

1920's: Us versus Them

Immigrants, Commies, and
Radicals... oh my!

A decade marked by fear

- America in the 1920s was a nation marked by fear and hysteria of the “unknown.”

Why?

- Lingering nationalism from WWI and increased immigration rates
- The Russian Revolution of 1917: is Communism taking over THE WORLD?
- The economy drops after the war, creating worker riots

Fear of Immigrants

- Americans begin to adopt “nativism,” favoring “native-born” Americans over immigrants
- Americans, still harboring mistrust of immigrants from WWI, create a series of “quota laws,” to put a cap on immigration. Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and Immigration Act of 1924 (sets immigration levels to 2% of each nationality from the 1890 census) mainly target southern and eastern Europe.
- The Ku Klux Klan increases its numbers to four million in the early 1920s.

Fear of communists and radicals

- The Russian Revolution in 1917 causes many Americans to fear that communism is spreading
- April 28, 1919: The US Postal Service finds 36 packages containing bombs sent to political figures and wealthy Americans such as John D. Rockefeller
 - Although it is never discovered WHO sent the bombs, Americans believe it is the work of radicals or anarchists (people who do not want government)
 - This leads to the Red Scare, a wave of anti-commie feeling in America

The First Red Scare and the Palmer Raids

- After his house is bombed in 1919, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and his assistant, J. Edgar Hoover, decide to round up any suspicious immigrant to stop a “dangerous revolution” in America.
- January 2, 1920: The “Palmer Raids” occur in more than 30 cities. 10,000 people are arrested, most without search OR arrest warrants.
- Thousands of aliens are held for days without charges, the right to bail, or attorneys.
- In total, about 500 people were deported for being members of the Communist Party.

Fear of unions

- After the war, production dropped, so unemployment rose
- Workers, upset their jobs were threatened, went on strike
- Some unions, like the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies), said socialism (everyone is equal) was the only way to protect workers rights
- Bosses use this idea to hurt unions, telling the public they are radicals who want to overthrow America with violence
- Major Setbacks for Labor:
 - Federal Courts kill child labor laws and workplace protections, many passed after Triangle Shirtwaist fire in 1911
 - 1919 steel strike: a dozen workers killed, steel companies refuse to give in to demands for right to unionize
 - Adkins v. Children's Hospital (1923): Women DO NOT have the right to special workplace protection laws, overturns a minimum wage law for women.
 - Reverses the Muller v. Oregon case (1908)

The Sacco and Vanzetti Case

- April 15, 1920: Massachusetts, two guards are robbed and killed as they carry boxes containing \$16,000 for payroll.
- Soon after, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian immigrants are arrested for the crime.

Testimony for the prosecution (Against Sacco and Vanzetti)

- The prosecution claimed the men were dangers to society and actively pursued a lie of crime. Their evidence was as follows:
 - The two men fled to Mexico in 1917 to avoid fighting in the war
 - Both men were active union members
 - Both men were part of an anarchists group in Boston, claiming to be “the radical of the radical.”
- Both men had guns on them when they were arrested
- An eyewitness claims to have seen “two Italians” fleeing the scene.

The Verdict

- Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco are found guilty on two counts of murder in 1921.
- The governor of Massachusetts appoints a committee to review the case and decide whether or not it was fair.
- The committee concludes the trial was fair, and Sacco and Vanzetti are executed by electric chair in August of 1927.

An Era of Conservative Politics

- Harding (1921-1923; dies in office)
 - Teapot Dome Scandal
 - Washington Naval Conference
 - Fordney-McCumber Tariff
- “Silent Cal” Coolidge (1923-1929)
 - Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact
 - National Origins Act (1927)
- Hoover (1929-1933)
 - More on this dude later