed lack of bias. Jewish organizations in Los Angeles in particular were quite helpful to the prosecution. As one leader there put it, "we turned over to the FBI a memorandum and exhibits which, in our opinion, proved that Lawrence Dennis was an unregistered Nazi agent. . . .we advised *PM* and other newspapers concerning this. We permitted the use of one of Dennis's pictures."[5] Asked if the prosecutor relied "considerably" on files of these groups in preparing for the Sedition Trial, one California-based leader replied swiftly, "yes, yes. Check the names of all the defendants . . . a high percentage of them, were people from Los Angeles, and from San Diego."[6]

At any rate, the approach devised by Dennis to the case was not to the taste of talented lawyers or Jewish groups alike. For the strategy of Dennis and his codefendants by design seemed to be to bog down the trial in a blizzard of motions and harangues. "Most accounts" of this strange trial "blame irascible defendants and their lawyers for making the trial a farce"—which, again, may have been intentional; after all, the defendants knew that as long as the nation was fighting fascism abroad they would be in profound trouble, but if they could elongate a trial that was bound to be lengthy anyway, the war might end and along with it the obtaining political climate and the United States would revert to its default position of conservatism—and that is precisely what occurred. "By arrangement" with his codefendants and befitting the bizarrely ironic fact that a "Negro" was the "brain" behind an alleged plan to place Klansmen and the like in the driver's seat in Washington, Dennis "spoke first" at the trial "and at greatest length. He . . . ridiculed the notion of a worldwide Nazi conspiracy."[7]

Dennis was primed for the battle of his career, though at times, he dramatically and fashionably entered the courtroom tardily.[8] " 'I had over 8000 exhibits,' " he said, " 'card indexed and ready to tender in support

of my historical thesis' " and these " 'exhibits were identical in character to those the government offered. Before sustaining objection to each of my exhibits the judge would have been compelled to read each exhibit and listen to my argument for its admission. This would have taken years.' "[9] One witness at the trial, a confidante of Hitler, was on the stand for four hours where he encountered a staggering 189 defense objections, a whopping 29 motions, and an enfeebling host of arguments between opposing counsel. The witness spoke "with a thick German accent," leading one attorney to say "he didn't know what the witness had said but that he objected anyway." Repeatedly during the trial the judge "reprimanded Dennis and told him that if he continued his outbursts he would appoint counsel to represent him." Lost in this hurricane of charge and countercharge was this particular witness's testimony that Berlin—and their domestic allies—planned to play on the "treatment of Negroes and Mexicans and stressing anti-Semitic angles."[10]

"District Court Room No. 1" was "smaller than a softball field but it [was] the biggest stage"[11] Washington had to offer for its biggest trial in years. Despite its size, the defendants' attorneys repeatedly and "bitterly objected to" what they deemed to be a "cramped courtroom and the conditions that made it necessary for them to sit either in front of or behind their clients," the "drawn blinds and the locked doors were certain to give the jury the idea they were judging a group of insurrectionists."[12]

This was the stage mounted by the trial's principal attraction, a man described routinely as "the tall swarthy prophet of 'intellectual fascism.' " For various reasons at the trial's opening, Dennis "held the floor for an hour"; he was "still talking—and his 28 co-defendants were avidly listening—when court recessed for the weekend." Though supporters of the left-wing journal *PM* were to question a similar trial of Communist leaders a few years later, this journal cheered on the inquisition that targeted Dennis. "Addressing the jury in studied, supercilious language, as if he were an academician reciting the political facts of life to a group of undergraduates," Dennis though under fire was in his element, displaying his superior intellectual candlepower to an audience that largely felt that the "Negro" was congenitally incapable.

"Dennis's address quickly elevated him into the hero's role among the defendants and many of the attorneys. Heretofore he has been a somber, isolated figure in the proceedings, exchanging few words with the characters around him and looking somewhat misplaced in the gallery of rabble-rousers, wild-eyes and hell-raisers who are on trial with him." Hence,

"he quickly achieved new stature. They listened with mingled awe and admiration as he spoke his literate lines, they chortled with delight at his facetious asides," and often "burst into applause. When the court recessed, defendants and several of the lawyers strode over to him to pay their respects."

Dennis, whose haughty exterior was designed to shroud an inner loneliness and pain, "accepted their plaudits with a faint smile, then strode a little triumphantly from the courtroom, his wife clinging to his arm."[13]

The left was singularly unimpressed. George Marshall of the National Federation of Constitutional Liberties thought the indictment and government's performance to be "splendid," that it "merits the commendation of all Americans who believe [in justice]."[14]

Equally unimpressed were leading members of the Jewish community. Edward G. Robinson, Congressman Emmanuel Celler, and Lillian Hellman joined Thomas Mann in denouncing the "defendants in the sedition case. . . . [T]hey intend," it was said, "to becloud the issues by attempting to place the Jews on trial. They take advantage of every opportunity to conduct a forum for the furthering of anti-Semitism"; disagreeing with the defendants' portrayal in the press, these advocates warned that the "explosive dangers inherent in their conduct." The "accused must not be looked upon as mere crackpots. This is what they would have us to believe. Actually, these people are conscious and unconscious tools of the enemy."[15]

Dennis's codefendants in particular gave sustenance to this concern. One of the more rabidly right-wing, Joseph McWilliams, was "born, he says, in Oklahoma and [was] part Indian" and, according to "his opponents," he "was once in the Communist Party"—though later he "joined the executive committee of the Ku Klux Klan,"[16] where he developed a reputation for fierce bigotry and anti-Semitism. As early as 1940, President Roosevelt told his attorney general, "I think this man should be looked into," after McWilliams's typically unsuccessful race for Congress.[17]

McWilliams vaulted into news headlines even more when his paramour, Alice Rand Tarnowsky, "a pretty blonde, but mental lightweight," had a "public conversion" from her previous "avowed" fascism. A "baby blonde type with large soulful eyes, glamorized by makeup . . . she dress[ed] coquettishly," and possessed "an appealing, clinging manner, a soft mind, a soft voice, and makes a fussy presentation of her ideas." This "adopted daughter of a Harvard professor . . . lived" with McWilliams

"on her large estate" but he "became bored with her." In response she broke with him and made a public splash as she "shifted her enthusiasm to the Catholic Church" and chose to "recant all her past political, isolationist, and fascist sins." In her public unveiling she told of meeting Dennis in New York in October 1942. "Joe called Dennis, whom he has known for many years and made a date to meet him in an Italian restaurant. They spent several hours together. Dennis tried out the smart conversation of his latest letters on Joe and Joe talking about his plans for taking over the universe. Alice was not impressed by Dennis's repetitions of his own witticisms."[18]

This connection to Native Americans was not unusual at a time when this group too was largely sidelined as part of a national consensus. Dennis's comrade, Senator Wheeler, ran for governor of Montana in 1920 on a Non-Partisan League ticket, which—unusually for the time—not only included a Negro but, as well, a Blackfoot Indian.[19]

Other "minorities" were not viewed as benignly. One Dennis codefendant asked "whether . . . prospects" for the jury "were Jews, had Jewish relatives, or read Jewish publications. Several lawyers rejected jurors on the basis of this information." Dennis was one of the few on trial who "disassociated" himself "from challenges" to potential jurors "found 'on race.' " As it turned out, the jury had "no blacks or Jews" but "at least three German-Americans."[20]

This jury was subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. Dennis alone "sought to object individually to each of the 200 exhibits" proffered by the prosecution but the judge "balked him, saying he refused to let Dennis 'make a laughingstock of this court.' Dennis then sat down." This consumed valuable time. Dennis also laboriously challenged the very thesis of the prosecution's case, berating the notion that he should be linked in a conspiracy to the presumed seditious acts of his codefendants: " 'by this theory,' " he explained, " 'President Roosevelt could be held responsible for everything done in local elections by Mayor Hague or Mayor Kelly,' " referring to two notable Democratic Party hacks, " 'because all are members of the same party, and the President is interested in the outcome.' "[21] Backing him up, one notorious codefendant, Elizabeth Dilling, declared that she " 'met Lawrence Dennis once briefly in a social setting.' "[22] Dennis, something of a loner, was keen to rub shoulders with the Charles Lindberghs and Burton K. Wheelers and General Robert Woods of the world, but it was a stretch to place him in league with such down-market elements as McWilliams and others of

that ilk, given his faux patrician elitism, exuding the vapors of Exeter and Harvard.

The trial of Dennis and his codefendants quickly descended into farce, which was not surprising, insofar as there were serious qualms about this case by the authorities from its inception; however, they felt duty bound to proceed given the exigencies of war and the seriousness of the accusations. The Justice Department, in short, was unsure about this case, according to the attorney general, but "after studying it for a few weeks, and discussing it with members of the Criminal Division who were preparing it for trial," it was "concluded that we had a sound case and agreed" to take it to trial. But they had not banked on either the obstreperousness of the defendants and the inability of the judge to rein them in. It was a "degrading experience," thought the prosecutors, "nothing like it had ever happened in an American court of law." Judge Edward E. Eicher, "the trial judge was determined to lean over backwards to give the defendants a fair trial," which was to be expected in a nation where the right-wing continued to hold considerable influence. Eicher "was an amiable man, a former . . . popular member of Congress, who had later served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission." However, by the time of the trial, "he was not well, was a nervous man, sensitive and patient, unable as it soon became apparent, to cope with the obstinate and unruly defendants," who were accompanied by "forty lawyers" that "raised every conceivable objection," creating a "bedlam of shouted objections and worse."

The trial was "incoherent," as "every document was attacked—and there were hundreds of them—an objection was made to every witness, in endless and redundant speeches by as many lawyers who could get on their feet at the same time. Before long the trial had become a dreary [shambles]. Turbulent scenes were the order of the day and the courtroom was continually in an uproar. . . . trivial technicalities were continually interrupting and blocking the normal procedure."

As Dennis "listened" in the "visitors gallery," Senator William Langer of North Dakota took to the floor of his august body and "speaking for nearly two hours in the Senate, said he thought the defendants were either actually demented or belonged to the lunatic fringe." Dennis may have cringed at this point, lamenting at how he had fallen, grouped as he was with the grubby and shabby and not the elite, whose association he craved. He had escaped an "inferior race" only to find himself grouped with an inferior bunch of malcontents and poseurs.

Yet he must have been elated to detect that this trial was in a death spiral that accelerated after the judge died; "the trial had killed him," said the attorney general, "everyone was sick of the farce, the war was over and the [fascist] propaganda had long since ceased," he felt. "In that sense, at least," he said not too convincingly, "the prosecution had accomplished the purpose which the President had in mind"—a curious assertion in that it concedes that freedom of expression rather than criminal infractions may have been the point of this mockery of jurisprudence, this travesty of a trial.[23]

Dennis alleged that he was able to sniff out the essence of the government's case early on, aiding him immeasurably in devising a way to blunt it. Speaking of himself in the third person, as he so often majestically did, he reaffirmed his own intelligence at the prosecutor's expense. "Dennis knew completely Rogge's case in theory from a six hour conference which Rogge, hoping to learn something from Dennis, was unwise enough to give him."[24] As Dennis saw it, this threadbare case was propelled by Washington's wartime need to accommodate Moscow.

Yet FDR should have anticipated that something would go awry with this trial since he was not unfamiliar with Judge Eicher. This former Iowa congressman was related by marriage to the Gallup family, and it was true even then that no sane politician, least of all FDR, could be indifferent to those who polled public opinion and gauged political sentiments.[25] Eicher's capability of breaking down was no secret to FDR either since the former had to "confess," as early as 1935 that he had "burned the candle at both ends," worsening his "physical condition," which "caused" the president "undue anxiety."[26] The concerned president admitted that he was "deeply distressed" about Eicher's deteriorating condition.[27]

Perhaps it was the Gallup connection that compelled the president to overlook Eicher's obvious deficiencies for when he wanted to vault from the SEC to the bench, close aides to FDR objected. It was "not true," said one that he was "doing a good job at the SEC . . . as all his fellow commissioners have told me. He has an obsession about this judgeship and just doesn't do any work anymore," though "Eicher tells me the President promised him a judgeship."[28]

If FDR wanted to place Dennis behind bars, this was a promise he should not have kept since Eicher proved incapable of orchestrating a conviction. Even as the trial was spinning out of control and despite the requirements of war, a blistering *Washington Post* editorial assailed this

"dreary affair," asserting "it will stand as a black mark against American justice for many years to come."[29] The adroit Dennis instructed General Wood to "pass this editorial along" to Colonel McCormack so this ally could pen a similar one for the *Chicago Tribune*. At this point, Dennis felt that it was the government—and not himself—that was on the run; "the jury and the local bench is laughing at this impossible case," he crowed. "Ridicule and laughter are the only defense."[30] Seemingly shaking his head, more in sorrow than in anger, Dennis bemoaned the fact that "it has taken a Jewish newspaper"—referring to the journal owned by Eugene Meyer and his heir, Katherine Graham—"to deliver the first attack on the government's case in strict line with my attack from the start." Yes, "only ridicule will ever beat FDR," he offered, since the case itself was "based on a crazy theory."[31]

Dennis's fellow right-winger, John T. Flynn, "saw" the defendant "in Washington recently. He seems to think," said Flynn, "that the trial, so far as he is concerned, is pretty well broken up and that even all the rest of it will be laughed out of court."[32] Even the left-wing journal *PM,* which had pressured the authorities aggressively to indict Dennis, was beginning to have second thoughts, noting the "growing campaign of editorial criticism assailing the conduct of the sedition trial."[33]

This acceleration of editorial condemnation was accompanied by a progressive diminution of press attention generally. Initially, radio station WMCA in New York City was typical, allocating " 'two fifteen minute periods a day' " to be " 'set aside . . . for news broadcasts from the Sedition trial.' " One community group wanted "stenographic transcripts of the broadcasts to be rushed" to their hands "every day by AIR MAIL SPECIAL DELIVERY" so as to effectively make use of these reports. But it was not long before there were complaints from this same source of the "ridiculous . . . coverage" of the trial, since it "concentrates mainly on the circus angle of it," thus "to the man on the street, the Sedition trial is nothing but a laughing matter" (emphasis in original).[34]

"The Sedition Trial is not a circus," a correspondent for B'nai B'rith was compelled to explain; "if Orson Welles' imaginary men from Mars were to descend upon New Jersey, they would receive more coverage in the daily press than the exposure in a Washington report of the silent invasion of America by the enemy's Trojan Horse Brigade. The press virtually wraps itself in silence," while "the McCormack-Patterson newspaper axis heroizes the disciples of the crooked cross."[35] Symptomatic of the ennui that had come to grip the press was the allegation by one Jewish

leader that "the Jewish news agencies have fallen down even worse than the wire services in covering the trial."[36]

At this seven-and-a-half-month trial, Dennis explained, "at the beginning" there were "some fifteen or more press representatives" that "were in attendance." But "after the third month," when reporters sensed that this was less a trial than a garish freak show, "this number had dwindled to only two or three." This was "one of the many ironies," thought Dennis of this "mass sedition trial," among which were that "the defendants were charged with conspiring to violate a law aimed at the Communists" and a supposed "Communist tactic of trying to undermine the loyalty of the armed forces." The "only evidence presented" against himself "in over seven months of the trial was the introduction of seven extracts from a Bund newspaper, in which extracts there were quotations, seven in number, from his writings over a period of years."

But what was even more unusual about this strange proceeding was the elaborately rococo defense Dennis concocted outside of court, where he seemed to be saying that convicting him as a criminal just because he had some things in common with his codefendants was as ridiculous as terming him a Negro simply because he shared some things in common with that group: "Let us suppose that a group of scientists set out to list all the physical characteristics of white people and Negroes," a term that he capitalized, no small matter when this was a matter of some contention. "Such a list, if complete, might run into hundreds or thousands of separate characteristics, all purely physical, that whites and blacks have in common. The members of both races have eyes, ears, arms, noses and so on, ad infinitum. Thus a long list of characteristics common to both racial groups would in no way serve the scientific purposes of classification, differentiation or prediction for the obvious reasons that both whites and blacks have all these physical characteristics and so have the yellow races. Such a listing of common characteristics might serve to validate a classification of all whites and blacks as members of the human race, but the yellow races are also members of the human race. Now there are just a few physical characteristics of whites which are not found in Negroes and a few physical characteristics of Negroes which whites do not have, such as pigmentation of skin, texture of the hair, thickness of the lips."

Yet, continued Dennis in this rather oddly baroque defense, "one hardly needs the Lasswell method of listing a number of physical characteristics peculiar to whites and peculiar to blacks to be able to tell a white

man from a black man. A glance suffices for this differentiation. But if one wants to classify a person with ten per cent of Negro ancestry or a colored person with ten per cent of white ancestry, the Lasswell method of listing similarities will be found utterly useless. The Lasswell method would not enable one to tell whether a swarthy person"—a favorite description of Dennis himself, by the way, of which he was not unaware—"was British, Russian, Irish, Italian or ninety per cent Swedish and ten per cent Negro. In such cases, the only way to determine the percentage is to trace the individual's family tree or ancestry for several generations back. . . . just as there is no chemical test by which blood can be graded and classified as to race, so there is no qualitative analysis by which propaganda can be tested or graded according to such classification as Nazi, socialist, communist, democratic and so forth."[37]

Dennis was obviously eliding the real differences between distinguishing fascist propaganda from other varieties and distinguishing himself, physically, from, say, FDR. But this elongated analogy seemed to be less about his defense and more about himself—more specifically, it seemed to be a plea for racial tolerance, adopting a viewpoint that was to become de rigueur much later but was rather daring then.

By May 1944, the trial had been "adjourned for five full days," and had entered "its seventh week." Dennis was not displeased, telling General Wood that "the trial is going well for the defendants and badly for the purposes of the prosecution"; it was "becoming daily more apparent to the press and the jury," he thought, "that this is an absurd prosecution and trial." When ACLU leader, Roger Baldwin, came to court "he said to me in the presence of witnesses that Rogge, the prosecutor, had 'lied to the press . . . about the case the government has.' " Dennis felt that "one reason why the government's case was phony was that it was based largely on quotes from Hitler and Nazi writers and orators, all of whom are congenital liars," thus Dennis was disbelieved when "I stated that I had never been an anti-Semite or even a red-baiter. But I would fight for the right of anti-Semites and red-baiters to free speech. I made free speech the central issue."

He was also not displeased with the performances of some among the defense counsel, these "fighting southern gentlemen, full of southern oratory and spirit," were "taking out their resentment by bedeviling both judge and prosecutor in every way known to legal craft," converting the intended solemn procedure into a "farce." "I am being consulted by almost all and by the best and most active defense counsel," he conceded

with typical self-satisfaction. As for his now infamous demarche, comparing Rogge to a Soviet prosecutor, he "apologized"—"but [to] Vishinsky for comparing Vishinsky's capable show in the Moscow purge trial to Rogge's hammy, corny imitation." But Dennis had a low opinion of those with whom he shared the dock, noting their "incongruities," in that "several are senile; one died during the trial at the age of 80" and "most are psychopathic."

Above all, as he told General Wood, "I am in desperate need of funds for legal and living expenses, though I have no lawyer," for when a "fighter gets cornered, as I have been," he noted, "he can't turn rat and crawl out" but must fight—with a little help from one's friends.[38]

Dennis's foes were not unhappy with what had befallen him. "Scholar Dennis at low ebb with his 'New Order' pals" read one headline. "In the weird rogues gallery of alleged seditionists," there was "one somber, brooding figure" who "stands out"; "he looks distinctly unhappy in the presence of the pro-fascist rank-and-file. Wearing a black hat and dark blue suit, Dennis sits impassively in the courtroom, parades austerely in and out during recesses and acts like a man who wants to go alone. His hair is graying slightly and a slight paunch is visible," "he is a tall, impressive sight. He shows no signs of whackiness," which distinguished him from his codefendants. "During the first two days of the trial James True, white haired inventor of the 'kike-killer' has been seated at Dennis' right hand and they occasionally engage in murmured conversation. But Dennis shows no animation about the dialogue. He looks as if he is simply trying to be polite and he is obviously ill at ease. On one of the visitor's benches one aisle away from Dennis in the crowded courtroom sits a sweet-faced, blonde young woman. She is Mrs. Dennis. She looks as if she might have graduated from Vassar just a couple of years ago and as if the humiliation of the present proceeding is a terrible but challenging ordeal. Most of the time she attempts to appear expressionless and unconcerned but at intervals she steals a glance at Dennis and he looks at her and they smile a little gently and hopefully." Both Dennises seemed "a little bewildered by it all." Lawrence Dennis especially, who had strived to radiate the elite airs of Exeter and Harvard, now had to "brush shoulders and sit on defendants' benches and converse amiably with the dismal citizens who were practicing his preachments." For it was Dennis who "provided the big words and the fancy phrases," while his codefendants did the dirty work. "He put fascism in respectable language. Now he has no place to go."[39]

Adequate funding or no, negative press or none at all, the approach devised largely by Dennis worked. This case, he argued, was "not proved by relevant facts and it cannot be disproved by relevant facts"; the "defense counsel," he asserted, "have to spoil the effects by continuous and disturbing interruptions and arguments, thus breaking the hypnotic spell and spoiling the indoctrination sequence." "To spoil the effect does not require good lawyers," he said. "In fact, the salvation of the defendants is perhaps the fact that most of the defense lawyers are not good lawyers," he added with characteristic judgmental verve. Consequently, the "jury" was "thus laughing and yawning with the government's long-winded readings of irrelevancies"; the "conditioning is spoiled just as the effect of a high mass, grand opera performance or a symphony concert would be spoiled by repeated interruptions by comedians or small boys making mischief."[40]

Dennis stuck a knife into the prosecution's case even in private communications. Discussing the case with conservative commentator, George Sokolsky, he denounced the "stunt trial of the thirty or forty odd alleged seditionists in the best Reichstag Fire Trial and Moscow Trials tradition." He stressed once more that "I only know slightly two or three of the alleged seditionists to be indicted. I can imagine that one or two cranks may be included who did the thing which has to be the corpus delicti of the indictment under this law, namely, conspiring to impair troop morale"—but not I, said Dennis, not I. Similarly, he declared, "I could not give an account of my finances over any twelve month's period of past life"—who could? asked Dennis. The "irony of all this [is] that I am being persecuted as America's No. 1 fascist, when all I did was predict that America would go fascist fighting fascism and argue that we should go fascist in a milder way without fighting fascism abroad and when FDR, American's Number 1 fascist, is carrying out my prediction."[41]

Nevertheless, Dennis and the other mischief-making defendants did not simply glide effortlessly to the stalemate that ensued. The nation, after all, was engaged in a death match with fascism and just allowing these defendants, who, in most cases, were sympathetic to the mortal foe, to escape unscathed was just asking too much.

ACLU leader Roger Baldwin thought it "remarkable in the degree of tolerance accorded to critics and opponents" by Washington. "The chief explanation of that in my mind," he said, "lies in the fact that the opposition is so powerful that it cannot be silenced." This was true: unlike the Communists who would soon be hounded, Dennis and the ultraright had

influential backers in the highest circles of industry particularly. "Furthermore," continued Baldwin, "it is not a direct, but an oblique opposition, couched in terms of anti-New Dealism, anti-Sovietism, anti-British feeling and anti-Semitism"; certainly those first two would be deemed virtually patriotic sentiments by many just after the war ended. Thus, he instructed Harry Elmer Barnes, "I do not go along with you that this indictment is any menace to freedom of speech since it affects only the lunatic fringe of the opposition, not to the war, but to the various phases of internationalism." Yes, "deploring the procedure in the seditious conspiracy case" was important and must be "deplored openly" but this had to be kept in perspective.[42]

Barnes, something of an iconoclast himself, was not in total agreement. "When a man like Lawrence Dennis has been framed," he told Baldwin, "you can hardly say that only the lunatic fringe has been affected, for I have heard you express a more enthusiastic appraisal for Dennis's writings than I ever have—and I suspect that you were right." The "Dennis case," he roared, "is almost solely a free speech and free press case. Indeed, from all aspects save the biological"—presumably referring to capital punishment—"the Dennis case is an infinitely more important civil liberties case than that of Sacco and Vanzetti."[43]

This was extravagant indeed and Baldwin quickly replied, "as to Dennis, I had several conferences with the federal prosecutors who outlined evidence against him wholly aside from his opinions. They named representatives of the German government with whom he had been in close contact. They stated he had received money from them. They intimated that his book was printed from Harper's plates at a publishing house financed by German money."[44]

Dennis, who considered Barnes a comrade, would have been surprised, perhaps, if he could have read Barnes's riposte, where he said that the defendant "is no buddy of mine. I have simply enjoyed some of his writing, as you have, and would like to see him get justice." For, declared Barnes, "his case is perhaps the major free speech case in American history. It is rather unique that he is being persecuted not so much for [what] he *has* written [emphasis in original] as for what his enemies fear he may write after the war. As for his having seen members of the German Embassy or consulates here," he reminded the credulous Baldwin, "that may be true, but [he] has also seen eminent Jews, Britishers, Army officers and so on. . . . any man writing a news letter would be likely to see all kinds of persons. That is how he got his information," "likewise, as to his book being

published by a house that accepted German money, three or four of the leading New York publishers brought out official British documents for which they were paid by the British government." Anyway, countered Barnes, "I doubt if the Government will be able to prove that Dennis took German money. Rather, they will resort to the trick of making him prove he did not," "smearing him by associating him with a lot of crackpots and men who were obviously and admittedly German agents. Most of the rest of the defendants are crackpots who will make as much of a burlesque of their defense as the Government will of the prosecution."[45]

As the trial was winding down, Dennis seemed at peace with himself, despite the harrowing tribulations to which he had been subjected. "Our children are in a nice school in Maryland," his spouse told one inquiring correspondent, "and we are now I suppose a permanent fixture in Washington unless some of the 'higher ups' decide to call this nonsense off. Our patience is holding off better than our purse and the sooner it ends the better. It's the biggest joke in Washington and is reflecting more discredit upon Biddle, the Department of Justice and the administration than upon this poor assortment of 'would be' crackpots."[46] Maybe so, but though Dennis did not have to face the prospect of spending years in a dank prison cell, after this harrowing trial he was never to regain whatever credibility he had once possessed. In certain circles he now was viewed as a crackpot, albeit an elegant one. He had migrated from being part of a "race" deemed to be beyond the pale to being part of a political grouping that was viewed similarly.

10

After the Fall

There was a mistrial declared after the judge suffered a fatal heart attack, unable to deal with the circus over which he was supposed to preside as ringmaster. But as Dennis's daughter, Emily, recalled, the trial devastated her father, he never recovered financially, which placed strains on his marriage and probably contributed to its demise. This financial burden complicated his ability to send her to Vassar and her sister, Laura, to Bryn Mawr—which made him more dependent on the kindness of wealthy benefactors.[1] Perhaps the final stake driven through his reputation was the fact that his family ancestry became a subject of wider discussion in 1946 in the trial's aftermath—as if this were a punishment more severe than imprisonment.

A year after the mistrial Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union was told that the case was dead, the only problem being that of "how to get the corpse out of the room," as Dennis so inelegantly put it. In January 1946, defense lawyers asked for a dismissal on account of failure to prosecute during a period of over a year after the mistrial, but the prosecutor, Rogge, asked for time to hunt new evidence in Germany. His motion was granted. Rogge uncovered, as Dennis noted, "plenty of wonderful evidence to smear all sorts of prominent people including such names as ex-President Herbert Hoover, ex-Vice President Garner, Jim Farley [prominent New Dealer], Senator Wheeler and John L. Lewis [labor leader], as co-conspirators with the Nazis. . . . much of the evidence was what the now very dead Goering and Ribbentrip had told Rogge."

Of course, Dennis's version of events is one-sided. Rogge's evidence was not just a matter of a "smear"; however, the defeat of the Axis, and the concomitant onset of tensions between Moscow and Washington, had altered profoundly the political calculus. There was little appetite in the

Justice Department for tackling once more Dennis and his motley codefendants. As the acid-tongued propagandist put it, "[Attorney-General Tom] Clark wanted Rogge to pipe down about the big shots compromised in the Rogge report," since the latter now "wanted to smear the big shots and not prosecute the small fry named in the Sedition Trial," while "Clark was disposed to revive the Trial to please certain minorities and not smear the big shots." At that point, "Rogge started spilling his smear. Clark blew his top and fired Rogge."[2] And the trial of Dennis came to an abrupt halt. Dennis had received a "Christmas card from one of the jurors" in the initial trial before all charges had been dropped—which was a sign of how this indictment was viewed; "[Roger] Baldwin said [Washington] recognized new indictments were impossible because of the statute of limitations," he added.[3]

"The mistake," in this trial, Dennis said, "was calling a good book lawyer and a phony liberal like Rogge to try to do a lynching in a nice, patriotic, liberal way. The project should have been entrusted to a real lyncher," said the man accused of being the nation's leading fascist, "to someone like Rankin, Bilbo or Cole Blease," referring to notorious Southern racists.[4]

He remained unrepentant, however, feeling that he had been treated unfairly, a feeling that did little to allay his virtually lifelong suspicion that because of his ancestry he would never be allowed to rise to the levels of similarly situated Exeter and Harvard men. His "prediction" of fascism's imminence and his consorting with the likes of German and Italian leaders was, in a sense, his shortcut to the social and political stratosphere that may not have been his birthright but, he thought, was his just desert. That dream suffered a near-fatal setback in May 1945—and again in August of that year—and he was now in the difficult position of finding a new niche for himself since the mantle of "brain" behind fascism no longer held a cachet of any positive meaning. He, more than most, realized that the constraints of war would lead inevitably to an encouraging change in the polecat status of the "Negro," but it was much too late for him to cross the color line and reclaim his formerly rejected status as a Negro. Moreover, he had a restive wife and two children to support, though here he continued to retain the support of the captains of industry, whose financial backing he needed now more than ever.

In that sense, "passing" failed Dennis, or more precisely, "passing" and fascism failed him. His assertion that fascism was inevitable proved misguided—at least during his lifetime—and it was "passing" that placed

him in a position to ride this mythical wave. For if he had not "passed," would he have been admitted to an elite prep school, then Harvard, then the State Department, and Wall Street? Still, it had been harsh medicine for Dennis to swallow when it became apparent that the Negro's status would change for the better, while he was now stranded on an island of storm-tossed "fascism" in an unruly sea of "whiteness."

Looking back years later at the aftermath of his trial, Dennis asserted that "the judge should have dismissed the case after the first week of the trial. I think that was really what killed the poor man. I think he was worrying about it. He died of a heart attack after the trial had gone on for seven or eight months." Though the stress and strain may have killed the judge, Dennis's "emotional reactions were very calm" throughout. "I was never excited," he claimed, "I was very calm and composed." Why? "I knew there could be no evidence of any real association that I had had with [Nazis]," the real gravamen of the indictment.

"Two" of Dennis's "lawyer friends went up" to Attorney General Biddle "and asked him how he ever could have conducted this sedition trial. . . and he said to these lawyer friends of mine, 'well, you [know], I was not in favor of that trial. I didn't approve of it.' But he had no choice about it. The trial was ordered and enforced by President Roosevelt. He was the man behind it. And nobody in the Department of Justice or the FBI was really in favor of it. Biddle should have had the courage to refuse to go on with it, to start it, and should have offered to resign. . . . I was definitely under a sort of taboo as a result of the trial," he concluded—which was a gross understatement. Ironically, as the skunk status of Negroes began to change, like an out of control seesaw, Dennis's status worsened. He had "passed" to avoid the stain of being deemed a "Negro" but now had to bear the cross to his dying days of being considered an outcast of another sort.

There were consolations. Though his heavily scrutinized finances had suffered a severe setback, he continued to "live" on what he called a "farm, which I didn't farm but it was a farm of 175 acres and a lovely old Cape Cod house . . . in the Berkshires near Pittsfield in the town of Washington." He had a "winter house in New Jersey in West Englewood" too. He retained the friendship of the affluent conservative publisher, William Henry Regnery, who had supplied him with thousands during the trial when Dennis was otherwise engaged and unable to make a living of any sort.[5] He was still consulting with General Wood and Senator Wheeler and other luminaries.[6] This latter list included John Blodgett, Jr., of Santa

Barbara, a "millionaire" who "bought" a "home" for his colleague and fellow iconoclastic writer, Harry Elmer Barnes, and "helped" Dennis "financially." Another man of affluence, Sidney Graves of Washington, D.C., "also helped" Dennis "financially."[7]

The Massachusetts house was where he resided with his spouse and two young daughters, particularly during the spectacular summers and autumns that graced this area. It was not as isolated as it sounds; "the best express trains," he explained, "in fact, all trains from Boston to Chicago stop at Pittsfield, 140 miles from Boston. . . . we live 10 miles from Pittsfield on top of the Berkshires." This rapid transit meant that he could skip down to his Manhattan office quite easily.[8] It was a massive "200 acres" that featured a "10 room house" that he shared with his spouse and daughters, who in 1946 were 10 and 12. Dennis had a "room" with his "wife's aunt in New York" where he traveled "a couple days a week," then to Washington "about once every month or six weeks."[9]

But he was not skipping happily for this grueling trial had left him more bitter than ever. He had soured further on the United States, a nation he was accused of seeking to subvert. "You and I have a pretty good idea what are the facts about Pearl Harbor," he reminded his friend, Charles Parsons. "FDR knew the attack [was] coming and wanted it just the way it happened. But it is and will remain impossible to make out a conclusive case simply because the key witnesses like Marshall, Stimson, and sundry others will lie, because some are dead and because the tell-tale documents in the form of memoranda and instructions can't be marshaled."[10]

The government was replete with dissemblers and liars in his opinion yet, he of all people was being accused—unfairly, he thought—of "turning a trial in an American court" into a "hippodrome," the "proceedings were abhorrent to every lawyer who was not a member of the Bund or the Ku Klux Klan," it was a "three ringed circus."[11]

Roger Baldwin of the ACLU, who he thought was—at least—critical of the trial, was taking a different viewpoint, or so he was told. "I have been informed by a person, who I have to take seriously," Dennis told Baldwin bluntly, "that this person was told by Oswald Garrison Villard that you had said to him that I had admitted to you, or words to that effect, that I had received German money." This called forth Dennis's "most emphatic denials." Moreover, he wondered, how could Baldwin make such an allegation when "as you and I rode uptown in the subway,

after the hearing . . . we agreed that the so-called fascists and anti-Semites did not read the sort of things I wrote; would not have understood or agreed with most of my writings; and certainly were not ideologically influenced or guided by me." Baldwin knew that "my readers were mainly, if not exclusively intellectuals, most of whom—practically 99% of whom disagreed with me."[12]

"I shall never ask the aid of the Civil Liberties Union," he spat out later. "Its record in the Sedition Case will stand in my memory as a black mark against it."[13]

He was also angry because although he had managed to escape prison, he and his defendants were still referred to as being, well, a bit weird. After the commentator, Upton Close, in his "weekly broadcast" spoke warmly of the defendants, Dennis reacted with "amazement and admiration," since "Close's comments were the more effective because he did not make the stupid blunder of Col. McCormack, [columnist Westbrook] Pegler and others who in saying something against the Sedition Trial prosecution never fail to say that the defendants were crackpots, etc." Now Dennis's opinion of his codefendants was not high either, questioning their "score of IQ or mental fitness"—they were not, unlike himself presumably, "superior people." Yet, Dennis, delicately sensitive to the invocation of double standards, the bane of Negroes and a phenomenon of which he was all too aware, even if he did not claim this status, was irate that analogous situations were not treated similarly. "I have read and heard over the radio many statements deploring acts of terrorism—really cold blooded murder of British personnel in Palestine," he noted in December 1946, "but I have yet to hear or read anyone calling the terrorists crackpots, damn fools or bad eggs" and as for the "case of the Scottsboro Negroes, all of whom were bad eggs, bums, roustabouts, 'no-counts,' those who championed their cause on the conviction of rape never once called these victims a bad name."[14]

This was not the only matter that irked him. Tom Clark and his boss, Harry Truman, were the "lowest form of political rate," he thought. "Unlike most [of] the defendants," he said, "I despise and fear Clark and Truman more than Rogge and [Walter] Winchell." Yet it was not just the rulers of the nation with whom he was angry. He seemed to believe that, inter alia, Jewish-Americans were close to the heart of his metastasizing problems. "Tell a Jew that another Jew is the victim of anti-Semitism or dirty work, and his only interest is whether the facts will sustain his charges. He is not interested in whether the victim is a good Jew or a bad

Jew or guilty or innocent. Our dumb natives won't fight dirty work and anti-gentilism [*sic*] on high principle." It was curious that Dennis refused to construct himself as being a victim of political discrimination but, instead, took this curious route. Of course, his "passing" meant that it was hard for him to acknowledge that there may have been resentment of him because of suspicions of his ancestry. So, he juxtaposed himself against what he thought to be the overweening power of Jewish-Americans. "It is smart propaganda for them [Jews] to link the persecutions of or discriminations against other minorities with their own: to link the cases of the Negroes, in whom the Jews have no interest, with the cases of Jews."[15]

Dennis's ill temper was not modulated when a prominent Jewish weekly said of himself and his codefendants that they were "traitors, criminals and pro-fascists." He sued and won a $10,000 judgment as the courtroom "resounded to such phrases as 'Jewish smear bund.'" The six-man, six-woman jury deliberated after hearing 12 days of testimony—invective might be a more appropriate term—and Dennis's judgment was substantially larger than those of his colitigants, perhaps because he had fewer image problems and was thought to be less of a "crackpot"—or "criminal fascist."[16] "Of course, I'll never get a penny," he remarked without elation, though he thought that if he had sued "in a city like N.Y. we should not have had a chance. There it would be impossible to get a jury without Jews."[17]

"My position is of record in my writings," he said. "The Jews have recognized that they [writings] are not anti-Semitic. Yet the Jews have it in for me. That is why I got thrown into the Sedition Trial, where I did not belong," he added resentfully. "Why do the Jews have it in for me," he asked plaintively. "The answer," he thought, "is that I can say and write things which offend them more and create more unfavorable opinion against them than all the vaporings of the out and out anti-Semites." Yes, he thought, "the Jews then kept working on me until they got me indicted," though he added that "anybody who joins causes in an action with the anti-Semites is doomed by their imbecilities."[18]

As ever, Dennis remained a formal critic of anti-Semitism but believed increasingly, especially in the postwar years, that he "[saw] no way of getting sound moderate criticisms of the Jews before the public."[19] "It is interesting now to watch the Jews," he said in early 1947, "getting jockeyed by economic, anti-Semitic and exclusionary pressures into identically the same position as the Germans before 1914 and before 1939. But there is

this difference to be noted: the Jews have something the Germans lacked. They are better propagandists and manipulators of moral symbols."[20] Though they were a "race which for four thousand years [had] been distinguished for the quality of its minds,"[21] they were—he said—"the world's oldest and worst racists."[22] He "got in wrong with the Jews," he thought, "by saying at Yale and Swarthmore in lectures that Hitler got all his racism and chosen people ideas from the Jews and was imitating them."[23]

Though Dennis may not have been a genocidal anti-Semite, he exhibited traces of classical anti-Semitism by repeated references to a presumed monolithic grouping—"the Jews"—which in itself may have been excusable (of course, negative references to "the Negroes" were rife at that time with little dismay raised beyond the confines of this beleaguered group) but was hard to justify when linked with allegations of this group supposedly persecuting him. "It is obvious that the Jews have it in for me," he announced in early 1948 as agitation over Palestine escalated. This was said in the context of his support for the presidential aspirations of his comrade—"Mr. Conservative"—Robert Taft of Ohio; he had "leanings to Taft," said Dennis, "but his repeated and emphatic endorsements of the Palestine Partition Plan, with demands for its enforcement by arms and a UN army have soured me on him. But I am not saying this [publicly]," he added, "in so many words because I want to avoid saying what would get me branded as a crackpot anti-Semite." Now, continued Dennis, "I have some Jewish friends" but a "Quaker friend" of his "in New York who agrees pretty much with me often tells me," he said, "that I never answer a query of his on a controversial issue without hedging or qualifying as if I were a lawyer talking for a court record. He is right. But you should understand how I got that way," he lamented, referring to his experience with fascism. "I always try to make it clear," he stressed, "that I am not against the Jews but against certain things certain of them do—the Zionists over Palestine; the Anti-Defamation League and so on."[24]

This was during a time when the war hero, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was being touted widely as a possible GOP standard-bearer, while on the fringes of the right he was being castigated as being unacceptable, not least because he was thought to be Jewish. Dennis dissented, however. "Eisenhower . . . is the Jew's pet," he opined, "though he, himself, is not a Jew." Intriguingly, Dennis compared the general to "one of [his] best friends, Sidney Graves"—"the son of General Graves," he added with his typical attempt to certify prestige and his ties to it. Graves had a "big es-

tate in Washington and entertains on a grand scale" and, of course, was "married to a very rich lady." But, in "Graves' biography, the nickname appears 'Nigger.' That apparently was his nickname at the [West] Point. But only a fool," Dennis veritably shouted, "like some of the crackpots" —increasingly one of his favorite words—"would infer from that that Sid was considered a Negro by his classmates," he added in a careful locution, just like "only a fool" would have "considered" Dennis himself "a Negro." Now "calling Ike a Swedish Jew," as some of the more outlandish were doing, was rejected unequivocally by Dennis, who had more than a passing interest in the subject of identity: it was "in the same album," it was "the same thing" as what Graves had been subjected to, he offered—and, by implication, what he had experienced himself as well.[25]

No, he emphasized repeatedly, "as to Ike," it "does not matter in the least whether he is a Jew or not, so far as I am concerned." No, he repeated, "I am not against the Negroes, Jews or any race as a race." "I am not an anti-Semite," he insisted. His concern about Eisenhower was different, for Dennis was "influenced by what has happened to the Germans for having had professional soldiers in high places for over a century." If pressed, he could "prefer him to Taft or Dewey, but I just can't see a General in the White House"[26]—not even Douglas MacArthur—who he was also "not as enthusiastic" about as "many" of his "friends" were, though he was hedging his bets, not unusual for one whose "racial" and ideological posture was subject to severe challenge, by "not saying anything against him."[27]

As noted, Dennis's approach to anti-Semitism was not exactly like those of his European counterparts, where this sickness was a much more integral part of identity and culture: he was not an advocate of genocide, for example. "I have never been anything but a theorist," he said at one point. "But that is a function which most people cannot understand. . . . I have never been a believer in any political or economic ism, as capitalism, communism, socialism, fascism, nazism, etc."[28] After his trial, he asserted that "Justice Brandeis," who was Jewish, "having read a series of articles" that he "had written" had "suggested" that his "New York publisher" contract him to do the book that was published as *Is Capitalism Doomed?*" Yet in the same article, written in 1949, he noted that the Swedish diplomat "[Count] Bernadotte" murdered apparently by Zionist fighters, along with "RAF flyers were shot down for the same reasons the early Americans killed off the Indians—to get and occupy their lands . . .

the Israelis have to do to the Arabs what our American ancestors did to the Indians."[29]

Still, he did lack a certain sensitivity on this matter, which was even more conspicuous given his comparable sensitivity toward Negroes. The infamous anti-Semite, Willis Carto, once told Dennis that "your attitude towards the Jews is like mine. I admire them for their ability to get and keep power whereas I despise the oafish white Christians for their stupidity and lethargy. They deserve the worst."[30] Simultaneously, in the aftermath of the Holocaust the Jewish community was much less prone to accommodate one like Dennis who, minimally, flirted with fascism.

This was understandable since Dennis consorted with the likes of Carto and others with less than savory reputations. George Van Horn Moseley was not as refined as Dennis; thus, in the midst of the crisis surrounding the formation of Israel, he told Dennis of "a very wise suggestion in connection with the President's plan to finance the shipment of one hundred thousand Jews from Europe to Palestine. He suggested a modification of the plan, and that we ship the one hundred thousand Jews from the District of Columbia."[31] In a chilling footnote, Moseley—whose advocacy of fascism was not as elusive as that of Dennis—told the latter that "very few people in the United States understand the great power of martial law when it is used properly." In that regard he found Dennis's writings "most interesting" and added: "I hope your circulation is increasing."[32]

But Dennis was also not very sensitive when it came to the crucial postwar matter of anticommunism either. "I could today write 'The Coming American Communism' exactly as I wrote 'The Coming American Fascism,' " he announced in the spring of 1946, "but it would get me branded as a Communist," so he desisted. "This time I am going to agree with almost everything J. Edgar Hoover or Lizzie Dilling . . . can say against Communism, which will protect me from the charge of being a Communist or pro-Communist," he said prudently but not accurately.[33]

Actually Dennis's views on this fraught matter were as controversial as his opinions about fascism. Dennis was "surprisingly sympathetic" to Henry A. Wallace, increasingly viewed by the center and the right as a dupe of the Communists; " 'time and the world-wide trend are with Russia, Communism and Asiatics,' " he opined, " 'Russia will play firebug; America will play fireman.' " As Dennis saw it, "the dynamics of the American economy—not any Russian 'threat'—made Cold War conflicts inevitable." He "suspected that the roots of Administration policy will

lay in efforts to dump the nation's surplus upon Western Europe: 'it is no mere coincidence,' " he said, " 'that the theatrical smash hit of the year in New York is "Death of a Salesman." ' "

Such jibes are why the historian, Ronald Radosh, termed Dennis, " 'our earliest and most consistent critic of the Cold War' " and why the scholar, Justus Doenecke, compared "old isolationists," for example, Dennis, to "partisans of the New Left."[34] His frequent correspondent, Harry Elmer Barnes, took note when *Time* magazine "showed how your line and mine is about 95 per cent the 'Communist line' while you, entirely, and I in large part, are blacklisted from publication on the ground that we are fascists.' "[35] He remained critical of the GOP, arguing in 1947 that they were "not running against Truman but against Stalin, all of which means that the Republicans are running with Truman—against Stalin—and not against Truman."[36]

Thus, Dennis adamantly opposed the Red Scare congressional inquisitions that received bipartisan backing in Washington. "If a congressional committee can ask a man, are you a Communist—answer yes or no," said Dennis, "then, why may it not ask any one, are you a fornicator, an adulterer, a homosexual"—or, he might have added, a "Negro."[37]

Loyalty tests also received support from the two major parties, though Dennis declared that "the terms American and un-American have come to be frightfully abused"; "Americans," said Dennis, "are trying to ape Torquemada without a one faith nation; to ape Lenin and Stalin without a one-party system." This was "absurd," he proclaimed, "even a sense of humor would make any one laugh at the whole business."[38]

By his own admission, Dennis absorbed a "terrific hit" when he opposed "rearming Germany and Japan," a holy crusade for most Cold Warriors, though he found it "absurd . . . to have fought a great war to disarm these militarist powers," and "now . . . trying to remilitarize them."[39] Even Dennis's "isolationism" had something of a tinge of the "New Left," as he once instructed the columnist, Dorothy Thompson, that " 'your passion for an unhappy minority is proportionate to their distance from you. It is great enough to condemn millions of our youth to die for Jews and Poland and Chinese in Asia but not great enough to insure adequate nourishment to American babies within a block of where you live.' "[40]

Dennis's views were as strange as his life, a tangled mélange of fascist sympathies, race consciousness, and isolationism that defied conventional categorization. Conventional wisdom would suggest that he was a "to-

talitarian," given his views on fascism and communism. But even here, his views were eccentric, asserting unconventionally that "Kemal Ataturk . . . was the first man in modern Europe who formulated—both theoretically and practically—the idea of the 'totalitarian state.' A state based principally on the racial principle. . . . all these elements of 'totalitarianism' " were "introduced into the practice of life by Kemal already in 1919."[41]

He took his message on race to the unlikeliest of venues. "Freedom Right," for example, featured the bloviating of Roger Pearson, ill-famed as a theorist of "race" superiority; also appearing in their pages was Lawrence Dennis, who asserted that "the backward nations will not stay backward but will advance industrially and technologically. Colored world population increase and supremacy, not Russian Communism, is the challenge."[42] Even before World War II, when much of Asia and Africa were in the vise of colonialism, Dennis was pointing to a "white retreat before [a] rising tide of color." This was "predicted 40 years ago by the Kaiser" and was "now taking place." In the "20th century retreat of the white race in the Far East the following have been epochal events: the capture of Port Arthur from the Russians in 1904," the "annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910; the expulsion by the Japanese of the Germans from Kiachow at the outbreak of the war in 1914."[43]

This theme of the rise of the "colored" against the "white" was not something that Dennis particularly lamented; this was consistent with his oft-cited idea that he was only making predictions, not acting like an announcer in a sporting event wedded to the home team or the visitor. After the war, it was a theme he continued to trumpet. What some saw as a rising tide of nationalism, he saw as "the new colored fascisms," pointing to events in Egypt and India, which were "free of certain vices and evils that characterized the fascisms of Europe. . . . they are neither Nordic nor white; they aim to liquidate rather than imitate British imperialism; they are pro instead of anti-Russia. . . . these militant nationalisms of the darker races, now in a healthy state of expansion, are not in a world conspiracy with Moscow or even with each other."[44]

When the American Labor Party, denounced as a "Communist front" by many liberals, won a congressional seat in the Bronx in 1948, Dennis was struck that this "overwhelmingly Jewish" district "with a large colored vote" would opt for the "Communist dominated and pro-Wallace" party. This, he proclaimed, was "not so much a vote against war with Russia as a vote for war with the Arabs. It shows up the schiz [*sic*] character of the Democratic Party" for the "Southerners are mad at [Truman]

because he has double crossed them on white supremacy," while "no one dares discuss honestly and truthfully the controversial issues in the Palestine problem for fear of being called anti-Semitic. . . . America's last two wars were, for Americans, essentially big lynching bees, which unlike domestic lynchings, had the blessings of the preachers and best people." But the conflict with Moscow had a differing requirement—that is, "to sell our next world war to needed European, Asiatic and African allies, as a noble crusade for all sorts of freedoms, etc., it seems necessary to the war planners to bring the status of the Negro more into line with the spirit as well as the letter of the Constitution." This was the motor driving the push toward desegregation, he asserted. "So crazy is the idea of America fighting Russia and communism all over Europe, Asia and Africa," said Dennis, "those planning this war are not crazy enough to want to combine it with a war for the racism of the Jews" (i.e., the war for Israel) "and the South and against the colored races as well as the awfully wicked Slavs. So as a gesture in support of our war propaganda, our war planners had to try to do something about our own race problem." Of course, despite the growing suspicion that Dennis was now "pro-Red," he lashed out at the "Wallace pinks who don't want war with Russia but welcome it with the Arabs."[45]

Dennis claimed that he—unlike so many others—was consistent in that he "did not want to fight *against* Hitler's racism," nor did he "now want to fight *for* the Zionists' racism" (emphasis in original).[46] Yet the larger significance of his thought at this time is that he recognized sooner than most how global responsibilities would impel the United States toward desegregation.

Dennis seemed to get a charge out of bashing the Dixiecrats who, he said, wanted outside intervention throughout the globe—except in the U.S. South, of course. "We were greatly amused night before last," he said in July 1948, "to hear over the radio the plaintive bleat of a Southern delegate at Philadelphia that the party majority there . . . were selling the South down the river, after the South had so loyally backed the majority's foreign policy over the years and while the Southerners were still rooting their heads off for the U.N. [United Nations], world government and intervention all over the planet by Washington—except down South." Didn't they realize that "the essence of American foreign policy and [the] U.N. is the total negation of states' rights"? "If American troops must enforce democracy in Germany," he asked years before scholars raised the point, then "why not in Dixie?" After all, "they, too, lost a war." Thus,

"if U.S. troops must back the Jews against the Arab majority in Palestine, because a world majority so orders, why shouldn't U.S. troops back the Negroes against the Southerners in Dixie if a world majority or a mere American majority should [so] decide." "It's one world, folks," said Dennis, veritably chuckling.

There was a further tension that even well-meaning liberals did not grasp, he averred. "American policy, enthusiastically endorsed by the Southerners, is to use [the] U.N. to implement the rule of the world majority. If and when this policy finally succeeds, the ruling world majority is bound to be Afrasiatic [*sic*]," with all the attendant consequences.[47] "No useful purpose is being served," said Dennis, "by hush-hushing the war of the colored world against white supremacy"; the United States, he thought, "must quit" such racially minded policies "or else fight a war of total extinction against [a] colored world majority."[48]

"Once the South has had civil rights forced on it," he said, "the Negroes in the South will thereafter hold the balance of power politically in the South, more or less as the Irish did for decades in the British parliamentary system" and "among the other results of this new balance of power will be the permanent orientation of the Democratic Party far to the left,"[49] yet another prediction of his that proved to be not altogether inaccurate.

Dennis, a native of Georgia, seemed to take great pleasure out of the squirming of the "white South" in the postwar world. The "native colored minority" in the United States "can now go to town. The new situation and division of power give it great leverage. The southerners have lost theirs. The native coloreds can now mobilize [against] the southerners the colored world majority." The "colored minority has more power over the Democratic Party than the southern minority for traditional southern race patterns. Why? The answer is that the international situation and foreign policy or the crusade [against Communism] have made this shift in power. It teaches a larger lesson."[50] It certainly did, though this was a lesson that few analysts were noting then.

Dennis rarely tired in pointing out that it was the South's "most distinguished President since Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, who started the current cult of internationalism. His war to end war did not end war but it started communism and the now ever rising tide of color."[51] Though they did not sense it, "it was a sad day for the . . . whites of South Africa or Mississippi or the Israelis of the world, when the West got the big idea of making Hitler's racism a fighting issue" as this set in motion a global cru-

sade that had to invoke antiracism in order to mobilize the strength to defeat the Axis. "Racists shouldn't talk about racism," he concluded[52] with a cynicism that was breathtaking in its realism and, like many of his pronouncements, a bit too insightful for the tastes of many.

Paradoxically, part of Dennis's appeal to conservatives was the sly manner in which he distinguished one from another. That is, quite frequently he referred to how "dumb" and "naïve"[53] conservatives were—while the conservatives reading his newsletter could comfort themselves with the notion that they were not being referred to, while Dennis scored another point in his ongoing battle to suggest that those ascribed as "white" were far from superior. "The conservatives generally are not smart," he said. "That is why they got liquidated in Russia and elsewhere."[54] Still, Dennis had to say "Sorry" since "now we know that some readers dislike our repeated use of the phrase 'the colored world' " and more than that, juxtaposing their interests against those of the melanin deficient.[55]

Dennis also utilized the onset of apartheid in South Africa to score points against apartheid in the United States. He cited approvingly the words of Dr. Francis Henneman, Roman Catholic Bishop of Cape Town, who said, " 'there is no such thing as white civilization. If it is white exclusively, it is not Christian, and if it is Christian, it is not white.' " It was foolish, thought Dennis, for Anglo-Americans to try to be white supremacists while "preaching . . . internationalism," this was "hypocritical" and though Dennis "prefers hypocrisy to fanaticism," he was "genuinely worried over the future of Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy in a death struggle with Communist fanaticism."[56]

Looking westward, he slapped down the "White Australia policy." "If the Australians can maintain a white Australia policy," he said, "we should not favor American troops being sent to fight the Australians to enforce the U.N. Bill of Rights"; "on the other hand, if the land hungry Asiatics, as we expect them to do—we hope long after we are dead—should finally launch a war of invasion, conquest and settlement of Australia in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition, we should not want to see American troops sent to fight."[57]

In fact, said Dennis, "the colored nationalisms of Asia and Africa hold a far greater future potential menace to America and the west than present-day Communism"; putting forth a race-based cycle of history, he offered, "every time we eliminate one big devil, we always get a worse one in his place."[58]

"The British asked for it," he said, somewhat facetiously. "To get America to stop German expansion—against Russia—the British had to call a holy war on sin" but now "the colored Asiatics and Africans are now out to fight the sin of white supremacy and imperial-colonial expansion." The "net result" was that "it now costs the British, French, Dutch, [and] Belgians more [in] fighting the rising tide of color than colonial exploitation can net. So American taxpayers have to replace the colored colonials as exploitees."[59]

Dennis congratulated himself after *Life* magazine "devoted its entire issue to Africa" in 1953 while "David Lawrence's 'U.S. News and World Report' gave eleven pages to an article on the same subject. Again, as usual," he added, "we were way ahead of the parade on the colored world."[60]

As Dennis saw it in 1953, the "Communist center of gravity" was "moving to Asia. . . . my pet phrase is the colored world" gaining ascendancy, something that "offends most Americans. They, of course, identify the term colored as applied to people, only to Negroes in the South, although our restrictive immigration laws are quite clear on this point." Unlike Dennis, "most Americans" did "underrate the colored world." He seemed to take a grim satisfaction in the dismantling of the colonial edifice that bolstered white supremacy—though many of the readers of his Newsletter took exception to this. He combined this penchant with another favorite tendency of his—which was not unrelated—that is, deriding the intelligence of those who could not grasp what he saw, something of a payback for the "white supremacy" that compelled his "passing." The "dumb British, the dumb Germans and the dumb Americans underrated Russia," the bête rouge of the moment, just as they "underrated . . . China and the colored world." Yes, thought Dennis it was a "good hunch" to suggest "the possibility ten years hence" that "the West will be seeking an alliance with white Russia against a China dominated and communized Asia." Yet this was nothing to fear, he thought, since "Communism can no more conquer, unite or dominate the world than any one of the other three great Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism has done." Still, the "West" was in a bind, said Dennis, since "any colored world leader who is our guy is sure to be a loser. But the average American can't see that," to "the contrary."[61]

Dennis argued that "Clive could lick with 5000 white soldiers, 120,000 Indians in the 1750s. In the 1950s America with 500,000 white soldiers in Korea can only founder around in impotency," a reality that

did not seem to sadden him unduly. "When one white soldier can't lick ten Asiatics," concluded Dennis, "the white man is doomed in Asia."[62]

This may have been true but such "insight" was not designed to bring Dennis into the mainstream of U.S. life. He would spend his last years decidedly on the margins of society.

11

An Isolationist Isolated?

The Cold War years were not good to Lawrence Dennis. The pressure placed on the United States as a direct result of the competition with the then Soviet Union pushed this nation toward a retreat from the more egregious aspects of Jim Crow—a system that had helped to push Dennis into a "racial closet" in the first place. However, by then his "white" identity had been too deeply encrusted for him to retreat from it and take advantage of the newly emerging racial enlightenment. Moreover, his brand of politics, which was deeply marked by an old-fashioned "isolationism," that harked back to George Washington's warnings about excessive entanglements by the new nation, was not congenial to the forward-leaning engagement that the Cold War seemed to require. Effectively, Dennis, a leading isolationist was himself isolated, bereft of the balm of close relatives ever since he had decided to enclose himself in a "racial closet." Politically, he still retained contact with an impressive list of opinion-molders, but many of them were not enthusiastic about unveiling their relationship publicly, leaving him cosseted in a "closet" of another sort.

Dennis during this period was a family man with two young daughters, a wife—and an uncertain income. Fortunately, he had friends of means, who could, for example, augment his daughters' stamp collection,[1] though the single-minded Dennis who even abjured his daughters' penchant for skiing[2] still had to find funding for this increasingly expensive sport. Dennis did enjoy sharing time with his comrades, among which was the similarly controversial writer, Harry Elmer Barnes, who spent more than one "delightful weekend" with Dennis and his spouse. "It was grand in every way," he effused, "social, intellectual, gastronomic and scenic."[3] Barnes and Dennis were "very close friends," according to the latter, at the time of the former's death. "He was like a father to me" and "his death was a great bereavement to me,"[4] one more setback in Den-

nis's vertiginous postwar descent. Balefully, Dennis conceded that he had lost a man who "worried about everything concerning me."[5] In turn, Dennis was told that Barnes "had respect for your books in the thirties and was appalled when you ran into difficulties."[6]

There was no postwar ceasefire in these difficulties. Carrying the taint of fascism, Dennis became virtually radioactive in a nation where a philosophy was emerging that grouped this ideology along with communism in the evolving though despised category of "totalitarianism." It was not as easy for Dennis to obtain lucrative speaking engagements and, as a result, he became more dependent on the largesse of his millionaire benefactors and the subscriptions to his Newsletter.

A typical incident occurred during this time when the powerful voice that was the columnist Walter Winchell asked at one point, "how come Lawrence Dennis is invited to speak before one of the most learned societies in the U.S.?" "Doesn't the American Political Science Association (mostly college profs) know that this Dennis is the leading intellectual fascist in the United States—and that he was one of the 33 defendants in that Washington mass sedition conspiracy case?"[7] One of Dennis's colleagues sighed at one point that "this is what discourages cancellations" to his Newsletter "from old America Firsters who can afford it. Like Lindbergh," said "Mrs. John P. Marquand," "they are escapists who just can't take it. Jews and Reds and pinks are never like that on a cause," she said with disgust.[8]

But also quite typically it was a "rich man" who provided Dennis with a "new electric typewriter" by which he could produce his not very widely read Newsletter.[9] Similarly, when Dennis's "brilliant children" were "at the point where their education" was "going to be expensive," a well-connected comrade reached out to the wealthy. "I am going to try to get a dozen friends," said Bruce Barton, "who will be willing to underwrite" subscriptions for Dennis's Newsletter.[10]

Dennis had started the successor to the *Weekly Foreign Letter*—entitled *The Appeal to Reason*—after the trial in 1946. "Writing and lecturing" had been his primary "source of income" since he had departed Wall Street in the early 1930s.[11] But ironically, as Negroes were emerging from their stink-stained status in the United States, Dennis—who had "passed" to escape this dungeon of despair—found himself politically taking on a similar status.

Yet Dennis retained powerful patrons, who subscribed to his renamed postwar Newsletter, though his status as the "brains" behind fascism had

undermined his lucrative lecturing, making him more dependent on these wealthy men. "I got the [title] 'The Appeal to Reason' " from "Tom Paine," usually regarded as a patron saint of the political left (though, interestingly, the Marxist economist, Paul Sweezy was a "reader of mine," said Dennis, "and an old friend").[12] Nevertheless, his "subscribers" included such nonleftists as Amos Pinchot, Senator Burton K. Wheeler, General Wood, Truman Smith, Herbert Hoover, Joseph Kennedy, et al. Dennis also "had important readers in Mexico, Brazil, Peru as well as London."[13] Homer Bone, a former U.S. senator, then a federal judge, was one of his supporters,[14] as well as Senator Rush Holt of New Jersey who gave him effusive "congratulations on your work. . . . when you were in my office some time ago," he reminded, "you mentioned that you would forward me your [Newsletter]."[15] Supreme Court Justice Harlan Stone found one of Dennis's books "the most thought-provoking [work] I have read in many a day. It ought to be widely read."[16] The powerful "Congressman [Howard] Buffett" of Nebraska was not only a "subscriber" but also someone who he "saw a good deal of" and, besides, was "an old friend." During this time—1952—Dennis "delivered personally to Senator Dirksen" of Illinois, a future GOP minority leader, a "memorandum on foreign policy which he had requested." He had just "attended with Buffett a big Taft rally in Washington" where "Dirksen presided," who they all were "pulling for."[17] "When I was in Washington last spring," said Dennis in late 1954, "Senator Dirksen told me that he [had] standing instructions to put *The Appeal* on the top of his mail every week when it came in so he would be sure to read it first."[18]

The influential congressman, George Holden Tinkham, was also a subscriber and admirer[19] of Dennis to the point when he went to the "Near East" in early 1952, he wanted the notorious isolationist to "send your publication to me at various points" along the way of his journey.[20] There was the de facto equivalent of a "Dennis caucus" within the halls of Congress, as U.S. Representative Lawrence H. Smith informed him during this period, "keep up the good work! Your influence is greater than you really appreciate."[21] There may have been something to this. A member of the influential Le Boutillier family "took out a year's subscription for John Foster Dulles, whom he knows quite well," Dennis remarked about the newly appointed secretary of state.[22]

Dennis told one of these patrons, A. Dana Hodgson, that he felt a "moral and ethical obligation" to him, as well as to "Philip Johnson, General Wood, Sterling Morton [heir to the salt fortune], Jack Blodgett

[a pillar of Santa Barbara's affluent] and others who, over the years, have contributed substantial amounts of money to enable me to keep . . . going."[23] "When I go to Washington," said Dennis during the tail end of the Eisenhower administration, "there are two men I always try to see. One is former Senator Burton K. Wheeler, now practicing law," and "the other" was "Captain Sidney C. Graves," a "classmate of Ike's" who was "married to a niece of TR [Theodore Roosevelt] who is quite wealthy."[24]

Strikingly, however, Dennis—because of his still odious political standing—was often treated as something akin to a hidden mistress by these powerful patrons, who often were reluctant to associate with him publicly. Ironically, he had ended up in both a political—and racial—"closet."

"Closet" or no, Dennis felt that his patrons got more than potent political ideas from him. As he told Blodgett, "I have an old friend and loyal reader who is today a lot richer for having followed my advice than he would have had he followed [Herbert] Hoover's ideas about inflation." This was his colleague and former fellow diplomat, Gilbert Redfern, "now retired and living in [South Carolina]" who "took me into meet Mr. Hoover back in 1940. He was then working for Mr. Hoover."[25] The former president seemed to be a particular target of Dennis, as at one point his colleague, Harry Elmer Barnes, though he was "happy to hear that Hoover reads your letter," warned the prolific writer still that "it does not intrigue men like Hoover to read occasionally in your Letters such expressions as 'dumb clucks like Hoover' "; the "latter is fine for conversation," he warned, "but a rapier is better than a bludgeon in your letters," he cautioned.[26]

Still, Dennis's sharp and sage words were often appreciated, as when W. C. Mullendore, president of the potent L.A.-based utility, Southern California Edison, made a point to "congratulate" Dennis for the "keenness" of his "analysis"; he, "of course," was "in thorough agreement" with this controversial intellectual.[27]

Still, Dennis should have followed his own economic counsel, since manifest financial strains increased the burdens on his marriage. In 1947, Eleanor Dennis was complaining that "Lawrence and I are still doing much too much work without help." He was writing the Newsletter and she was producing it with a balky and primitive "stencil arrangement." There "just isn't time," she moaned; "unanswered letters" were piling up and the details of labor meant that she could not "keep all that stuff in my head." She had been reduced to canning "100 [quarts] of fruit—it

helps out when funds are low" and, fortunately, in the Berkshires "we have such lovely pears & apples."[28]

Despite the hole in their wallet, the Dennis family often sought to live otherwise; "the girls have two saddle horses now," said Ms. Dennis in 1948. Yet, at the same time, she continued to complain that her spouse's "desk is piled to the ceiling with unanswered mail and I am quite helpless because of the battle between desk and sink and stove." As she told one potential donor, "the subscription list is way down again so that whatever you can do there is urgently needed."[29] When she was "in bed" for "two months with 'flu' and both girls had the chickenpox at the same time," the overburdened family was pressed to the wall.[30]

Increasingly, Eleanor Dennis was wondering if the marriage she was enmeshed in was what she had bargained for when she exchanged marital vows. "I walked six blocks on a bitter cold night just to mail" the Newsletter; "Dennis has no secretary at all"—not counting herself, of course—"and the entire letter has been done without any bookkeeping or secretarial service for months." It was all a "mess," not least since the usual piles of unanswered mail hampered the flow of whatever income was coming through the mail, meaning also they had "no income as bills were not sent out."[31]

"My poor wife," groaned Dennis, "has to do all the housework and bookkeeping"—though he evinced no interest in doing either.[32] Shortly thereafter, Dennis moaned that "my Eleanor is down in NY in hospital for a little operation for bursitis," perhaps induced by lugging his Newsletters to the Post Office.[33] Equally—though he may not have recognized it at the time—this did not bode well for the health of Dennis's marriage.

Yet his spouse tried to stand by her man, amid the difficulties. "Poor Dennis is snowed under with work," she affirmed in early 1952, "and has but one part time girl to do some addressing for him and no secretary." By that juncture, she "had given up all the work on the letter two years ago to go out and earn some money to live on." No adroit multitasker, she argued, "I couldn't do both housework, ballet teaching plus 'Appeal to Reason.'" Yet, "things finally got in such a disconnected state" that she "took over and have been doing the bookkeeping day & night for ten days," while still "teaching in Pittsfield daily," which put her "under a terrific strain of work." She "had a very sick daughter to care for," besides dealing with "blizzards, ice & snow to drive thru every day." But above all, they were "bogged down with debts." She was bearing up,

however, avowing that "it's a rare privilege to be able to help a man as courageous and honest as Dennis. This is not to pour out my troubles," she told one of her husband's colleagues as she busily poured out her troubles, "but it is much more than slight negligence that is wrong here," she thought. "We two have done this job for nearly two years alone and have never made enough to pay the grocer," which was even more disturbing since "if many of [their] very wealthy subscribers could see me doing this job of mailing in the kitchen I suppose they would be horrified!"[34]

One of these "very wealthy subscribers" was the heir to the salt fortune, Sterling Morton, the anti-New Deal, isolationist Princetonian, who was active in both the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Illinois Manufacturers Association. Their mutual colleague, Bruce Barton, intervened with the affluent Mr. Morton in mid-1951 as Dennis's financial crisis escalated. Dennis "was in to see" Barton, a man who had interested the latter "ever since I read his book 'The Dynamics of War and Revolution.'" During "the outrageous trial in Washington," Barton "contributed anonymously to his family" and also donated indirectly "by buying subscriptions to his Letter for friends and members of Congress." But Barton was writing not just to brief Morton about Dennis's plight but with a special request. Dennis's "brilliant children" were "now at the point where their education is going to be expensive" and the helpful Barton was "going to try to get a dozen friends who will be willing to underwrite five or ten subscriptions in addition to your own." Barton endorsed Dennis, expressing "great respect for Dennis' integrity and sincerity, and for the loyal and courageous spirit of his wife."[35]

Dennis himself reached out to Morton, writing him from Manhattan's Harvard Club during the same period, thanking him for his "subscription renewal" and attaching a clipping about his daughter's intellectual prowess.[36] Rather quickly Morton coughed up a "check for $100 in payment for five subscriptions."[37]

By 1952, Dennis was griping—like many small publishers—that an increase in subscriptions, an increase spurred with the generous aid of his wealthy associates, had brought paradoxically more headaches and more burdens on his marriage. "This prosperity has more than doubled my living costs," he complained, "and even cut somewhat my gross income. I was vastly better off during the worst years of the Depression when my gross income was just as high and bought three times as much." As ever, he was "still trying to reach a small elite" with his "message," but this approach carried a downside.[38] "My personal financial problems," he

moaned to the up-and-coming conservative intellectual, William F. Buckley, "trying to educate two daughters" and the rest "becomes more acute." This was why, he thought, "all or most of the preachers and teachers have turned left and are basically anti-business," for it was not easy to survive as an isolationist intellectual—even when one had powerful patrons and influential readers.[39] In fact, Dennis opined in 1948, "an intellectual or thinker in America today has to be an out and out prostitute to make a decent living."[40]

Actually, Dennis's griping about being an intellectual living at the margin of the bankrupt became something of a proxy for his unease about being marginal—a status that would have worsened if he had chosen to live openly as a Negro man. His colleague, John T. Flynn, did "not like eggheads," Dennis complained in early 1954. "Nor do most present day rightists. Well, that is just too bad for them," he said with asperity, since "the conservatives need the eggheads more than the eggheads need the non-egghead conservatives. Any egghead intellectual in America today making less than $10,000 a year would, if he conformed satisfactorily, make as much plying his egghead specialty or a similar one under the Communists. But the big business executives, salesmen and lawyers making over $10,000 a year would rate little or nothing under a Communist dictatorship, except possibly the firing squad or a prison camp." Yet it was this latter group that was raking in the bucks while intellectuals like Dennis were perpetually on the cusp of financial despair.

As ever, the self-interested Dennis was concerned with "prevailing trends" which "more or less determine or dictate the rise of the eggheads to power as the ruling elite," a perch that he felt was rightly his, given his superior intelligence. Yet, he grumbled, the "masterminds of our crusading anti-communists, who are 'practical' fellows and never eggheads, think it very smart, as a part of their crusade to bait preachers, teachers, army officers and eggheads," instead of lavishing them with riches. "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad," he predicted. The "conservatives want to preserve the status quo and to oppose change, while the eggheads, being much smarter"—a group in which he modestly grouped himself—"recognize that change is the wave of the future and try to ride with it." This is why, as he saw it, "Communism today is more or less of a red herring,"[41] a topic he turned to over and over again during this era.[42]

This heretical viewpoint made it difficult for Dennis to be a reliable bedfellow of the Republican Party, an entity he generally preferred to the

Democrats. He tended to "share" a "high regard" for the hawkish General Douglas MacArthur, which was seemingly at odds with Dennis's own isolationism. Then, in early 1948, he chided "[Robert] Taft and other isolationist Republicans" who "thought they were terribly smart, straddling on the Marshall Plan and foreign policy. Well," huffed Dennis, "they have not been indicted for sedition, but they have been quietly discredited as isolationists."[43]

Still, it was evident that Robert Taft of Ohio had the kind of isolationist sentiment that Dennis found congenial. "Taft or war," was Dennis's slogan when the Ohioan was challenging Eisenhower for the GOP nomination for the presidency.[44] "I only influenced Taft," Dennis conceded at one juncture.[45] No fan of Ike, Dennis also decided to "prefer Adlai [Stevenson]" to the general, since "he is likely to be able to manage to keep the Negroes and the Dixiecrats both bought and in line better [than] a real hick could ever do. [William Jennings] Bryan, another hick, could never have kept these minorities like the Southerners and the Negroes in line as did FDR, the sophisticate advised by sophisticates like [Harry] Hopkins and the [Felix] Frankfurter hot-dogs."[46] His benefactor, Sterling Morton, also an Illinoisan, was in touch with Governor Stevenson; "his grandfather and my grandfather," he reminded Dennis, "were in [Grover] Cleveland's second administration together. I have known him since he was a child and he is, of course, a delightful personality."[47]

His preference for Stevenson was not just driven by empathy for a fellow "egghead" but was part of Dennis's progressive alienation from conservatives, who he thought were much too prone to conduct global crusades, like the Cold War. "There is a change taking place on the liberal left," he announced portentously in late 1950; thus, he declared, "right now my line is more in harmony with that of the [Walter] Lippmanns and Adlai Stevensons than with the line of . . . 'Human Events' and [William F.] Buckley's 'National Review.'"[48] He had broken with mainstream conservatives on bedrock matters, waving away contemptuously their concern about the alleged espionage of Alger Hiss. "How can a running hunt for more Alger Hisses . . . still in relatively minor positions," he said dismissively, "be considered as important. . . . how can anyone think that the Hisses" were "as important as the FDRs and Churchills in getting us into the last war."[49]

"I concur generally in all attacks on the Communists for their crimes," he said at one point but that was as far as it went. "I think it is a mistake," he added, "to concentrate one's attention on the Reds carrying a party

card or the Reds in the Kremlin. . . . I am against most of our anti-Red moves and propaganda," he announced, which under obtaining circumstances could have led to his being labeled a Red himself. But he would not relent: "I am not worried about what Stalin or obscure Reds in America will do," he said. "I am worried about what Truman will do with our army, navy, air force and money." Sounding his major Cold War theme, he proclaimed, "I am an isolationist" and "if I were a Republican leader, I'd be running against Truman and not Stalin."[50]

"I am as much against communism as anyone," he added, but unlike many others Dennis saw "the menace on this score as inherent in our own blunders" and not Moscow's. "So many anti-communists want to fight Russia," he said sorrowfully, a path he thought foolhardy and contrary to his isolationist principles.[51]

As he saw it, presidential powers had gained at the expense of the separation of powers. "The present foreign policy," he said shortly after the war in Korea had commenced, "gives the President unlimited and unconstitutional powers to put America into war anywhere, anytime, he may decide an act of aggression has occurred. I say [this is] unconstitutional unreservedly," he added with emphasis, though "nothing in line with this policy would be held unconstitutional by our packed federal courts. The Constitutional reservation of the power to declare war has been abrogated-terminated." Yet the "conservatives seem afraid to raise this issue, except, of course for the 'Chicago Tribune.' "[52]

As so often happened during his stormy career, Dennis here may have been seeking to ride what he perceived to be the ascendant wave, as was the case when he was perceived widely as an avatar of fascism. For at this time, it was not an unwise bet to make that conservatives of the Buckley ilk were in decline, while the line of Stevenson was rising. Nor was it unwise to surmise that the United States might be overreaching with its penchant for interventions in Korea, Guatemala, Iran, and elsewhere. But as happened previously, Dennis was wrong—again—just as he was when he announced in early 1951, "the Republican Party is finished." That is, he was "wrong" insofar as the Cold War ultimately proved to be enormously popular with dominant U.S. elites, and opposition to its tenets marked one indelibly as somewhat questionable, particularly one like Dennis who already had the albatross of fascism around his neck.

His sounding the death knell for the GOP was somewhat premature. Pressing ahead boldly Dennis called for a "new party alignment: the in-

ternationalists versus the nationalists or isolationists," he was with the latter, of course. He had developed contempt for Cold Warriors, "telling Republicans and anti-communists and anti-New Dealers" repeatedly that "being anti-communist would get them nowhere." For them he reserved his ultimate insult, reversing the obloquy traditionally aimed at Negroes: "They're awful dumb," he concluded.[53]

His colleague, Harry Elmer Barnes, may have echoed Dennis's own sentiments when he lambasted "the Dumbrightists" who "have been dumb about a lot of things, but dumbest in following and lauding Trotskyites like [James] Burnham, Ben Stolberg and Max Eastman." They had led astray the rising star of the right, he thought: "if Bill Buckley would team up with some realist like you," Dennis was told, "he could go places, with his cash and your brains. He is a sweet boy but just in the cradle intellectually."[54] But how could he advance intellectually while in the grips of a GOP that Dennis thought was terribly wrongheaded. Their line "which amounts to saying 'vote for us' " since "we'll give you war with Russia sooner and run it better" was terrifically misguided in his opinion.[55]

To be fair, there were other reasons for Dennis's surprising sympathies for the "liberal left"; it was a way to further distance himself from his more odious associations with the right. "Now with so many top eggheads of the liberal left like [Walter] Lippmann, Jimmy Warburg, [Adlai] Stevenson, [Hubert] Humphrey and others . . . are coming out for peaceful co-existence, I think it is much better for me personally," crowed Dennis, "and for what I stand for to be linked with that crowd than to be linked with the extremists on the right who include the anti-Semites."[56]

Dennis stoutly maintained that his anti-interventionism remained consistent—only his fellow-travelers changed—and the "liberal left" were obviously a more hospitable group with which to be associated.

As Dennis saw it, conservative interventionism was doomed to failure. "The great weakness of the America First movement before Pearl Harbor," he told Sterling Morton, "was that it did not expound the doctrine of neutrality. Many of the old America Firsters have now turned Asia-Firsters and want the U.S. to intervene in Asia," first Korea, then Vietnam, both wars that he opposed. "I see no chance of success for any American intervention or interventionist policy in Asia," he said. Ever the hard-boiled realist, Dennis thought he was "tough enough to say that, while I am sorry for any people under the iron heel of the Reds," he asserted sympathetically, "I am not prepared to intervene with force for

their liberation where I see little or no chance of such intervention proving successful."[57]

Why did he think this? Increasingly after World War II, Dennis had come to view the world through the prism of race. As he told Morton in late 1954, sounding a note that was to recur frequently, "many of my loyal subscribers have found my frequent references to 'the colored world' and its growing hostility to the white colonial powers hard to take. The problem," he said with a sniff, "is that they are just not well informed," not least since "our communications media play down or suppress news of that sort."[58]

And why was this? Why was Dennis so sensitive to this concern? "You were one of the first to be aware of what we call today the rise of the 'third world,' " affirmed the historian, Justus D. Doenecke, to Dennis. From what was born, he asked, "your sensitivity to the rise of non-western, nonwhite peoples," was it born from his Central European experience, for example? More likely, this emerged from Dennis's own tortured past.[59]

"My attitude towards Negroes and the race problem has always been sympathetic," Dennis told the inquiring scholar with the coyness he usually deployed when discussing this ultrasensitive matter. "I knew Lothrop Stoddard," he confided, speaking of the conservative writer, "whose book 'The Rising Tide of Color' came out in 1920"[60] and he too was an influence—which may have been true but was certainly misleading.

Whatever the case, Dennis—perhaps liberated by the antiracist spirit that flowed in the postwar world—assailed the race-mongers with renewed vigor. As Pretoria was imposing apartheid in 1948 and some were waxing anxiously about the onset of a new ossified era of racially driven terror, Dennis was dismissive, noting that the "big problem for them"—speaking of the European minority there—"is to prolong the present situation and to postpone their eventual submersion under the inevitably rising tide of color or native self-assertion." A dumbfounded Dennis drew out the domestic implications of this unfolding tragedy, asking plaintively about racial segregation, "how does an American imagine that his country can lead a world unification movement and wage a propaganda war against the non-racist Russians, Communists or Moslems, when it is forced to follow compromise and the modus vivendi on an issue affecting nearly a tenth of the American people?"[61]

Shortly thereafter, he was similarly dismissive, almost rejoicing in asking rhetorically, "why has the Indian press, read by Indian tradesmen and capitalists, been gloating over American reverses in Korea? The answer,"

he offered triumphantly, "is that Indian tradesmen resent what South Africa does to several hundred thousand Indian capitalists," just as "they resent the White Australia policy." "Non-Communist Asians," he counseled, "will not support the use of western armed forces intervening in Asia to uphold . . . western imperialist and colonial powers in Asia while such force can and never will be used to uphold the rights or redress the wrongs of the colored peoples of Asia and Africa." "Therein," he thundered in words that would not have been out of place in a left-wing journal, "lies the fraud of U.N. and U.S. internationalism."[62]

He was equally outraged at what he saw as double-standards. "What we are hanging Tojo for," he said, "is having imitated the Spanish, the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch, the French, the Americans and the Russians in planning and waging aggressive war."[63] London remained his favorite whipping boy, however. "Why have the Germans and Japanese failed so miserably in their bid for a place in the sun?" he asked. "They lacked the background of lawlessness and hypocrisy, defiance of the papal bull dividing the world, piracy, privateering, buccaneering, freebooting, opium trading, started by Henry the Eighth . . . looting of the church properties and defiance of the church in the 16th century that laid the foundation of British imperial and capitalistic success and greatness."[64]

Dennis's causticity was not just reserved for London, however, as the land of his birth came in for its share of critique. How could the United States be so "dumb"—his favorite word for this nation's elite—"to want to crusade for a democratic world order which could only prove fatal to their monopolies and special privileges," "cordoned" by "tariff and immigration barriers, segregation, racial discrimination and denial of complete equality of access and opportunity." They "deserve all that is coming to them," he said with contempt, "for having been so dumb."[65]

As he saw it, there were just a "few men of wealth" who were "intelligent enough to understand the facts about internationalism." He thought that "most of the wealthy internationalists" simply were "not that smart" and did not realize that by knocking down barriers they were simply opening themselves up to competition they would not be able to handle. "This is what Americans still don't grasp. They are still living in the past, when the white man had an easy time in this country over both the Indian Aborigine and the African slave." Their policies not only were "dumb"—they were "crazy."[66]

When the Negro baseball star, Jackie Robinson, "testified before [Congress] repudiating Paul Robeson's communism but backing 100% Robe-

son's and the Communists' demands for race equality and non-segregation, the U.S. press went wild with approval of what it took as a lethal blow to communism. How naïve!" thought Dennis.[67] He was uniquely sited—with a foot in more than one camp—to see before most that the privileges of whiteness, which had been "cordoned" off, would now have to be shared, which inevitably would ignite severe strains.

Not reluctant to display his erudition, after reading Dostoevsky's "'Political Writings'" in "German," Dennis reflected on this "mad genius of Russia whose thought has more influence over Russian policy than that of Marx"; he had just "had the pleasure of seeing a French movie version of one of [his] greatest novels, 'The Idiot,'" whose focus was a "character who was a bit mad and a real do-gooder. He was a sort of Messiah. He brought nothing but tragedy in his wake. He was always trying to do good." "'The Idiot,'" thought Dennis, was a metaphor for his homeland. "To understand America's present world role," he asserted, "one must be able" to engage Dostoevsky "with sympathetic appreciation." For despite the "do-gooder" image projected, "in the Anglo-American tradition, up to the nineties, there was piracy, slave trading and endless wars of aggression, aggrandizement and colonization, but no Messianism. Spain had the Messianic complex in the 16th century. Britain had the piracy and freebooting dynamic." Then "Britain beat the Spanish Armada in 1588 and ended Spain's bid for world leadership. Thenceforward for four hundred years the Anglo-Saxons fought shy of Messianism," but this began to change, he thought, in the 1890s, the age of imperialism, which required a deeper rationalization. Now with the Cold War, this "Messianism" was proliferating, which was repugnant to Dennis the isolationist, who had deeper reasons than he let on for his apprehension about the impact of this trend on a world with a "colored" majority.[68]

These were themes that Dennis took to public audiences—that is, on those infrequent occasions when he was able to wangle an invitation to speak. One such time occurred in early 1952 when he addressed undergraduates at Amherst College, not far from his home in the Berkshires and again at Columbia. In both instances he was "surprised at the friendly student reception" he got.

At the Morningside Heights campus in Manhattan, "one reason they had me," he told his benefactor, Sterling Morton, "was to get the other side. They had thought of getting a Communist speaker but decided that might be a bit too indiscreet," so one accused of fascism had to suffice. "So," said Dennis with satisfaction, "I was invited to state the case

against war" in Korea and "my line stood up under four hours cross examination and won a terrific ovation." There was an added factor for the warmth of his reception—"they don't like Ike at Columbia," he remarked, "so my cracks at him brought big applause." But, as was typical, he combined anti-war rhetoric with fierce denunciations of the color bar. "What strengthened my position enormously," he concluded, "was that the score or more Asiatics in the audience, all graduate students, were 100% behind me and volunteered statements or arguments in support of my theses from time to time. The natives with me, clearly a majority from the applause, just listened to the questions and answers and grinned their agreement with me. The Asiatics—Indians, Chinese, etc. chimed in again and again in support of my attacks on Korea and our foreign policy globaloney [*sic*]," while the enemy, "the internationalists who were rash enough to tangle with me just got mopped up." The "more we back white imperialists in Asia," said this Race Man of the new type, "the more we play into the hands of the Russians." This was "crazy," said Dennis, using a word that was challenging "dumb" as his favorite appellation for an elite that had shunned him. "Communism should not be feared to accomplish what in two thousand years Christianity has not achieved," concluded the former child preacher. Apparently, the audience liked what it heard—"I was interrupted six times by applause," said the immensely self-satisfied Dennis; and when he "finished there was stomping of feet, whistles as well as applause," while in contrast "the other three speakers only had formal applause at the end of their talks."[69]

Of course, such raucous welcoming was the exception more than the rule after the Sedition Trial. "I used to be in great demand as a speaker," he said wistfully in early 1955, but when he got ensnared by the law the "great trouble" was that "the America First and neutrality case had no champions on the campus or the communications media" and he was hammered as a result. Rambling on he recalled that "twenty years ago I addressed some organization in Santa Barbara along with a distinguished Jewish writer." With a customary attempt to signal his own importance by pointing to those with whom he consorted, he added that "I was then entertained overnight by a lady who was the widow of Count Bragiotti and the step-mother of ex-Gov. Lodge's wife, Francesca." But that was then, for "now the Foreign Policy Association, League of Women Voters and like organizations hear no one with views like mine," and the fascist taint he was to carry to his grave with its overtones of anti-Semitism was a prime cause. Yet now "Tonybee" was "attacked by many Zionists for

saying just what I said twenty years ago," he complained, "that Hitler's racism stemmed from the Jews and the Old Testament." "I was never an anti-Semite any more than Tonybee," he griped, none too convincingly. "I can't help it that Gerald Smith and other anti-Semites share some of my views about [the] UN and internationalism," he groaned. His comrade "Dorothy Thompson, at whose home I dined and spent the night last summer, at her summer home in Vermont, with her Czech Jewish third husband Max Kopf, told me how she had been smeared by [columnist Walter] Winchell as a Nazi, for having taken the Arab side. She has had her column dropped" and "certainly, she no more than I, is or ever was anti-Semitic"—though she had another flaw, he thought, since "she steals a lot of stuff from my letters for her column."[70]

Thus, despite his powerful connections in Washington and the patronage he received from the wealthy, Dennis continued to bear the stain of fascism, which kept him bound in a political closet. The "human stain" he carried, the hidden facts of his ancestry, meant that he was isolated further in a closet not entirely of his own making. This was terribly embittering.

12

Passing On

Lawrence Dennis's postwar travails seemingly had no surcease. There was the unsightly blot of being deemed a leading fascist in a nation where the concept of "totalitarianism" had linked this prior foe with the new one—communism. He had left his family behind in an attempt to escape the bonds of Jim Crow, then was left to watch in amazement—and further isolation—as this system of apartheid began to erode.

Well, at least he had the salving balm of his immediate family—then in 1956 his spouse, no doubt overtaxed by her role as housekeeper and administrator of his Newsletter, left him. "I have been having domestic difficulties," he informed a friend. "Eleanor has left me and is suing for a divorce." Dennis moved to a small room at the Harvard Club in Manhattan.

There were a few rays of light, as he surveyed his crumbling world. His daughter Emily "had graduated from Vassar in 1955 and now has a job in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York." His other daughter, Laura, was at Barnard.[1] This was fine but as Dennis was entering his dotage there was no escaping that this isolationist was increasingly isolated.

It was a "difficult divorce," said Dennis with sadness, seemingly heaving from the accumulated personal and political burdens he had to bear. He sought to recover, wedding "the widow of Wilbur Burton, who was a foreign correspondent for the 'Baltimore Sun,' " though it was unclear if he shared with her the deepest secrets about his ancestry.[2] His "dear wife Dora" proved to be a faithful companion, until she too passed away a few years before Dennis himself passed on.[3]

But even in the best of times, a divorce can be emotionally wracking. Piled upon Dennis's other troubles, this divorce was notably debilitating. "It is just hard to believe Eleanor can be so mad," he moaned; "what jolts

me is that over sixty two years in which I had lots of affairs and nearly a dozen women one time or another who seriously wanted to marry"—he confided licentiously in 1956, his year of maximum pain—yet among all those conquests, "I never had a single one turn on me. I could meet and exchange fond memories with every one of them. This is the first time a woman ever turned on me." Dennis was wounded and befuddled. "The only logical motivation must be spite. But why?" Dennis thought he had the answer, another man—"the answer is Karl. It's sad."[4]

Going forward there were consolations. More than a decade after his painful divorce, his daughter, "Emily," was "both an artist teaching painting to children at the Metropolitan Museum" in Manhattan, leading "classes held primarily for emotionally upset children. She is also administrator of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, a museum that caters to what we call today the disadvantaged children and their parents, that is the Negroes," that is, the group to which he once openly belonged. His other daughter, "Laura," was married, her "husband, Mark Dollard," he added, bursting with a typical class-inflected pride, "is the son of Charles Dollard, who has long been a big shot with the Carnegie Foundation."[5] Then Emily Dennis "married" a "very proper Irishman born in London," he said with similar satisfaction.

The rapidly graying Dennis, who like many older men had adapted to the comforts of marriage, now found himself "in the throes of domestic relations difficulties"; almost worse from his viewpoint was that his beloved Newsletter was, as a result of this distraction, enduring "irregularities in getting out" and he was having trouble in "keeping up" with his "work."[6]

That aside, Dennis remained as controversial as ever during a time when the nation was undergoing a wrenching change in how Negroes were being treated, at the same time that tensions with the former Soviet Union showed few signs of easing. Actually, there was a reason why corporate barons continued to subsidize Dennis though by his own admission he was becoming increasingly sympathetic to a "left-liberal" point of view and his opinions on questions of color were not widely shared in elevated circles. For even if one did not agree with him, Dennis could provide insight or simply a way of thinking that at least allowed one to juxtapose contrary opinions profitably.

Thus, just as his domestic difficulties were catching fire, the Bandung, Indonesia conference of developing nations caught his eye. "Had the American, the British and the French been as smart as [India's] Nehru and

most of the colored world leaders at Bandung," he declared, "they would have sought from the turn of the century to play off the Germans against the Russians and the Japanese against the Chinese." For now the Bandung leaders were using similar balance-of-power tactics: the "colored world's game is to hold [the] balance of power between [the] U.S. and [the] Reds." Dennis found this stance utterly appealing, even as it brought derision in Washington. "After an entire generation of befuddled and misled Americans have been converted to the fallacy that neutrality is impossible and evil," he said with smug satisfaction, "it will really be amusing to see them taught by the smarter leaders of the colored world that George Washington was not all wrong, and [FDR] and [Wilson] were not all right about neutrality being evil and impractical."[7] For Dennis it was a matter of solemn principle that the United States should adopt a posture of strict neutrality, even isolationism, which was passionately at odds with the dominant Cold War logic. This stance served as one more reason for Dennis himself to be isolated among opinion-molders.

As Dennis saw it, the United States and its European allies particularly were reaping the bitter harvest of white supremacy at an inopportune Cold War moment when Moscow was in a position to take advantage. Shrugging off his marital problems, he observed in early 1956 that "this week we had the spectacles of the Alabama whites throwing stones at Miss Lucy in Tuscaloosa and of the French colonial whites in Algiers throwing tomatoes at the Premier of France. The trend is obvious," he thought, a sharp though ultimately failing backlash against the foes of white supremacy.[8] When Egypt moved to reclaim the Suez Canal, many in the North Atlantic were outraged, but it was left to Dennis to ask, "was Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation any less illegal, unjust or wrong, so far as property rights are concerned, than [G.A.] Nasser's latest nationalization of the Suez?"[9]

Dennis had little sympathy for those making a last stand on behalf of white supremacy, seeing their dilemma as payback for their rhetorical crusades on behalf of democracy abroad, a crusade which clashed with his isolationist predilections. Still, he had an odd—and typically singular—way of expressing this opposition. "The Southern racists, white supremacists and opponents of desegregation should, as a matter of controversial or polemical discussion, draw on the classics of the outstanding exponents and champions of white supremacy"—for example, Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, whose views on race were global and, historical, even if, in my opinion, madly hysterical. But what Dennis

seemed to find objectionable among contemporary "Southern and other white racists or white supremacists" who were "opposed to racial integration" was their "anti-intellectual and highly emotional" arguments. Actually, it is striking that this later era of white supremacy had not produced one intellectual even mildly comparable to Grant or Stoddard—perhaps because the latter could be more honest and open about their white supremacy—whereas latter day advocates had to dress up their odiousness in the deceptive ideology of anticommunism. Dennis, on the other hand, told them truths they were not interested in hearing. "The great period of the whites was between 1500 and 1900, when they rose to about a third of the world's total population." Yet, he announced in 1962, "over the next forty or fifty years, it is calculated that [their] percentage of the world's total population will decline" precipitously. What did this mean? For Dennis it meant that "if the colored world were completely united, the outlook would be grim for the white world," a point he stressed repeatedly during the era of Bandung[10] and one not designed with the sensitivities of the majority of his fellow citizens in mind. As he saw it, the world had been transformed: "the rise of nuclear weapons and the rising tide of color"—and the possibility that the latter might gain access to the former—"have changed the entire world situation," he concluded.[11]

But as Dennis might have put it, everything had changed except modes of thinking. "So many of my former isolationist friends," he complained, "have been telling me for years that isolationism is dead or a thing of the past. They are dead wrong," not least since there was a "danger we may unite nationalists of the colored world and neutral worlds with the Communists in opposition to our world meddling and attempts to use force to back up doomed European colonialism."[12]

For in his declining years, Dennis had become increasingly eccentric in his opinions and certainly he was far from the stereotyped view of what a leading fascist thinker should resemble. To Dennis "our conservatives should be moderates" but "most of them are extremists. A leftist extremist makes sense. A rightist extremist does not."[13] There was an undeniable logic to this opinion but one is hard pressed to divine how Dennis expected to raise funds from an audience not shaped by his eccentricities.

But Dennis increasingly was clashing with received right-wing opinion, even on matters that threatened to uncloak him. "The real, or big, issue is amalgamation: intermarriage or miscegenation," he said days after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, while "the

case against racial integration in the schools is based on odious comparisons."[14] "I call the fight over desegregation a race war," though at this juncture it was unclear where Dennis's allegiances would reside if it actually came to this cataclysm.[15]

Taiwan and Israel were well on their way during this era to becoming right-wing symbols of steely defiance, yet Dennis argued with similar insolence that "it is conceivable and even far from improbable that in a not distant future Israel may be attacked by its neighbors"; in fact, he continued, "Israel and Chiang" were "the weakest of America[']s" allies "to whose defense we are committed."[16]

Yet despite holding opinions seemingly contrary to what a "fascist" icon should believe, Dennis continued to attract right-wingers as if he were made of flypaper. In 1964, one among this group, Richard Edwin Houtzer, wrote to "extend" to Dennis "the offer of the Greenback Party nomination for President"; it was "possible," he said, "for you to carry at least 10,000 votes in both Minnesota and Washington and I believe that you can take 3 votes away from the Democrats to every one away from the Republicans." Perhaps unaware as to the bona fides of the person he was actually addressing, he confided to what he assumed was a fellow "white" that he "was assaulted by two Negroes and my nose was broken and three ribs cracked. I still feel pain to this day."[17] Dennis declined the offer, which was apparently part of a campaign to boost the GOP nominee—Barry Goldwater—a man who gave Dennis "a thousand thanks for your good words. They mean more to me than I can possibly tell you," this after he went down to a miserable defeat in this presidential race.[18] Thereafter, suggesting that his presidential aspirations might not be totally chimerical, Dennis expressed high praise for his longtime comrade, William F. Buckley, after he endorsed the idea of "having a Negro President of the United States," which was "something few, if any, self-styled Conservatives would approve of."[19] As the nation itself was emerging from the fetid cave of Jim Crow, Dennis seemed to be more emboldened. Dennis "never opposed unlimited immigration into this country or racial integration or assimilation," he admitted.[20] "Law never could and never will accomplish the impossible. It cannot be made to prevent two streams, which flow side by side, from eventually mingling. Only dumb legalists"—his frequent rebuke once more—"could have believed the contrary."[21]

This was well before the resurgence of modern conservatism, a time when the U.S. right wing was not so choosy about allies, and, therefore,

did not turn its back on Dennis despite his "fascist" credentials. After all, Dennis had a storehouse of iconoclastic ideas, which—if nothing else—provided unique perspectives with which one could shape one's own. Dennis stayed on top of the news too. "I read the English papers," he told an inquiring correspondent in 1969, "getting the 'Sunday Times' and 'Observer' every week. 'The Economist' is my stand-by."[22]

Dennis had plenty of time to study newsprint in his old age because his declining health had slowed him down immeasurably. For a while he was residing "in an apartment" on the "corner of Riverside Drive and 102nd Street" with his "younger daughter Laura" and her spouse, "Mark Dollard," and their "four year old baby."[23] For a while he was hobbling around Manhattan with a "cane."[24] "I am 75 years old," he said on Independence Day in 1969: "I had a birthday this Christmas. I am not well. I have hardening of the arteries, which makes walking difficult for me."[25]

Dennis was not well but the nation in which he had been born was improving; for the sickness of de jure discrimination was fading rapidly and the growing recognition that having within the gates a restive and sullen African-American population quite susceptible to the overtures and blandishments of Washington's real and imagined antagonists was no small reason. Understandably, analysis of this dynamic has looked to the left and the traction gained by the pro-Moscow Communist Party in the United States, but it was not only Reds who sensed—and sought to exploit—this fundamental weakness.[26] Though Dennis was in the closet and, in any case, European-style fascism never gained momentum among African-Americans,[27] it remains fair to say that the easing of Jim Crow barriers made it less likely that the embittered melanin deficient—like Dennis—would be impelled by their own subjective dilemma to seek succor abroad, thereby jeopardizing U.S. national security. On the other hand, Dennis's flirtation with fascism was a harbinger of the rise of a hard-edged conservatism in the United States that threatened to jeopardize the hard-earned gains garnered by African-Americans in the wake of the civil rights upsurge of the 1960s.

But if this perception about his own subjective dilemma occurred to Dennis certainly he did not share it with his readers. He went to his grave retaining reticence about his deepest and darkest secret.

For after the sedition trial he had developed extensive carbuncles and a staph infection; keloids came soon thereafter, leading to star-shaped scars on his back. His marital difficulties had left scars of another sort that he had difficulty surmounting. After the death of his second wife, he

moved in with his daughter Emily, and in a final act of definition, perhaps rebellion, he finally allowed his hair to grow, taking on the newly popular hairdo—an "Afro." He had been a man of great physical strength for much of his life but now he was debilitated. Finally, in August 1977, Lawrence Dennis passed on, with most recalling him as an apostle of fascism and few recalling that at one time, in his infancy, he had been a celebrated "Negro." Fewer still detected any connection between the powerful poles of his existence—"passing" and fascism.

Notes

NOTES TO THE PREFACE

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2. *New York Times,* 22 March 1927.

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15. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *War Within and Without: Diaries and Letters of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1939–1944,* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, 151, 152.

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18. Ibid., Schlesinger, 74, 78.

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22. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 2 December 1941. Dennis's Newsletter can be found in many libraries; I consulted copies at Stanford University in his papers.

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33. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 8 May 1972, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

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68. *New York Times,* 14 May 1940.

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75. See Georg Reuth, *Goebbels,* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990, 14, 24. See also Daniel Kelves, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity,* New York: Knopf, 1985; Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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11. Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 6, 7.

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14. See, e.g., Eva Saks, "Representing Miscegenation Law," *Raritan,* 8 (Fall 1988): 39–69; David A. Hollinger, "Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States," *American Historical Review,* 108 (Number 5, December 2003): 1363–1390.

15. Ibid., James O'Toole, 110, 123, 124, 148.

16. Ibid., Earl Lewis and Heidi Ardizzone, 37.

17. Ibid., Randall Kennedy, 284, 326, 320. Akin to the story told by Harriet Jacobs is a more contemporary tale—that of former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. "Through his youth and into middle age, a rumor circulated in Washington—a rumor which he was certainly aware—that Edgar himself had black blood [*sic*] in his veins." In the "black communities of the East . . . it was generally believed that Edgar had black roots. The writer Gore Vidal, who grew up in Washington in the thirties, has a singular memory. . . . 'people said he came from a family that had "passed."'" Moreover, "early photographs of Edgar do have a Negroid [*sic*] look. His hair was noticeably wiry, and a 1939 article refers to his 'dark skin, almost brown from sunburn.' . . . no birth certificate was registered when Edgar was born in 1895." See Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover,* New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1993, 349.

18. See Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race,* New York: New York University Press, 1996, 56. See also Gary Nash, "Toward a Recognition of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History,* 82 (December 1995): 941–962.

19. Ibid., James O'Toole, 144, 198: Quite typically, "at West Point in 1880 . . . a black cadet from South Carolina was tied up and beaten by his classmates,

in spite of the light complexion that had kept his secret for a while. The victim was even twice convicted of staging the whole incident himself and was dismissed from the academy."

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21. Ibid., Randall Kennedy, 298, 330.

22. Ibid., Laura Browder, 123.

23. Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP,* New York: New Press, 2003, 337.

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26. Charles R. Larson, *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen,* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993, 42.

27. Of course, too much can be made of the slippery concept of "identity." See, e.g., Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society,* 29 (2000): 1–47.

28. Ibid., Charles R. Larson, 42.

29. Heidi Ardizzone, "Red Blooded Americans: Mulattoes and the Melting Pot in U.S. Racialist and Nationalist Discourse, 1890–1930," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, 1997, 8, 93, 162, 186. On Louisiana, see also *Jane Doe v. State of Louisiana,* 479 So. 2d 372 (1985): This state as recently as a few decades ago defined anyone who was "one-thirty-second black" as "'colored.'" See also Walter Benn Michels, "The No Drop Rule," in K. Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *Identities,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 401–412.

30. Ibid., Ian F. Haney López, 62, 67, 23.

31. Ibid., Randall Kennedy, 369. See also J. A. Rogers, *Nature Knows No Color-Lines: Research into the Negro Ancestry in the White Race,* St. Petersburg, Florida: Helga M. Rogers, 1952.

32. Ibid., Kenneth Robert Janken, 2.

33. Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900–1940,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, 166.

34. Ibid., Mae Henderson, xxiv. See also Teresa Zackondik, "Fixing the Color Line: The Mulatto, Southern Courts and Racial Identity," *American Quarterly,* 53 (September 2001): 420–451.

35. See, e.g., Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma; The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944, 683–688; Thomas Theodore McKinney, *All White America,* Boston: Meador, 1937; E. W. Eckard, "How Many Negroes 'Pass'?" *American Journal of Sociology,* 52 (Number 6, 1947): 498–500; John H. Burma, "The Measurement of Negro 'Passing,'" *American Journal of Sociology,* 52 (Number 1, 1946): 18–22.

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3. *Atlanta Journal,* 15 November 1897. See also *Spokane Press,* 29 October 1903.
4. Ibid., Lonnie Lawrence Dennis, 16, 17, 28, 31, 36, 41, 43, 64, 72, 74, 79, 90, 98, 100.
5. Michael Leroy Porter, "Black Atlanta: An Interdisciplinary Study of Blacks on the East Side of Atlanta, 1890–1930," Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1974, 8, 17, 40.
6. David Fort Godshalk, "In the Wake of Riot: Atlanta's Struggle for Order, 1899–1919," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1992.
7. Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta,* San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001, 92–93, 256.
8. Ibid., Kenneth Robert Janken, 16.
9. See obituary of Green Dennis, *Atlanta Journal,* 14 December 1901. Lawrence Dennis's FBI file, from which much of the following and immediately foregoing is taken, can be found at FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. and is available to the public. See, e.g., Report, circa 1941, 97-6, Atlanta, File No. 97-HQ-218, *FBI.*
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15. Ibid., FBI Report, 24 March 1941, Record Group 60.
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24. W. B. Munroy to Mr. Yeomans, 27 December 1915, Lawrence Dennis File.

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2. Ibid., Letter from America Institute, 8 Univeritaet St., 17 November 1938, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 10, SP3 BTJ/R, *FBI.*

3. Ibid., Oral History, Lawrence Dennis.

4. Ibid., Report, 10 June 1942, 97-218-168 and 100-4201, Sections 5–6, *FBI.*

5. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Life, 1 May 1942, 97-68, Section 13, *FBI.*

6. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Porter Sargent, 24 April 1942, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 7–8, *FBI.*

7. Lawrence Dennis, *The Coming American Fascism,* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936, vii, 109, 110, 172, 209, 229, 242, 250, 261, 262, 299.

8. Lawrence Dennis, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* New York: Harper & Bros., 1932, 56, 83, 183, 239–240, 255.

9. Lawrence Dennis, "Usury and the Canonists," *The Economic Journal,* 42 (Number 166, June 1932): 312–323. See also the review of *Is Capitalism Doomed?* in *The Economic Journal,* 43 (Number 169, March 1933): 150–152.

10. Review, *Social Forces,* 16 (Number 2, December 1937): 299–301.

11. Review, *International Affairs,* 15 (Number 4, July-August 1936): 640–641.

12. Review, *American Political Science Review,* 30 (Number 3, June 1936): 573–575, 573.

13. Review, *American Economic Review,* 26 (Number 2, July 1936): 298–300.

14. See, e.g., David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004; Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956,* London: Associated University Presses, 1988; Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006.

15. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917–1950,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000, 244.

16. Undated Clipping, Box 4, Folder 2, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

17. Memorandum from Department of Justice, 12 March 1942, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 4, *National Archives and Records Administration—College Park, Maryland.*

18. Memorandum from FBI, 29 October 1942, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, *National Archives and Records Administration.*

19. Ibid., Transcript of FBI interview with Philip Johnson, 18 June 1942, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Box 5, *National Archives and Records Administration.*

20. Ibid., Memorandum from FBI, 13 February 1943, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Class 146-6-11, Section 6, Box 5.

21. Ibid., Memorandum from FBI, 16 October 1943, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Class 146-6, Box 5.

22. Ibid., Memorandum from FBI, 13 February 1943.

23. Ibid., Memorandum from FBI, 6 October 1943, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Class 146-28-110. Redfern seemed duplicitous, at least he continued to pose as a friend of Dennis though he was confiding details about him to the authorities. See, e.g., Gilbert Redfern to Lawrence Dennis, 13 August 1953, Box 2, Folder 6, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*: "When we last corresponded some 15 years ago FDR's thugs were closing in on you and at that time you looked like a short sale. . . . I wonder if our master-

minds in Washington have caught on yet to the fact that the Communist center of gravity is gradually moving from Moscow to Peiping? I have heard a friend in the U.N. venture a guess recently that, ten years hence, Russia would be allied with the West against a China-dominated Asia and communized Asia. . . . I retired from the U.N. Children's Fund 18 months ago and settled in Southern Pines, N.C. . . . it is 300 miles south of the nearest potential H-Bomb target. . . . I am now nearing 66."

24. Letter to E. K. Hassett, 27 May 1941, Box 11, *Yale in World War II Collection, Yale University.*

25. *Yale Daily News,* 24 May 1941.

26. Frank Altschul to *Yale Daily News,* 2 June 1941, Box 11, *Yale in World War II Collection.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Report, 27 October 1938, Box 3, *James Metcalfe Papers—Stanford University.*

2. Ibid., P. E. Foxworth, Assistant Director, FBI, to J. Edgar Hoover, 6 January 1942, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 3–4, *FBI.*

3. Ibid., Report, 10 July 1942, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 8, 97-218-231, 97-18, *FBI.*

4. Ibid., Senator Joseph H. Ball to J. Edgar Hoover, 24 February 1942, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 3–4, *FBI.*

5. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Lindbergh, 6 February 1940, Group 325, Series I, Box 9, *Charles Lindbergh Papers—Yale University.*

6. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Charles Lindbergh, 7 November 1940.

7. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Charles Lindbergh, 31 May 1941.

8. Charles Lindbergh to Lawrence Dennis, 14 April 1941, Series I, Group 425, Box 38, *Charles Lindbergh Papers.*

9. Memorandum from FBI, 27 February 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 4, General Records of the Department of Justice.

10. Joseph W. Bendersky, *The 'Jewish Threat': Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army,* New York: Basic, 2000, 276.

11. Ibid., Kenneth Davis, *The Hero,* 409.

12. Ibid., Charles Higham, *American Swastika,* 56.

13. Justus Doenecke, "Lawrence Dennis: The Continuity of American Isolationism," *Libertarian Analysis,* 1 (Number 1, Winter 1970): 38–63, 38.

14. Ibid., Oral History, Lawrence Dennis.

15. *Lawrence Dennis, The Dynamics of War and Revolution,* New York: Weekly Foreign Letter, 1940, viii, xii, 213, 14, 109, 211, 185, 90, 130, 179.

16. Review, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* 28 (Number 3, December 1941): 453–455, 454.

17. Review, *American Political Science Review,* 35 (Number 2, April 1941): 352–354, 352.
18. Review, *International Affairs Review,* 19 (Number 3/4, December 1940): 161–163.
19. Review, *American Sociological Review,* 6 (Number 1, February 1941): 119–121.
20. Review, *American Economic Review,* 31 (Number 1, March 1941): 122–124.
21. Summary Report, 1 July 1940, pp. 1387, 1528, Box 2, *News Research Service Papers—Stanford University.*
22. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 27 June 1940.
23. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 31 July 1941.
24. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 19 February 1942.
25. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 13 November 1941.
26. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 19 November 1941.
27. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 30 January 1941.
28. Report, 24 April 1942, 97-218-257, Section 9, *FBI.*
29. Report, 16 March 1943, 97-68, Section 13, *FBI.*
30. Report, 9 April 1943, 100-35, Section 13, *FBI.*
31. *New York Times,* 20 November 1934; *New York Post,* 20 November 1934.
32. Report, 25 June 1933, Box 14, Folder 17, *Papers of the Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council, California State University–Northridge.*
33. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 27 July 1933.
34. Letter to Mr. Barth, 16 December 1942, Record Group 44, Box 1843, Records of the Office of Government Reports, U.S. Information Service, Bureau of Intelligence, Office of War Information, Reports and Special Memoranda, *National Archives and Records Information—College Park, Maryland.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. *Washington Post,* 30 December 1940.
2. *Life,* 20 January 1941.
3. Edward Tamm to J. Edgar Hoover, 12 July 1940, 97-218-2, Section 1, *FBI.*
4. Memorandum for the File, 27 August 1940, 97-218-7, Section 1, *FBI.*
5. Memorandum from Department of Justice, 21 November 1941, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Section 1, Box 4, General Records of Department of Justice.
6. FBI Report, 2 May 1942, Record Group 60, Class 146-6-11, Section 2, Box 4, General Records of Department of Justice.

7. Report, Date Unclear, 97-68, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 6, *FBI*.

8. Report, 20 January 1943, 97-68, Section 14, *FBI*.

9. General Robert Wood to President Roosevelt, 6 December 1941, Official File 4330, *FDR Library—Hyde Park, New York*.

10. Report, 8 June 1942, 97-218-192, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 6, *FBI*.

11. J. Edgar Hoover to Special Agent, New York, 30 December 1942, 97-218-311, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 11–13, *FBI*.

12. P. E. Foxworth, Assistant Director, FBI, to J. Edgar Hoover, 4 January 1943, SP3BTJR, *FBI*.

13. Ibid., FBI Report, 26 August 1941, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Section 1, Box 4, General Records of Department of Justice.

14. Report, circa 1943, 97-89, Section 17, *FBI*.

15. Report, 4 November 1943, 97-68, Section 17, *FBI*.

16. Memorandum, 25 June 1941, 97-18, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 2, *FBI*.

17. Report, Date Unclear, 97-68, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 6, *FBI*.

18. Ibid., FBI Report, 6 August 1941, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Section 1, Box 4, General Records of Department of Justice.

19. Ibid., Report, No Date, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Section 1, Box 4, General Records of Department of Justice.

20. Ibid., Report, No Date, Record Group 60.

21. Ibid., Department of Justice Memorandum, 10 July 1942, Record Group 60.

22. Ibid., John S. Piper to Francis Biddle Duke, 15 April 1942, Record Group 60.

23. Ibid., see Box 6, 146-28-110, Section 1, 17 April 1942–9 October 1943, Record Group 60, General Records of Department of Justice.

24. W. W. Shannon to Attorney General Duke, 3 January 1944, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-28, Box 29, General Records of Department of Justice.

25. FBI Report, 26 September 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

26. Report, 20 January 1943, 100-35, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 11–13, *FBI*.

27. Affidavit of "Mrs. H. de Terra," 17 September 1942, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

28. FBI Report, 14 September 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

29. Report, 30 January 1942, 97-218-82, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 3–4, *FBI*.

30. FBI Report, 8 August 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

31. FBI Report, 25 July 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice. This document can also be found at 97-218-237, 97-44, *FBI.*

32. FBI Report, 24 July 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

33. Ibid., Oral History, Lawrence Dennis.

34. Testimony of Lawrence Dennis Before Exclusion Hearing Board, New York City, 21 May 1943, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-28, Box 29, General Records of Department of Justice.

35. Ibid., Oral History, Lawrence Dennis.

36. Burton K. Wheeler to Robert Wood, 22 December 1941, Box 55, *America First Papers—Stanford University*: "I just wanted to write you a note and tell you how much I appreciated working with you."

37. Robert Wood to Colonel Robert McCormack, 31 December 1941, Box 55, *America First Papers.*

38. *PM,* 25 May 1941; *Minneapolis Tribune and Star Journal,* 1 June 1941.

39. Lawrence Dennis to Robert Wood, 10 October 1941, *Robert Wood Papers—Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Iowa.*

40. Robert Wood to Lawrence Dennis, 20 October 1941, *Robert Wood Papers.*

41. Robert Wood to J. Edgar Hoover, 30 January 1943, SP3BTJ/R, Section 12, *FBI.*

42. FBI Report, 30 August 1943, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-6, Box 5, General Records of Department of Justice.

43. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 13 February 1941.

44. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 31 July 1941.

45. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 19 November 1941.

46. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 11 December 1941.

47. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 5 March 1942.

48. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 12 March 1942.

49. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 4 June 1942.

50. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 19 February 1942.

51. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 16 April 1942.

52. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 14 May 1942.

53. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 30 April 1942.

54. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 21 May 1942.

55. Ibid., Testimony of Lawrence Dennis, 16 March 1943. This testimony can also be found at 97-218-384, Section 15, *FBI.*

56. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 5 March 1942.

57. Report, 1 December 1942, SP3BTJ/R, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 10, *FBI.*

58. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949, 203.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. *Hairenik Weekly,* 24 November 1943, Box 23, *John T. Flynn Papers, University of Oregon–Eugene.*
2. Walter Winchell Commentary, 12 September 1943, Box 23, *John T. Flynn Papers.*
3. "Special Committee for Constitutional Government," 13 October 1943, Box 23, *John T. Flynn Papers.*
4. Victor W. Rotnem, Chief, Civil Rights Section, to M. H. Helter, 30 November 1942, Record Group 60, Classified Subject Files, Class 146-28-110, Box 6, General Records of Department of Justice.
5. Ibid., Victor W. Rotnem to William W. Barron, 8 June 1942, Record Group 60.
6. Lawrence Reilly et al., *The Sedition Case,* Metairie, Louisiana: Sons of Liberty, 1985, 95.
7. Ibid., John Roy Carlson, *Under Cover,* 154, 155, 462–466, 492, 494, 486–487.
8. Interview, 8 September 1943, Box 3, *John T. Flynn Papers.*
9. Lawrence Dennis to Arthur Garfield Hays, 4 November 1943, Box 41, *George Sokolsky Papers—Stanford University.*
10. Lawrence Dennis to Porter Sargent, 23 March 1942, File No. 97-HQ-218, Sections 7–8, *FBI.*
11. Report on Interrogation of Lawrence Dennis, 28 December 1942, 97-68, *FBI.*
12. Lawrence Dennis to Robert Wood, 10 November 1942, *Robert Wood Papers.*
13. Alf Landon to Lawrence Dennis, 29 September 1943, Box 41, *George Sokolsky Papers.*
14. Lawrence Dennis to Alf Landon, 5 August 1943, Box 41, *George Sokolsky Papers.*
15. Robert Wood to Lawrence Dennis, 19 January 1943, *Robert Wood Papers.*
16. Lawrence Dennis to Arthur Garfield Hays, 12 October 1943, Box 41, *George Sokolsky Papers.*
17. Lawrence Dennis to Robert Wood, 23 January 1943, *Robert Wood Papers.*
18. Robert Wood to Lawrence Dennis, 30 January 1943, *Robert Wood Papers.*

19. Lawrence Dennis to Robert Wood, 12 January 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

20. Secretary of General Robert Wood to Lincoln Cain, 24 February 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

21. Robert Wood to Lawrence Dennis, 5 June 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

22. *Chicago Tribune,* 16 April 1944.

23. See, e.g., Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

24. Albert E. Kahn, "The Case of O. John Rogge," *Masses and Mainstream,* 5 (Number 1, January 1952): 15–21, 15.

25. Harry Barnes to Roger Baldwin, 8 April 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

26. *New York Times,* 4 January 1944.

27. *Daily Worker,* 5 January 1944.

28. Name Deleted to FBI, 25 February 1944, File No. 97-HQ-218, Section 19, *FBI.*

29. *Chicago Tribune,* 22 May 1944.

30. *Chicago Tribune,* 17 May 1944.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. Unfortunately, despite repeated inquiries and searches, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland was unable to locate the transcript of this trial though archivists are convinced that it is there and thus it should be hunted down by future historians. See Walter Hill, NARA, to Gerald Horne, 29 December 2003 (in possession of author).

2. *New York Times,* 21 August 1977. See also material in Box 108, *Group Research Archives, Columbia University–New York City.*

3. Ibid., Lawrence Reilly et al., *The Sedition Case,* 59.

4. Memorandum, 7 April 1944, Box 24, Folder 4, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council, California State University–Northridge.*

5. George J. Mintzer to Leon Lewis, 16 March 1942, Box 57, Folder 24, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council.*

6. Oral History, Joseph Roos, December 1979–January 1980, *California State University–Northridge.*

7. Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression,* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983, 198, 200, 214.

8. *Chicago Tribune,* 6 September 1944.

9. *Chicago Tribune,* 8 December 1944.

10. *Chicago Tribune,* 12 October 1944.

11. *PM,* 8 May 1944.

12. *Chicago Tribune,* 19 April 1944.

13. *PM,* 19 May 1944.

14. George Marshall to William Power, 6 August 1942, Box 19, *George Marshall Papers, Schomburg Center–New York Public Library.*

15. Leonard Golditch to Edward G. Robinson, 10 May 1944, Box 30, Folder 14, *Edward G. Robinson Papers, University of Southern California–Los Angeles.*

16. Harold Lavine, *Fifth Column in America,* New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1940, 92–93.

17. President Roosevelt to Attorney General, 10 June 1940, Official Files 4008, *FDR Library—Hyde Park, New York.*

18. Memorandum, 24–27 September 1943, Box 24, Folder 4, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council.*

19. See File on Burton K. Wheeler, B-W-561-bk, *American Heritage Center —University of Wyoming, Laramie.*

20. Ibid., Leo P. Ribuffo, 198, 200.

21. *Chicago Tribune,* 4 August 1944.

22. *Chicago Tribune,* 27 January 1944.

23. Notebooks, no date, Box 4, *Francis Biddle Papers, FDR Library.*

24. Lawrence Dennis and Maxwell St. George, *A Trial on Trial: The Great Sedition Trial of 1944,* No City: National Civil Rights Committee, 1946, 381, 241–244, 119–121.

25. Edward Eicher to President Roosevelt, 18 September 1939, Personal File 2681, *FDR Library.*

26. Edward Eicher to President Roosevelt, 22 July 1935, Personal File 2681, *FDR Library.*

27. President Roosevelt to Edward Eicher, 13 July 1935, Personal File 2681, *FDR Library.*

28. James Rowe to Harry Hopkins, 23 October 1941, Box 12, *James Rowe Papers, FDR Library.*

29. *Washington Post,* 17 July 1944.

30. Lawrence Dennis to General Robert Wood, 17 July 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

31. Lawrence Dennis to General Robert Wood, 30 July 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

32. John T. Flynn to Harry E. Barnes, 20 September 1944, Box 24, *John T. Flynn Papers.*

33. *PM,* 30 July 1944.

34. Joseph Roos to Johannes Steel, 23 May 1944, Box 23, Folder 4, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council.*

35. Report by J. L. Martin, 14 June 1944, Box 23, Folder 4, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council.*

36. Nathan Cohen, Jewish Community Council of Greater Kansas City, to Leon Lewis, 20 June 1944, Box 23, Folder 4, *Papers of Community Relations Committee—Jewish Federation Council.*

37. Ibid., Dennis and St. George, 257.

38. Lawrence Dennis to General Robert Wood, 28 May 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

39. *PM,* 19 April 1944.

40. Lawrence Dennis to General Robert Wood, 22 June 1944, *Robert Wood Papers.*

41. Lawrence Dennis to George Sokolsky, 2 January 1943, Box 41, *George Sokolsky Papers.*

42. Roger Baldwin to Harry Elmer Barnes, 12 April 1944, Box 30, *Harry Elmer Barnes Papers, University of Wyoming, Laramie.*

43. Harry Elmer Barnes to Roger Baldwin, 14 April 1944, Box 30, *Harry Elmer Barnes Papers.*

44. Roger Baldwin to Harry Elmer Barnes, 20 April 1944, Box 30, *Harry Elmer Barnes Papers.*

45. Harry Elmer Barnes to Roger Baldwin, 25 April 1944, Box 30, *Harry Elmer Barnes Papers.*

46. Eleanor Dennis to John T. Flynn, no date, Box 17, *John T. Flynn Papers.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. Interview, Emily Dennis Harvey, 22 June 2003 (in possession of author).

2. Undated Memo by Lawrence Dennis, Box 17, *John T. Flynn Papers.*

3. Lawrence Dennis to George Deatherage, 16 January 1945, Box 2, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

4. Lawrence Dennis to Roger Baldwin, 21 February 1946, Box 2, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

5. Ibid., Oral History, Lawrence Dennis.

6. Lawrence Dennis to John W. Blodgett, Jr., 11 December 1947, Box 3, Folder 2, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

7. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 22 June 1972, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

8. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 9 June 1946, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, *Charles Parsons Papers, Yale University.*

9. Lawrence Dennis to General Robert Wood, 19 May 1946, Box 5, Folder 39, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

10. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 10 December 1949, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers.*

11. Letter from A. A. Melniker, 7 November 1946, Box 2, Folder 4, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

12. Lawrence Dennis to Roger Baldwin, 12 March 1944, Box 2, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

13. Lawrence Dennis to Roger Baldwin, 21 February 1946, Box 2, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

14. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Max St. George, 18 December 1946, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

15. Ibid., Lawrence Dennis to Max St. George, 23 October 1946, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

16. See Folder on 1947 Libel Trial in Box 1, Folder 9, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

17. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

18. Lawrence Dennis to Max St. George, 21 November 1949, Box 5, Folder 17, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

19. Lawrence Dennis to Max St. George, 2 January 1949, Box 4, Folder 17, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

20. *The Appeal to Reason,* 1 February 1947.

21. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 25 September 1940.

22. *The Appeal to Reason,* 21 February 1948 (this is Dennis's postwar Newsletter, which can be found in many libraries: I read these at Stanford).

23. Lawrence Dennis to Robert J. Alexander, 8 December 1954, Box 1, Folder 20, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

24. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 23 February 1948, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

25. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 23 February 1948, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

26. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 8 March 1948, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

27. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 23 February 1948, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

28. Lawrence Dennis to Norman Thomas, 9 May 1956, Box 5, Folder 23, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

29. *The Appeal to Reason,* 8 January 1949.

30. Willis Carto to Lawrence Dennis, 7 May 1955, Box 3, Folder 9, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

31. George Van Horn Moseley to Lawrence Dennis, 4 July 1946, Box 4, Folder 29, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

32. George Van Horn Moseley to Lawrence Dennis, 30 November 1946, Box 4, Folder 29, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

33. Lawrence Dennis to Harry E. Barnes, 11 April 1946, Box 2, Folder 13, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

34. Ibid., Justus D. Doenecke, *Not to the Swift,* 64, 65, 79, 157, 246.

35. Harry E. Barnes to Lawrence Dennis, 31 January 1953, Box 2, Folder 14, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

36. Lawrence Dennis to John Blodgett, Jr., 11 December 1947, Box 3, Folder 2, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

37. Lawrence Dennis to Arthur Garfield Hays, 24 July 1953, Box 3, Folder 38, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

38. *The Appeal to Reason,* 30 August 1947.

39. Lawrence Dennis to Harry E. Barnes, 10 February 1951, Box 2, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

40. Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939–1941,* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, 282.

41. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 17 November 1938.

42. "Freedom Right," June 1959, Box 6, Folder 23, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

43. *Weekly Foreign Letter,* 20 July 1939.

44. *The Appeal to Reason,* 1 June 1946.

45. *The Appeal to Reason,* 21 February 1948.

46. *The Appeal to Reason,* 28 February 1948.

47. *The Appeal to Reason,* July 1948.

48. *The Appeal to Reason,* 11 October 1952.

49. *The Appeal to Reason,* 24 July 1948.

50. *The Appeal to Reason,* 30 August 1952.

51. *The Appeal to Reason,* 6 September 1952.

52. *The Appeal to Reason,* 21 February 1953.

53. *The Appeal to Reason,* 10 June 1950.

54. *The Appeal to Reason,* 3 July 1954.

55. *The Appeal to Reason,* 26 July 1952.

56. *The Appeal to Reason,* 25 September 1948.

57. *The Appeal to Reason,* 24 September 1949.

58. *The Appeal to Reason,* 2 April 1949.

59. *The Appeal to Reason,* 30 August 1949.

60. *The Appeal to Reason,* 2 May 1953.

61. Lawrence Dennis to Gilbert Redfern, 15 August 1953, Box 2, Folder 6, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.* "Most of the old fuddy duddies have not as yet awakened to the realities of the colored world," said Dennis. "They don't like the phrase. They won't use it." See *The Appeal to Reason,* 19 November 1955. Repeatedly, Dennis was compelled to note that his "repeated mention of and references to the colored world and the rising tide of color" brought "unpopularity" for his Newsletter: *The Appeal to Reason,* 21 September 1957.

62. Lecture by Lawrence Dennis, no date, Box 5, Folder 9, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

1. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 9 November 1946, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

2. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 18 December 1946, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

3. Harry Elmer Barnes to Lawrence Dennis, no date, circa 1946, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

4. Lawrence Dennis to Mr. Houghton, 8 July 1969, Box 2, Folder 1, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

5. Lawrence Dennis to James J. Martin, 4 September 1968, Box 4, Folder 20, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

6. Roy Turnbaugh to Lawrence Dennis, 29 October 1975, Box 2, Folder 1, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

7. Undated column by Walter Winchell, Box 1, Folder 7, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

8. Mrs. John P. Marquand to Lawrence Dennis, 29 July 1949, Box 4, Folder 19, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

9. Mary Barnes to Mrs. Stafford, 14 March 1957, Box 2, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

10. Bruce Barton to J. Sanford Otis, no date, Box 2, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

11. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 1 January 1971, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

12. Lawrence Dennis to James J. Martin, 28 January 1969, Box 4, Folder 21, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

13. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 27 January 1971, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

14. Homer Bone to "Dear Lawrence," 19 January 1949, Box 2, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

15. Rush Holt to Lawrence Dennis, no date, Box 3, Folder 41, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

16. Letter from Harlan Stone, 1 September 1940, Box 4, Folder 19, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

17. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 18 June 1952, Box 4, Folder 28, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*. Later Congressman Buffett asserted, "each week I find your bulletin informative, instructive, and helpful." See Howard Buffett to Lawrence Dennis, 2 March 1953, Box 3, Folder 8, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

18. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 3 December 1954, Box 22, *Sterling Morton Papers, Chicago Historical Society.*

19. George Holden Tinkham to Lawrence Dennis, 16 July 1946, Box 5, Folder 25, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

20. George Holden Tinkham to Lawrence Dennis, 25 February 1952, Box 5, Folder 25, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

21. Lawrence Smith to Lawrence Dennis, 20 October 1951, Box 5, Folder 12, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

22. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 30 January 1953, Box 17, *Sterling Morton Papers*.

23. Lawrence Dennis to A. Dana Hodgson, 10 December 1958, Box 3, Folder 40, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

24. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 9 July 1960, Box 4, Folder 28, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

25. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 8 March 1957, Box 4, Folder 28, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

26. Harry Elmer Barnes to Lawrence Dennis, 3 January 1951, Box 13, Folder 13, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

27. W. C. Mullendore to Lawrence Dennis, no date, Box 4, Folder 30, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

28. Eleanor Dennis to "Dear Charles," circa 1947, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

29. Eleanor Dennis to Charles Parsons, circa 1948, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

30. Eleanor Dennis to Charles Parsons, circa 1949, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

31. Eleanor Dennis to Charles Parsons, circa 1951, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

32. Lawrence Dennis to Edwin Borchard, 25 October 1946, Box 3, Folder 4, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

33. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 25 June 1952, Group 387, Series I, Box 6, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

34. Eleanor Dennis to Charles Parsons, 18 January 1952, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, Folder 106, *Charles Parsons Papers*.

35. Bruce Barton to Sterling Morton, 29 June 1951, Box 12, *Sterling Morton Papers*.

36. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 29 June 1951, Box 12, *Sterling Morton Papers*.

37. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 14 August 1951, Box 13, *Sterling Morton Papers*.

38. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 18 June 1952, Box 4, Folder 28, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

39. Lawrence Dennis to William F. Buckley, 5 January 1951, Box 2, Folder 13, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

40. *The Appeal to Reason,* 6 November 1948.

41. *The Appeal to Reason,* 27 February 1954.

42. See, e.g., *The Appeal to Reason,* 25 July 1953.
43. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 27 January 1948, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, Folder 106, *Charles Parsons Papers.*
44. *The Appeal to Reason,* 19 April 1952.
45. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 8 May 1972, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
46. Lawrence Dennis to E. B. Craney, 28 July 1952, Box 3, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
47. Sterling Morton to Lawrence Dennis, 9 June 1952, Box 4, Folder 28, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
48. Lawrence Dennis to A. Dana Hodgson, 3 December 1950, Box 3, Folder 40, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
49. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 3 December 1954, Box 22, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
50. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 23 February 1948, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, *Charles Parsons Papers.*
51. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 6 April 1946, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, *Charles Parsons Papers.*
52. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 22 August 1950, Box 12, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
53. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 20 February 1951, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, Folder 106, Charles Parsons Papers.
54. Harry Elmer Barnes to Lawrence Dennis, 1 September 1955, Box 2, Folder 14, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
55. Lawrence Dennis to Charles Parsons, 18 September 1946, Group 387, Box 6, Series I, *Charles Parsons Papers.*
56. Lawrence Dennis to Harry Elmer Barnes, 12 December 1958, Box 2, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
57. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 10 January 1955, Box 23, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
58. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 3 December 1954, Box 22, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
59. Justus D. Doenecke to Lawrence Dennis, 25 January 1971, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
60. Lawrence Dennis to Justus D. Doenecke, 27 January 1971, Box 3, Folder 22, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
61. *The Appeal to Reason,* 29 May 1948.
62. *The Appeal to Reason,* 5 August 1950.
63. *The Appeal to Reason,* 27 November 1948.
64. *The Appeal to Reason,* 18 December 1948.
65. *The Appeal to Reason,* 29 October 1951.
66. *The Appeal to Reason,* 14 June 1952.

67. *The Appeal to Reason,* 20 August 1949.
68. *The Appeal to Reason,* 7 February 1948.
69. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 10 September 1951, Box 12, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
70. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 28 January 1955, Box 23, *Sterling Morton Papers.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

1. Lawrence Dennis to George Deatherage, 14 November 1956, Box 3, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
2. Lawrence Dennis to James J. Martin, 4 September 1968, Box 4, Folder 20, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
3. Frederick L. Schuman to Lawrence Dennis, no date, Box 5, Folder 8, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
4. Lawrence Dennis to Mrs. Yone Stafford, 27 August 1956, Box 5, Folder 16, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
5. Lawrence Dennis to Paul Palmer, 8 December 1969, Box 4, Folder 32, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
6. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 8 March 1957, Box 29, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
7. *The Appeal to Reason,* 16 April 1955.
8. *The Appeal to Reason,* 11 February 1956.
9. *The Appeal to Reason,* 15 September 1956.
10. *The Appeal to Reason,* 6 October 1962.
11. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 9 July 1960, Box 38, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
12. Lawrence Dennis to Sterling Morton, 2 October 1956, Box 28, *Sterling Morton Papers.*
13. *The Appeal to Reason,* 24 August 1963.
14. *The Appeal to Reason,* 7 September 1963.
15. Lawrence Dennis to Harry Elmer Barnes, 12 November 1958, Box 2, Folder 15, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
16. Lawrence Dennis to Alexander Mintz, 18 October 1958, Box 2, Folder 4, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
17. Richard Edwin Houtzer to Lawrence Dennis, 12 June 1964, Box 2, Folder 3, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
18. Barry Goldwater to Lawrence Dennis, 18 December 1964, Box 3, Folder 33, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
19. Lawrence Dennis to A. C. Spectorsky, no date, circa 1970, Box 6, Folder 5, *Lawrence Dennis Papers.*
20. *The Appeal to Reason,* 13 September 1958.

21. *The Appeal to Reason,* 21 September 1958.

22. Lawrence Dennis to Paul Palmer, 8 February 1969, Box 4, Folder 32, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

23. Lawrence Dennis to Robert McClary, 15 August 1967, Box 2, Folder 4, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

24. Lawrence Dennis to C. F. Beach, 15 August 1967, Box 2, Folder 1, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

25. Lawrence Dennis to "Dear Ralph," 4 July 1969, Box 1, Folder 19, *Lawrence Dennis Papers*.

26. See, e.g., Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986; Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956,* London: Associated University Presses, 1988; Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois,* New York: New York University Press, 2000; Gerald Horne, *Red Seas: Ferdinand Smith and Radical Black Sailors in the United States and Jamaica,* New York: New York University Press, 2005.

27. Fiction provides some insight into this phenomenon. See, e.g., Carl Offord, *The White Face,* New York: McBride, 1943; Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth: A Novel,* New York: Random House, 1999. See also the unpublished work, "Black Hope," by Richard Wright in his papers located at Yale University.

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