

## The Roaring Twenties: A Time of Turmoil

On a hot summer day in 1920, about 50,000 African Americans marched through the streets of Harlem in New York City. Thousands more lined the sidewalks, cheering the marchers. Their leader, Marcus Garvey, stirred new hope in African Americans, saying: “We are descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer.” A participant at the march later recalled, “It was the greatest demonstration of [African American unity] in American history...”

### Fear of Radicalism



Read Fear of Radicalism pages 700-701 and answer the following questions:

1. Why was there an atmosphere of distrust in America after WWI?

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2. Americans after WWI, wanted a “Return to Normalcy” and to start living life as it was before the war. What effect did this have on their views about foreigners and radicals ?

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# 6 Red Scare

Communists were called **reds** after the red flag of the International, which was the worldwide communist organization.



**"Whose country is it anyway?" Uncle Sam takes care of "reds."**

Some people in America were scared by Russia's ideas. They were afraid of *communism*. Others were attracted to those ideas. Under communism, most property and goods belong to the state. People are expected to share. That sounds noble; it just never seems to work unless forced upon people. Communist nations have not been free nations.

After the world war, some people were scared that communists wanted to take over in the United States. There were a few communists in this country—but they were not successful. Most

American people were not attracted to communism.

## Russia Revolts

Russia fought with the Allies in World War I until the Russian people decided they'd had enough of the war. It was more important, as far as they were concerned, to solve their own problems. They wanted to get rid of their ruler—the tsar (ZAR). They wanted to end the big gap between rich and poor in Russia. They wanted what Americans had wanted in 1776. They wanted freedom. So they had a freedom revolution.

At first, it looked as if they might get freedom. The people who overthrew the tsar (in 1917) were trying to create a demo-

cratic government. Then a revolutionary named Vladimir Lenin, who was living in Europe in exile, came back to Russia. That man changed the fate of Russia and the world. He became dictator of Russia. He didn't believe in democracy.

Things had been bad in Russia when the tsar was ruler. They got much worse under Lenin and the ruler who followed, Joseph Stalin. Lenin and Stalin brought totalitarianism to Russia. They brought repression, murder, state control, and misery. They brought an economic system called communism.

Lenin took Russia out of the

war. That let Germany move troops from eastern Europe to France. It made the Great War tougher for the Allies.

What does all this have to do with U.S. history? A lot. You see, the world had become smaller. Not smaller in size, but in accessibility. At the beginning of the 19th century, it took at least two years for a ship to go from Salem, Massachusetts, to China and back. Now, with the telephone, communication was almost instantaneous. Modern technology meant that the ideas of one nation could spread quickly to others.

1. Explain the basic idea of Communism? Why were some people in the U.S. scared of communism after WWI?

## The Red Scare

2. Lenin and Stalin setup a totalitarian form of government in Russia. Explain what this means?

### WAR, PEACE, AND ALL THAT JAZZ



**Left:** In September 1920, a bomb exploded on Wall Street, killing 38 people and fueling fears that communists threatened the nation's existence. **Above:** A. Mitchell Palmer, President Wilson's attorney general.

In that same postwar time, there were also some *anarchists* in America. Anarchists don't believe in government at all. You don't have to be very smart to realize that anarchy doesn't work. But, when the anarchists looked around and saw poverty, war, and evil, they thought that this was the fault of governments. Some may have really believed that the answer was to do away with all governments. A few tried to do that by setting off bombs intended to kill government leaders. That, of course, was criminal behavior. Newspapers made big headlines of the bombs. Many Americans were frightened. But what A. Mitchell Palmer, President Wilson's attorney general, did was irresponsible and criminal. (He got away with it—but not in the history books.)

Palmer went on a witch hunt. The witches he went after were communists and anarchists. He took the law in his hands, and, in two days of raids in major cities (in 1920), agents invaded homes, clubs, union halls, pool halls, and coffee shops, rounding up nearly 5,000 people, who were held in jail, not allowed to call anyone, and treated terribly. Those without citizenship papers were sent out of the country—to Russia. Most weren't guilty of anything.

### Sacco and Vanzetti

**N**icola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were accused of murdering a paymaster and his guard at a shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts. Did they do it? Even today, no one is sure. But they were convicted and executed. Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, and many said it was radical beliefs that were on trial. The trial was a *cause célèbre* (which, in French, means "a famous happening").

*Ben Shahn made 23 paintings of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in 1931–1932, including this portrait from their trial.*



## The Red Scare

3. What is meant by the term anarchist? What actions did anarchists take in the U.S. to create change?

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4. What did Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer do to fight communists and anarchists?

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5. Read pages 701-702 and the reading below and explain the story of Sacco and Vanzetti. How did a fear of immigrants effect the outcome of their trial and punishment?

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"Sacco and Vanzetti" (1927), Ben Shahn 1931-1932.



As America entered into the 1920's, the hostility towards immigrants was mounting to unsurpassed levels. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1919 brought about the fear of communism and led Attorney General A. Michel Palmer to institute his Red Scare policies that included violations of civil liberties and tarnishing the images of immigrants. Americans began to fear immigrants as a threat to American society which left European immigrants susceptible to becoming scapegoats. Mush of the fear and hate was felt by immigrants who were seen as alien radicals. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both Italian immigrants, clearly understood the true force of society's bias in the 1920's. Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted of murder and robbery in South Braintree, Mass., and later executed for their crimes. From the evidence and the obvious biased feelings toward immigrants, the case was less a display of facts and evidence, and more a display of culture. Instead of upholding the judicial outlined in the United States Constitution, the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti ended up a product of the prejudice and discrimination of old-stock Americans and feelings of nativism in the 1920's.

The Sacco and Vanzetti trial exemplified the conflicts that had risen after WWI, as the Red Scare conditioned the American people to fear and despise certain groups. These groups included eastern and southern Europeans. The arrest and trial of Sacco and Vanzetti focused less on the evidence that the prosecution presented and more on the battle between American traditions and Anarchy. The conviction showed how society's bias could sway the American judicial system to make a judgment on personal beliefs rather than on the facts presented. The trial remains heavily debated and fuels the interests of lawmakers young and old because the hostility towards immigrants in the 1920's made it impossible to get a fair trial.



**In 1789**, Congress passed an Alien law. It kept certain people from emigrating to the United States. A sedition law made it a crime to speak against the government. People were jailed for their ideas. The people who supported those laws said they wanted to keep “dangerous foreigners” out of the country. At the time, the foreigners they feared were French.

Behind the red scare was a fear of foreigners. These men being taken to prison are all immigrant aliens.

Communists are sometimes called “reds.” Mitchell Palmer took advantage of America’s fear of communism. He helped create a “red scare.” He hoped it would make him president. During the red scare, Americans were not free to speak out about communism. They weren’t free to criticize the government. Some people’s lives were ruined.

Witch-hunting turns up every once in a while in American history. (It happened in Salem, Massachusetts, in colonial days; it happened after World War II with a senator named Joe McCarthy.) The good thing is, it never seems to last long. Persecution for ideas is not the American way.



Everywhere reds were under the bed—or, as in this cartoon, slithering under cover of the Stars and Stripes.

The 1st Amendment (part of our Bill of Rights) says: *Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech.* Does that mean that communists and anarchists are free to speak out here—as long as they do not engage in criminal activity or plot to overthrow the government?

Thomas Jefferson wrote: *Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, and errors cease to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.* He believed that when everyone’s ideas are heard, people will make wise choices. Do you agree with him?

The Ku Klux Klan grew hugely in the 1920s. The Klan no longer limited its hatred and bigotry to blacks; it was anti-foreign, anti-communist, anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish.



6. Look at the photos above. Describe the common feelings felt by divergent groups such as the KKK and nativists?