

# The United States in the 1920s

**The illusion of Isolationism  
and the Red Scare**

# Learning Objectives

Explain the cause of restrictions on immigration the USA in the 1920s

Identify key events in the Russian Revolution

Describe the “Red Scare” in America

Explain the controversy over the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti

Describe the rise of the KKK

# The Policy of Isolation

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Source: <http://www.american-historama.org/1913-1928-ww1-prohibition-era/isolationism-1920s.htm>

# Why?

“The destruction and cost of WW1 had left their mark on America and the majority of Americans wanted to be kept out of any future involvement in European politics and simply wanted to be left alone to concentrate on building prosperity in the United States.

The American people wholeheartedly agreed with the idea of "a return to normalcy" and were in favor of the return to the American foreign policy of Isolationism.

The American economy was entering a boom period – see the Economic Boom of the 1920's. Before WW1 America was in debt to Europe. After WW1 the situation was reversed and the Allies owed the US more than \$10 billion for the cost of armaments and food supplies.”

# Reasoning...

“The resumption of the American foreign policy of Isolationism in the 1920's appeared to be a logical decision.

- The Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans surrounded the USA formed a natural, geographic barrier with the rest of the world
- Memories of the destruction and loss caused by WW1 were fresh in the minds of Americans
- Americans believed that radical political movements and ideologies such as socialism, communism, and anarchism were European in origin and threatened political stability in the United States. The events during the Red Scare (1917 - 1920) had fostered the fear and suspicion of foreigners
- Americans did not trust Europeans after the Treaty of Versailles

# Economic Consequences

“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).

The 1922 Fordney-McCumber Act was passed introducing the highest tariffs in American history, this policy was called Protectionism. However the US law backfired. In response to the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act, European countries imposed a tax on American goods making them too expensive to buy in Europe and restricting trade which contributed to the Great Depression of the 1930's.”

# Restrictions on Immigration

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# Changes in Immigration Patterns

A giant wave of immigration that began in the late 1800s had raised the nation's population of foreign-born residents to a then-record high of 13.9 million in 1920, making up a near-record 13% of the U.S. population.

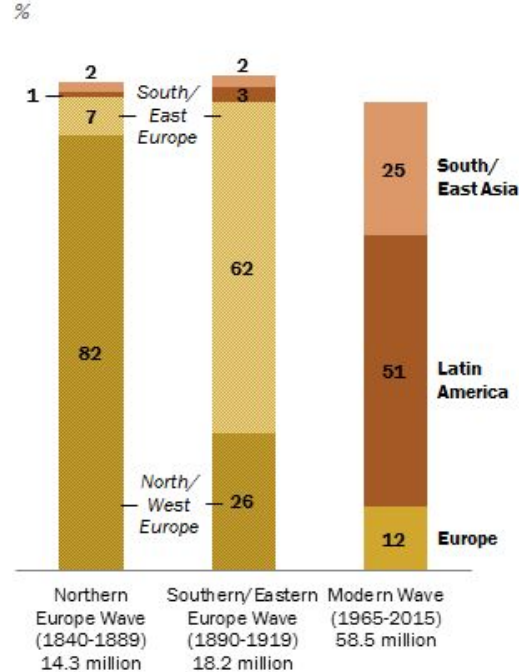
The first arrivals in this wave were mainly Northern Europeans, but by the early 1900s most new arrivals came from Italy, Poland and elsewhere in Southern and Eastern Europe.”

Source:

<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/chapter-1-the-nations-immigration-laws-1920-to-today/>

FIGURE 1.1

## Latin American, Asian Immigrants Make Up Most of Post-1965 Immigration



Note: Data for 1965-2015 include legal and unauthorized immigrants; for 1840-1919, only legal admissions.

Source: For 1965-2015, Pew Research Center estimates based on adjusted census data; for 1840-1919, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 2008, Table 2

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# Nationality Quotas

“Nationality quotas were imposed only on Europe, not on countries in the Western Hemisphere. There were no quotas for Asia, because immigration from most countries there already was prohibited through other restrictions imposed in 1875 and expanded in later decades.

Aside from country limits, federal laws already in place barred immigration by criminals, those deemed “lunatics” or “idiots,” and people unable to support themselves, among others .

There were some exceptions to U.S. immigration restrictions. For example, because of labor shortages during World War II, the U.S. and Mexico signed an agreement in 1942 creating the Bracero program to allow Mexican agricultural workers to enter the U.S. temporarily. The program lasted until 1964.”

# **The Russian Revolution and the Red Scare**

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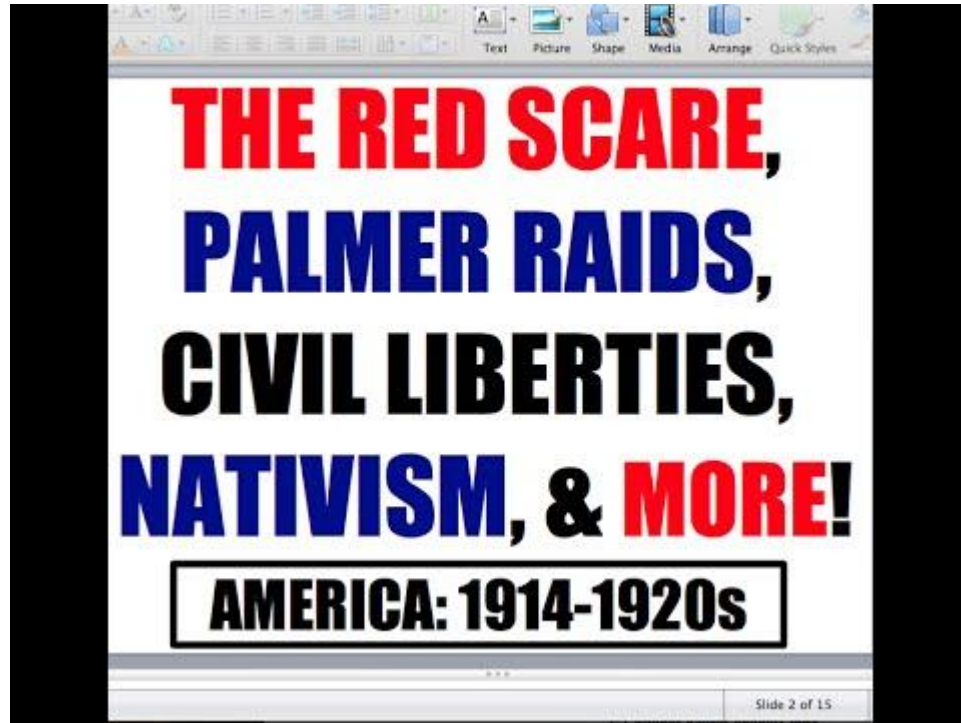
# Quick look at the revolution

In 1917, two revolutions swept through Russia, ending centuries of imperial rule and setting in motion political and social changes that would lead to the formation of the Soviet Union. In March, growing civil unrest, coupled with chronic food shortages, erupted into open revolt, forcing the abdication of Nicholas II (1868–1918), the last Russian czar. Just months later, the newly installed provisional government was itself overthrown by the more radical Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924).

Source: <http://www.history.com/topics/russian-revolution>



Summary of the Russian Revolution



The Red Scare (Source- Youtube)

# The Red Scare

“Shortly after the end of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Red Scare took hold in the United States. A nationwide fear of communists, socialists, anarchists, and other dissidents suddenly grabbed the American psyche in 1919 following a series of anarchist bombings.

The nation was gripped in fear. Innocent people were jailed for expressing their views, civil liberties were ignored, and many Americans feared that a Bolshevik-style revolution was at hand. Then, in the early 1920s, the fear seemed to dissipate just as quickly as it had begun, and the Red Scare was over.”

Visit for more information at the source:

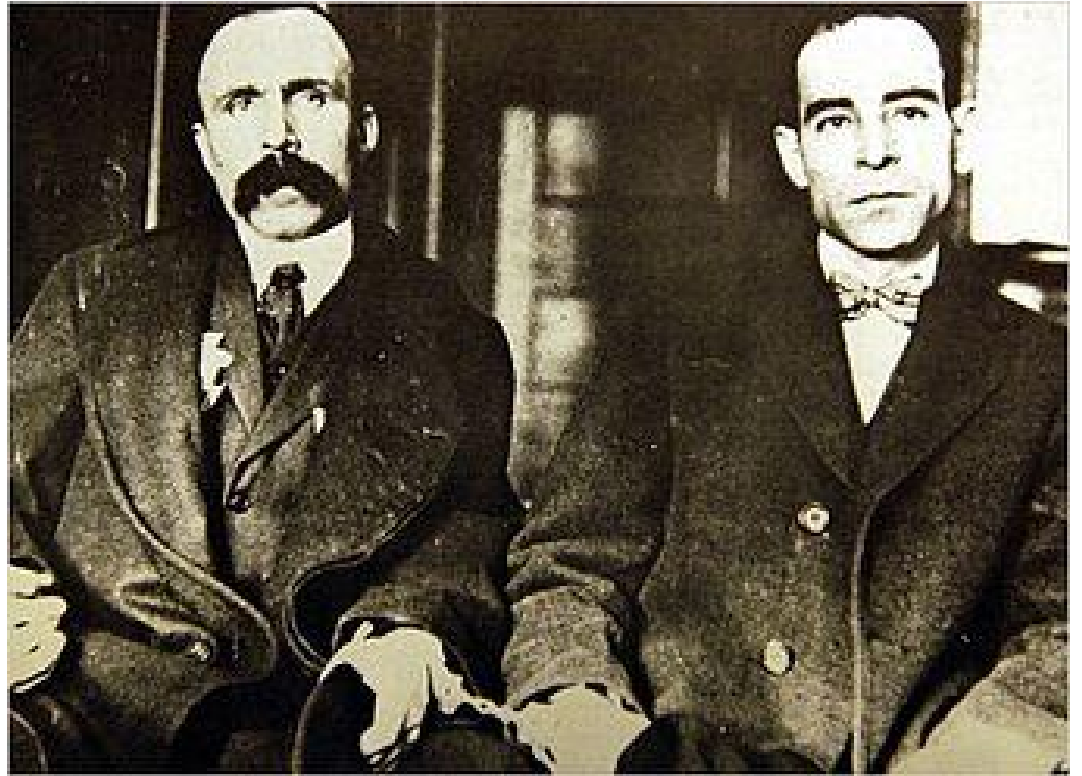
<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/saccov/redscare.html>

# **The Executions of Sacco and Vanzetti**

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## Summary

“In 1921, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both Italian-Americans, were convicted of robbery and murder. Although the arguments brought against them were mostly disproven in court, the fact that the two men were known radicals (and that their trial took place during the height of the Red Scare) prejudiced the judge and jury against them. On April 9, 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti's final appeal was rejected, and the two were sentenced to death.”





# The Crime

“At about three o'clock in the afternoon of April 15, 1920, Parmenter, a paymaster, and Berardelli, his guard, were fired upon and killed by two men armed with pistols, as they were carrying two boxes containing the pay roll of the shoe factory of Slater and Morrill, amounting to \$15,776.51, from the company's office building to the factory through the main street of South Braintree, Massachusetts. As the murder was being committed, a car containing several other men drew up to the spot. The murderers threw the two boxes into the car, jumped in themselves, and were driven away at high speed across some near-by railroad tracks. Two days later this car was found abandoned in woods at a distance from the scene of the crime.”



Summary courtesy of Youtube

# **The Ku Klux Klan**

**(a boiling cesspool of idiocy and hate)**

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# Summary

Founded in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) extended into almost every southern state by 1870 and became a vehicle for white southern resistance to the Republican Party's Reconstruction-era policies aimed at establishing political and economic equality for blacks. Its members waged an underground campaign of intimidation and violence directed at white and black Republican leaders.

Though Congress passed legislation designed to curb Klan terrorism, the organization saw its primary goal—the reestablishment of white supremacy—fulfilled through Democratic victories in state legislatures across the South in the 1870s. After a period of decline, white Protestant nativist groups revived the Klan in the early 20th century, burning crosses and staging rallies, parades and marches denouncing immigrants, Catholics, Jews, blacks and organized labor. The civil rights movement of the 1960s also saw a surge of Ku Klux Klan activity, including bombings of black schools and churches and violence against black and white activists in the South.

Source: <http://www.history.com/topics/ku-klux-klan>



Origins of the KKK

# Founding the Klan

“A group including many former Confederate veterans founded the first branch of the Ku Klux Klan as a social club in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866. The first two words of the organization’s name supposedly derived from the Greek word “kyklos,” meaning circle.

In the summer of 1867, local branches of the Klan met in a general organizing convention and established what they called an “Invisible Empire of the South.” Leading Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest was chosen as the first leader, or “grand wizard,” of the Klan; he presided over a hierarchy of grand dragons, grand titans and grand cyclopes.”

# Revival during the Roaring 20s

“In 1915, white Protestant nativists organized a revival of the Ku Klux Klan near Atlanta, Georgia, inspired by their romantic view of the Old South as well as Thomas Dixon’s 1905 book “The Clansman” and D.W. Griffith’s 1915 film “Birth of a Nation.” This second generation of the Klan was not only anti-black but also took a stand against Roman Catholics, Jews, foreigners and organized labor. It was fueled by growing hostility to the surge in immigration that America experienced in the early 20th century along with fears of communist revolution akin to the Bolshevik triumph in Russia in 1917.

The organization took as its symbol a burning cross and held rallies, parades and marches around the country. At its peak in the 1920s, Klan membership exceeded 4 million people nationwide.”

# Review

Explain the cause of restrictions on immigration the USA in the 1920s

What happened in the Russian Revolution?

What was the “Red Scare” in the 1920s?

Why is there controversy over the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti?

What is the KKK?