

Politics of the Roaring Twenties

Section 1

Americans Struggle with Postwar Issues

Terms and Names

nativism Suspicion of foreign-born people

isolationism Pulling away from world affairs

communism An economic system that supports government control over property to create equality

anarchists People who opposed any form of government

Sacco and Vanzetti Immigrant anarchists accused of murder

quota system A system that established the maximum number of people who could enter the United States from each country

John L. Lewis President of the United Mine Workers

Before You Read

In the last section, you read about the end of the First World War. In this section, you will see how Americans adjusted to the end of the war.

As You Read

Use a chart to take notes on the aftereffects of World War I.

POSTWAR TRENDS (Page 412)

How did World War I affect America?

World War I left much of the American public divided about the League of Nations. The end of the war hurt the economy. Returning soldiers took jobs away from many women and minorities, or faced unemployment themselves. A wave of **nativism** and **isolationism** swept over America as people became suspicious of foreigners and wanted to pull away from world affairs.

1. What attitudes became prevalent in America after WWI?

FEAR OF COMMUNISM

(Pages 413–414)

Why did Americans fear communism?

Americans saw **communism** as a threat to their way of life. Communism is an economic and political system that supports government control over property to create equality. Some communists said there should be only one political party: the Communist Party. Communists came to power in Russia through violent revolution.

World War I created economic and political problems in Russia. In 1917, the Russian czar, or emperor, stepped down. Later, a group of revolutionaries called

Section 1, *continued*

Bolsheviks took power. Their leader was Vladimir I. Lenin. They established the world's first communist state. This new government called for worldwide revolution. Communist leaders wanted workers to seize political and economic power. They wanted to overthrow capitalism.

In the United States, about 70,000 people joined the Communist Party. Still, the ideas of the communists, or "Reds," frightened many people. A fear of communism, known as the "Red Scare," swept the nation.

Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer set up an agency in the Justice Department to arrest communists, socialists, and **anarchists**, who opposed all forms of government. (The agency later became the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI.)

Palmer's agents trampled on people's civil rights. Many radicals were sent out of the country without trial. But Palmer found no evidence of a plot to overthrow the government. Many suffered because of abuses of power during the Red Scare. One case involved two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. **Sacco and Vanzetti** were arrested for robbery and murder in Massachusetts. They admitted they were anarchists. But they denied committing any crime. The case against them was weak. But they were convicted anyway. Many people protested the conviction. They believed it was based on a fear of foreigners. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927.

2. How did Americans show their fear of communism?

LIMITING IMMIGRATION

(Pages 414–415)

How did Americans show their Nativist feelings?

Some Americans used the Red Scare as an excuse to act against any people who were different. For example, the Ku Klux Klan, which had threatened African Americans during Reconstruction, revived.

Now the Klan turned against blacks, Jews, Roman Catholics, immigrants, and union leaders. They used violence to keep these groups "in their place." The Klan briefly gained political power in several states.

As a result of nativism, or anti-immigrant feelings, Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act of 1921. It established a **quota system**. This set a limit on how many immigrants from each country could enter the United States every year. In 1924, a new quota limited immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, mostly Jews and Roman Catholics.

The 1924 law also banned immigration from Japan. People from the Western Hemisphere still entered the United States in large numbers.

3. What was the quota system?

A TIME OF LABOR UNREST

(Pages 417–418)

What were the three major strikes of 1919?

Strikes were not allowed during World War I because they might have hurt the war effort. But in 1919, three important strikes occurred.

Section 1, *continued*

Boston police officers went on strike for a living wage. The cost of living had doubled since their last raise.

Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge used force to put down the strike.

A strike by steelworkers began at U.S. Steel Corporation. Workers demanded the right to join unions, which employers prohibited. In 1923, a report revealed the harsh conditions in steel mills. Public opinion turned against the steel companies, and workers were given an eight-hour day. But they still had no union.

A more successful strike was led by **John L. Lewis**, the president of the United Mine Workers. When Lewis's workers closed the coal mines, President Wilson tried to help to settle the dispute between the miners and mine owners. The miners got higher wages, but they did not get shorter hours.

In 1925, A. Philip Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an African-American union of railroad workers. But few blacks belonged to other unions. Overall, the 1920s was a bad time for unions. Union membership declined from 5 million to 3.5 million for the following reasons: (1) immigrants were willing to work in poor conditions, (2) language barriers made organizing people difficult; (3) farmers who had migrated to cities were used to relying on themselves, and (4) most unions excluded African Americans.

4. Why did union membership decline?

Section 1, *continued*

As you read this section, take notes to answer questions about postwar conditions in America and the fear of communism.

After World War I, many Americans feared that Communists would take over the country.

1. How did the Justice Department under A. Mitchell Palmer respond to this fear?	→	2. Why did Palmer eventually lose his standing with the American public?
3. How did the Ku Klux Klan respond to this fear?	→	4. Why did the Klan eventually lose popularity and membership?

Public opinion turned against labor unions as many Americans came to believe that unions encouraged communism.

5. Why was the strike by Boston police unpopular with the public?	→	6. Why did Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge become so popular?
7. Why was the strike at U.S. Steel unpopular?	→	8. How did President Wilson respond to the steel strike?

A. MITCHELL PALMER

FROM *The Case against the Reds* (1920)

After the outbreak of strikes and riots in 1919, Democratic Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer organized a carefully coordinated series of raids against communists and anarchists on January 3, 1920. He was a Quaker attorney from Pennsylvania who had served three terms in Congress. Driven by hatred of foreign radicals and a desire to gain the Democratic presidential nomination in 1920, he often acted on his own without informing or consulting President Wilson. In the article that follows, he sought to counter the many critics of the "Palmer raids."

From "The Case against the Reds," *The Forum* 63 (February 1920): 63-75. [Editorial insertions appear in brackets—Ed.]

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workman, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking into the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws, burning up the foundations of society.

Robbery, not war, is the ideal of communism. This has been demonstrated in Russia, Germany, and in America. As a foe, the anarchist is fearless in his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect for any other creed. Obviously it is the creed of any criminal mind, which reasons always from motives impossible to clean thought. Crime is the degenerate factor in society.

Upon these two basic certainties, first that the "Reds" were criminal aliens, and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime, it was decided that there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws. An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not

wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish, nor will he do so, so long as the rights of common citizenship can be exerted to prevent him. . . .

By stealing, murder and lies, Bolshevism has looted Russia not only of its material strength, but of its moral force. A small clique of outcasts from the East Side of New York has attempted this, with what success we all know. Because a disreputable alien—Leon Bronstein, the man who now calls himself Trotzky—can inaugurate a reign of terror from his throne room in the Kremlin: because this lowest of all types known to New York can sleep in the Czar's bed, while hundreds of thousands in Russia are without food or shelter, should Americans be swayed by such doctrines? . . .

My information showed that communism in this country was an organization of thousands of aliens, who were direct allies of [Leon] Trotzky. Aliens of the same misshapen cast of mind and indecencies of character, and it showed that they were making the same glittering promises of lawlessness, of criminal autocracy to Americans, that they had made to the Russian peasants. How the Department of Justice discovered upwards of 60,000 of these organized agitators of the Trotzky doctrine in the United States, is the confidential

information upon which the Government is now sweeping the nation clean of such alien filth. . . .

One of the chief incentives for the present activity of the Department of Justice against the "Reds" has been the hope that American citizens will, themselves, become voluntary agents for us, in a vast organization for mutual defense against the sinister agitation of men and women aliens, who appear to be either in the pay or under the spell of Trotzky and Lenine [*sic*]

The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decencies of private life, to usurp property that they have not earned, to disrupt the present order of life regardless of health, sex, or religious rights. By a literature that promises the wildest dreams of such low aspirations, that can occur to only the criminal minds, communism distorts our social law. . . .

These are the revolutionary tenets of Trotzky and the Communist Internationale. Their manifesto further embraces the various organizations in this country of men and women obsessed with discontent, having disorganized relations to American society. These include the I.W.W.'s, the most radical socialists, the misguided anarchists, the agitators who oppose the limitations of unionism, the moral perverts and the hysterical neurasthenic

women who abound in communism. The phraseology of their manifesto is practically the same wording as was used by the Bolsheviks for their International Communist Congress.

. . . The Department of Justice will pursue the attack of these "Reds" upon the Government of the United States with vigilance, and no alien, advocating the overthrow of existing law and order in this country, shall escape arrest and prompt deportation.

It is my belief that while they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have caused irritating strikes, and while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and their unclean morals, we can get rid of them! And not until we have done so shall we have removed the menace of Bolshevism for good.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What crimes did Palmer accuse the Reds of committing?
2. How did Palmer address the legal rights of aliens?
3. What would be the public response to such a statement today? Explain.

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

The Red Scare Is Un-American (1920)

The majority of Americans supported the actions of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and shared his fears of communist conspiracies. A few people, however, raised concerns about the arbitrary use of police powers to deal with aliens. William Allen White, the crusading editor of the Emporia Gazette in Kansas and a prominent Republican progressive, criticized Palmer's crusade.

From "The Red Scare Is Un-American," *Emporia Gazette* (Kansas), January 8, 1920.

The Attorney General [A. Mitchell Palmer] seems to be seeing red. He is rounding up every manner of radical in the country; every man who hopes for a better world is in danger of deportation by the Attorney General. The whole business is un-American. There are certain rules which should govern in the treason cases.

First, it should be agreed that a man may believe what he chooses.

Second, it should be agreed that when he preaches violence he is disturbing the peace and should be put in jail. Whether he preaches violence in politics, business, or religion, whether he advocates murder and arson and pillage for gain or for political ends, he is violating the common law and should be squelched—jailed until he is willing to quit advocating force in a democracy.

Third, he should be allowed to say what he pleases so long as he advocates legal constitutional methods of procedure. Just because a man does not believe this government is good is no reason why he should be deported.

Abraham Lincoln did not believe this government was all right seventy-five years ago. He advocated changes, but he advocated constitutional means, and he had a war with those who advocated force to maintain the government as it was.

Ten years ago Roosevelt¹ advocated great changes in our American life—in our Constitution, in our social and economic life. Most of the changes he advocated have been made, but they were made in the regular legal way. He preached no force. And if a man desires to preach any doctrine under the shining sun, and to advocate the realization of his vision by lawful, orderly, constitutional means—let him alone. If he is Socialist, anarchist, or Mormon, and merely preaches his creed and does not preach violence, he can do no harm. For the folly of his doctrine will be its answer.

The deportation business is going to make martyrs of a lot of idiots whose cause is not worth it.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Was White concerned that the views of socialists might be true? Explain.
2. How did White suggest social change could be promoted?
3. What did White mean when he wrote that the "deportation business" would create martyrs?

¹ Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919).

MARGARET SANGER

The Need for Birth Control (1922)

During the 1920s New Yorker Margaret Sanger (1883–1966) became the crusading champion for a woman's right to birth control devices. Her mother was a devout Roman Catholic who went through eighteen pregnancies before dying of tuberculosis, and Margaret was determined to give women access to contraceptives to free them from such childbearing burdens. Her tireless efforts ignited fierce opposition from the Catholic Church and other religious organizations.

From *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York, 1922), pp. 196–219.

our body and our fundamental humanity behind us, not by aiming to be anything but what we are, shall we become ennobled or immortal. By knowing ourselves, by expressing ourselves, by realizing ourselves more completely than has ever before been possible, not only shall we attain the kingdom ourselves but we shall hand on the torch of life undimmed to our children and the children of our children.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why, according to Sanger, was the "traditional morality" related to sexual intercourse dying out?
2. What did Sanger say were the advantages of smaller families?
3. Why did she believe that birth control was an "ethical necessity"?

HIRAM W. EVANS

FROM *The Klan's Fight for Americanism* (1926)

The backlash against "alien" groups "infesting" American life after World War I assumed its most virulent form in a revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The organization had first emerged in the rural South after the Civil War, seeking to intimidate blacks from voting or holding office, and had pretty much died out by 1900. The zealous patriotism fostered by American intervention in World War I helped revive the Klan. In its new form it was more of an urban than a rural phenomenon. It adopted a broader agenda than the original organization, and its membership grew across the nation. By 1926 it boasted over three million members. Klan intolerance now went beyond blacks to include Jews, Catholics, communists, and labor unionists. Texas dentist Hiram Evans assumed leadership of the organization in 1926. In this speech he reveals that the Klan was fundamentally a protest against all of the ills associated with modern culture.

"The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review*, 223, March 1926, pp. 38–39. Reprinted with permission.

... The Klan, therefore, has now come to speak for the great mass of Americans of the old pioneer stock. We believe that it does fairly and faithfully represent them, and our proof lies in their support. To understand the Klan, then, it is necessary to understand the character and present mind of the mass of old-stock Americans. The mass, it must be remembered, as distinguished from the intellectually mongrelized "Liberals."

These are, in the first place, a blend of various peoples of the so-called Nordic race, the race which, with all its faults, has given the world almost the whole of modern civilization. The Klan does not try to represent any people but these. . . .

These Nordic Americans for the last generation have found themselves increasingly uncomfortable, and finally deeply distressed. There appeared first

confusion in thought and opinion, a groping and hesitancy about national affairs and private life alike, in sharp contrast to the clear, straightforward purposes of our earlier years. There was futility in religion, too, which was in many ways even more distressing. Presently we began to find that we were dealing with strange ideas; policies that always sounded well but somehow always made us still more uncomfortable.

Finally came the moral breakdown that has been going on for two decades. One by one all our traditional moral standards went by the boards or were so disregarded that they ceased to be binding. The sacredness of our Sabbath, of our homes, of chastity, and finally even of our right to teach our own children in our own schools fundamental facts and truths were torn away from us. Those who maintained the old standards did so only in the face of constant ridicule. . . .

The old-stock Americans are learning, however. They have begun to arm themselves for this new type of warfare. Most important, they have broken away from the fetters of the false ideals and philanthropy which put aliens ahead of their own children and their own race. . . .

One more point about the present attitude of the old-stock American: he has revived and increased his long-standing distrust of the Roman Catholic Church. It is for this that the native Americans, and the Klan as their leader, are most often denounced as intolerant and prejudiced. . . .

The Ku Klux Klan, in short, is an organization which gives expression, direction and purpose to the most vital instincts, hopes, and resentments of

the old-stock Americans, provides them with leadership, and is enlisting and preparing them for militant, constructive action toward fulfilling their racial and national destiny. . . . The Klan literally is once more the embattled American farmer and artisan, coordinated into a disciplined and growing army, and launched upon a definite crusade for Americanism! . . .

Thus the Klan goes back to the American racial instincts, and to the common sense which is their first product, as the basis of its beliefs and methods. . . .

There are three of these great racial instincts, vital elements in both the historic and the present attempts to build an America which shall fulfill the aspirations and justify the heroism of the men who made the nation. These are the instincts of loyalty to the white race, to the traditions of America, and to the spirit of Protestantism, which has been an essential part of Americanism ever since the days of Roanoke and Plymouth Rock. They are condensed into the Klan slogan: "Native, white, Protestant supremacy."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What "evils" did Evans claim were infecting modern American society?
2. According to Evans, what were the implied objectives of the Klan?
3. To what extent do you think the Klan's philosophy was consistent with other American ideals and principles? Explain.

The Need for Immigration Restriction (1923)

The Red Scare after World War I helped generate pervasive fears of "foreign" radicals streaming into the United States. A postwar depression also fueled concerns that a wave of new immigrants would take jobs away from Americans. At the same time, people continued to worry that "alien" peoples from eastern Europe and Asia could not be assimilated into American culture. These concerns took legislative form in the

128. Marcus Garvey on Africa for the Africans (1921)

Source: "Speech Delivered at Liberty Hall, New York City, August 21, 1921," in *Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey (New York, 1923-1925), Vol. 2, pp. 93-97.*

In the new, densely populated black ghettos created in the wake of the Great Migration, disappointment with conditions in the North inspired widespread support for a separatist movement launched by Marcus Garvey, a recent immigrant from Jamaica. Throughout the world, Garvey pointed out, the war had inspired movements for national self-determination—in Ireland, eastern Europe, and Europe's Asian and African colonies. Blacks, he insisted, should enjoy the same internationally recognized identity enjoyed by other peoples. The government soon deported Garvey after convicting him of mail fraud. But the massive following his movement achieved testified to the sense of both racial pride and betrayal kindled in black communities during and after the war.

FOUR YEARS AGO, realizing the oppression and the hardships from which we suffered, we organized ourselves into an organization for the purpose of bettering our condition, and founding a government of our own. The four years of organization have brought good results, in that from an obscure, despised race we have grown into a mighty power, a mighty force whose influence is being felt throughout the length and breadth of the world. The Universal Negro Improvement Association existed but in name four years ago, today it is known as the greatest moving force among Negroes. We have accomplished this through unity of effort and unity of purpose, it is a fair demonstration of what we will be able to accomplish in the very near future, when the millions who are outside the pale of the Universal Negro Improvement Association will have linked themselves up with us.

By our success of the last four years we will be able to estimate the grander success of a free and redeemed Africa. In climbing the heights to where we are today, we have had to surmount difficulties, we have had to climb over obstacles, but the obstacles were stepping stones to the future greatness of this Cause we represent. Day by day we are writing a new history, recording new deeds of valor performed by this race of ours. It is true that the world has not yet valued us at our true worth but we are climbing up so fast and with such force that every day the world is changing its attitude towards us. Wheresoever you turn your eyes today you will find the moving influence of the Universal Negro Improvement Association among Negroes from all corners of the globe. We hear among Negroes the cry of "Africa for the Africans." This cry has become a positive, determined one. It is a cry that is raised simultaneously the world over because of the universal oppression that affects the Negro. You who are congregated here tonight as Delegates representing the hundreds of branches of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in different parts of the world will realize that we in New York are positive in this great desire of a free and redeemed Africa. We have established this Liberty Hall as the centre from which we send out the sparks of liberty to the four corners of the globe, and if you have caught the spark in your section, we want you to keep it a-burning for the great Cause we represent.

There is a mad rush among races everywhere towards national independence. Everywhere we hear the cry of liberty, of freedom, and a demand for democracy. In our corner of the world we are raising the cry for liberty, freedom and democracy. Men who have raised the cry for freedom and liberty in ages past have always made up their minds to die for the realization of the dream. We who are assembled in this Convention as Delegates representing the Negroes of the world give out the same spirit that the fathers of liberty in this country gave out over one hundred years ago. We give out a spirit that knows no compromise, a spirit that refuses to turn back, a spirit that says "Liberty or Death," and in prosecution of this great ideal—the ideal of a free and redeemed Africa, men may scorn, men may spurn us, and may say

that we are on the wrong side of life, but let me tell you that way in which you are travelling is just the way all peoples who are free have travelled in the past. If you want liberty you yourselves must strike the blow. If you must be free you must become so through your own effort, through your own initiative. Those who have discouraged you in the past are those who have enslaved you for centuries and it is not expected that they will admit that you have a right to strike out at this late hour for freedom, liberty and democracy.

• • •

It falls to our lot to tear off the shackles that bind Mother Africa. Can you do it? You did it in the Revolutionary War. You did it in the Civil War. You did it at the Battles of the Marne and Verdun; You did it in Mesopotamia. You can do it marching up the battle heights of Africa. Let the world know that 400,000,000 Negroes are prepared to die or live as free men. Despise us as much as you care. Ignore us as much as you care. We are coming 400,000,000 strong. We are coming with our woes behind us, with the memory of suffering behind us—woes and suffering of three hundred years—they shall be our inspiration. My bulwark of strength in the conflict for freedom in Africa, will be the three hundred years of persecution and hardship left behind in this Western Hemisphere. The more I remember the suffering of my fore-fathers, the more I remember the lynchings and burnings in the Southern States of America, the more I will fight on even though the battle seems doubtful. Tell me that I must turn back, and I laugh you to scorn. Go on! Go on! Climb ye the heights of liberty and cease not in well doing until you have planted the banner of the Red, the Black and the Green on the hilltops of Africa.

Questions

1. How does Garvey define black freedom?
2. How do you think Garvey felt that African independence would benefit black Americans?

~~129. John A. Fitch on the Great Steel Strike (1919)~~

~~Source: John A. Fitch, "The Closed Shop," *The Survey* (November 8, 1919), pp. 53-56, 126, 91.~~

~~Among American workers, wartime language linking patriotism with democracy and freedom inspired hopes that an era of social justice was at hand. In 1919, over a million workers engaged in strikes—the greatest wave of labor unrest in American history. The strike wave reached its peak in the era's greatest labor uprising, the steel strike. Centered in Pittsburgh and Chicago, it united some 365,000 mostly immigrant workers in demands for union recognition, higher wages, and an eight-hour workday. Before 1917, the steel mills were little autocracies, where managers arbitrarily established wages and working conditions and suppressed all efforts at union organizing. "For why this war?" asked a Polish immigrant steel worker at a union meeting attended by the writer John Fitch, who visited Pittsburgh to report on the strike. "For why we buy Liberty bonds? For the mills? No, they're dead and America—for everybody. No more [work] like a horse and wagon. For eight-hour day." By 1920, with middle-class opinion having turned against the labor movement and native-born workers abandoning their immigrant counterparts, the strike collapsed.~~

~~WHAT ARE THE chief issues in the steel strike? Is the strike revolution in disguise or is it a bona fide trade union struggle? Is the issue the closed union shop or the closed anti-union shop? Is the strike an effort of a minority to dominate, led by rank outsiders who came into the steel district as professional agitators? Or is it the expression of long pent-up desires held by large numbers of genuine steel workers, under a welcomed leadership? Is it a fight of Americans against foreigners? Or is it an old-fashioned dispute of anti-union employers against organized labor in any form, such as has long since been thrashed out and settled in other major American industries in favor of collective bargaining?~~