

STUDY GUIDE
AMERICA IN THE 1920'S- Isolationism
TEST: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1ST

January 29, 2018
7th grade Civics

The Red Scare:

The fear of Communism in the USA in the 1920's

The so-called "**Red Scare**" refers to the fear of communism in the USA during the **1920's**.

This wave of fear led to a period when the government went after "Reds"- as Communists were known- and others with radical views.

In late 1919 and early 1920, **Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer** and his deputy J. Edgar Hoover ordered the arrest of people suspected of being Communist and anarchists. Palmer and Hoover also staged raids on the headquarters of various "suspicious" groups. In the raids, the government arrested more than 4,000 people, ransacked homes and offices, and seized records. They did not find the large stockpiles of weapons and dynamite they claimed they were seeking.

Palmer said the raids were justified. The government **deported** - expelled from the United States- about 500 of the aliens it had arrested but quickly released many others for lack of evidence. In time people realized that the danger of revolution was greatly exaggerated. The Red Scare passed- but the fear underlying it remained.

Nicola Sacco

Bartolomeo Vanzetti

- Italian immigrants and avowed anarchists
- Anarchy: absence of government
- Arrested as suspicious in a streetcar

Antiforeign and antiradical feelings surfaced in a criminal case in Massachusetts in 1920. Two men robbed a shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts, shooting and killing a guard and paymaster. Soon afterward, the police arrested Sacco and Vanzetti for the crime. Tried and convicted in July 1921, they were sentenced to death. The case created a furor. Both men were anarchists, and Sacco owned a pistol similar to the murder weapon. Neither had a criminal record, however, and the evidence against them was weak. Future Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter wrote a defense of the two men. William Howard Taft, chief justice of the United States, attacked Frankfurter for "vicious propaganda."

Caught up in the antiforeign fever, many Americans demanded that the death sentence be carried out. In 1927, a special commission appointed by the governor of Massachusetts upheld the verdict- Sacco and Vanzetti- still proclaiming their innocence- were executed. While historians continue to debate the verdict. The case suggested the depth of antiforeign and antiradical feelings in the United States in the 1920's.

Authorities had linked a number of bombings and bomb threats to anarchist groups.

Be able to answer this for the test:

What was it about the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti which made it become a significant moment in American History?

Nicola **Sacco** and Bartolomeo **Vanzetti**, Italian immigrants and anarchists, were executed for murder by the state of Massachusetts in 1927 on the basis of doubtful ballistics evidence. For countless observers throughout the world, **Sacco and Vanzetti** were convicted because of their political beliefs and ethnic background. Despite worldwide demonstrations in support of their innocence, the Italian-born anarchists were executed for murder. On April 15, 1927, a paymaster for a shoe company in South Braintree, Massachusetts, was shot and killed along with his guard.

How did America's immigration laws in the 1920's contribute to isolationism in America?
The Immigration Act of 1924 made the principle of national origin quotas the permanent basis for U.S. immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act) restricted the number of immigrants from a given country to 2% of the number of residents from that same country living in the United States.

The Immigration Act of 1924

The percentage quotas were strongly biased towards to the "Old Immigrants" from North-Western Europe as as opposed to the "New Immigrants" from South-Eastern Europe. The Immigration Act of 1924 shut the 'Golden Door' to America and 87% of immigration permits (visas) went to immigrants from Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. The law completely excluded immigrants from Asia.

Calvin Coolidge was the 30th American President who served in office from August 2, 1923 to March 4, 1929. One of the important events during his presidency was the Immigration Act of 1924.

It is said that there were over 150,000 anarchists or communists in USA in 1920 alone and this represented only 0.1% of the overall population of the USA.

American Isolationism refers to the foreign policy of the US that sought to avoid

involvement in any foreign disputes or entanglements that could lead to war. The idea of American Isolationism became popular after WW1 which had left many Americans with a feeling of distrust of Europe and wondering whether the deaths and sacrifices of WW1 had been worthwhile.

American Isolationism was further fueled by the suspicion that the massive amounts of money, made by the munitions industry and arms manufacturers, had played a major role in the US involvement in the Great War.

The geography of the USA, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, made the policy of American Isolationism seem obvious and the natural resources available to the nation led to the belief that the US could survive alone, although the advantages to be gained by trade with other countries was also appreciated. Recovery from the devastating economic crisis of the Great Depression was uppermost in the minds of Americans and the policy of American Isolationism seemed the logical way forward for many.

Isolationism is the name of the foreign policy adopted by Republican governments under President Harding (1921-1923) and [President Calvin Coolidge](#) (1923-1929). The American foreign policy of Isolationism in the 1920's was a diplomatic and economic doctrine that aimed at self-advancement to make the United States economically self-reliant and retaining peace with other nations. The policy of Isolationism in the 1920's attempted to isolate the United States from the diplomatic affairs of other countries by avoiding foreign entanglements and entering into alliances, and limiting foreign competition by imposing high import tariffs (Taxes).

After World War I the US attempted to become less involved in world affairs.

The US refused to join the League of Nations. Although President Wilson pushed hard for US membership, opposition in the US Senate was significant. Americans, after learning of the destruction and cost of World War I, did not want the United States to become entangled in another European conflict which could lead to another devastating war.

Americans viewed the nations of Europe as conflict prone and likely to become involved in internal and external disputes which could draw in the United States into another war which really had little to do with American interests.

The US closed the doors to immigration during the 1920's. Early on the US had excluded Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians, but later the US began to exclude even Europeans, particularly eastern and southern Europeans.

Why did the US, a nation of immigrants, suddenly turn against immigration?

Answers:

1) anti-European feelings after WWI;

- 2) organized labor believed cheap immigrant labor forced down wages;
- 3) railroads and basic industries were well developed by 1920's and industrialists no longer felt the need for masses of unskilled workers;
- 4) more established Americans descended from northern Europe felt recent immigrants from eastern and southern Europe could never be truly American, and they also saw them as inferior;
- 5) radical political movement and ideologies such as socialism, communism, and anarchism were viewed as European in origin and as potential threats to political stability in the United States.

Immigration Laws:

- 1) Quota Act of 1921 – limited immigration from each country to 3 % of total number who had immigrated in 1910 and set a yearly limit of 350,000
- 2) The 1924 quota reduced the quota to 2%, the base year changed from 1910 to 1890. This discriminated against eastern and southern Europeans because many had come to the US after 1890
- 3) National Origins Act of 1929 – the base year was moved to 1920, but total number was set at 150,000

The War of Tariffs:

America set high tariffs on imports to keep out foreign products. This raised prices for American consumers because cheaper foreign products were kept out of the US market. It also took away an essential market (the US) from many European and Latin American countries. People in these countries lost their jobs as factories were unable to sell their products to the US, and farmers began to accumulate huge surpluses. Eventually foreign nations responded by raising their own tariffs and excluding American manufactured and farm products from foreign markets.

War Debts Unpaid:

The nations of Europe had accumulated huge debts during World War I when they had borrowed massive sums of money from the US to buy war goods. By 1918 the total amount owed to the US was about \$10 billion. The US lowered interest rates on loans when Europeans faced difficulties in repaying, but high tariffs in the US prevented Europeans from earning the dollars they needed to pay off the loans.

The European Allies looked to war reparations from Germany as the solution to their debt problems. In 1921 a Reparations Commission fixed the total amount of German reparations at \$33 billion. Germany however was in the middle of an economic crisis with high unemployment and hyperinflation and was completely unable to pay the reparations. Germany attempted to borrow money from European and US banks to pay

the reparations, but there were limits to what the Germans could borrow. By 1930 Germany was totally unable to make any other reparation payments.

A Legacy of Bitterness:

European allies claimed that they had done most of the fighting and had suffered the most during the war, and that consequently, the US should cancel all war debts. The US claimed that as much as 1/3 of the loans had been made after the armistice and that therefore the Europeans should have to pay. In the end most of the war debts and most of Germany's reparations remained unpaid. Nonetheless, the US's unsuccessful attempt to collect the war debts increased Europe's resentment against the US. Also, the Allies' unsuccessful attempt to collect reparations from the Germans contributed to a feeling of bitterness among the German people that contributed to the rise of Hitler in the early 1930's

Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925–1927

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5078>

In response to growing public opinion against the flow of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe in the years following World War I, Congress passed first the Quota Act of 1921 and then the even more restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act). Initially, the 1924 law imposed a total quota on immigration of 165,000—less than 20 percent of the pre-World War I average. It based ceilings on the number of immigrants from any particular nation on the percentage of each nationality recorded in the 1890 census—a blatant effort to limit immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, which mostly occurred after that date. In the first decade of the 20th century, an average of 200,000 Italians had entered the United States each year. With the 1924 Act, the annual quota for Italians was set at less than 4,000. This table shows the annual immigration quotas under the 1924 Immigration Act.

FOR TEST: In reference to the Immigration Quotas, what are the main ideas from this paragraph? Outline to make it easier to study.

KU KLUX KLAN

For all its many positive aspects, the 1920s was a period sadly marred by widespread intolerance. Religious, racial, and ethnic prejudices, long present in American life, bubbled to the surface. This intolerance manifested itself most famously in the form of the hooded knights of the Ku Klux Klan, who marched down the Main Streets of small town America as well as Pennsylvania Avenue, the “Avenue of Presidents.” The Klan came to be one of the most important and certainly spectacular social movements of the postwar years. What follows is a description of the Klan that burst onto the national scene in 1921, reached its high point at mid decade, and then faded away.

The Klan preached a message of keeping “America for Americans”—*that is, white,*

native born, Protestants—and took as its mission securing and maintaining that birthright for them. Underlying it all was the idea that only these Americans were fit to govern America. Klan members were driven by a strong bias against Catholics, Jews, certain foreigners, and blacks. These groups were seen as incapable of meeting the Klan's One-Hundred Percent American standard of patriotism because of their inability to assimilate fully into American life due to various impediments.

There have been three Klans, each separate and distinct. The Klan that flourished in the 1920s was the *second* Ku Klux Klan. It existed as a legally chartered entity from 1915 to 1944, a total of 29 years.

The Second Klan of the 1920s: This is the body—known officially as the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan—that Presidents Warren G. Harding, 1921-23, and Calvin Coolidge, 1923-29, confronted. It differed significantly from its predecessor and successor. Most notably, it was a popular, nationally organized movement taking the form of a secret, fraternal organization and presenting itself to the public as a benevolent and patriotic society. Apart from its darker activities, which brought so much emotional anguish and even physical suffering to its victims, it is remembered primarily for its sinister costumes, its mysterious rituals and late night ceremonies, its bizarre titles for its officers, and especially for its symbol, the fiery cross.

In the 1920s, vast numbers of Klansmen and Klanswomen would proudly parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in their hooded costumes and with flags flying in a display designed to convey power and might and to intimidate those who would oppose them. These men and women of the Klan were found in both urban and rural areas and in all sections of the country, but primarily in America's Heartland, with Indiana having the largest contingent of knights.

In its early years, 1915-20, the second Klan grew slowly and showed little promise of success. During the Great War, it put itself to work ferreting out disloyal Americans. It did not spring to life, becoming an organizational and financial success, until June of 1920, when Simmons hired two clever marketing experts, Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, to head the Klan's Propagation Department. They became, as one student of the Klan has observed, the "real creators" of the second Klan