

# The USA: A nation of contrasts, 1910-1929

## 2.1 Restrictions to immigration -1

There were four important measures introduced to restrict immigration into America, each one being stricter than the previous one.

Literacy Test, 1917 !- Immigrants had to pass a series of reading and writing tests. Many of the poorer immigrants, especially those from eastern Europe, had received no education and therefore failed the tests and were refused entry.

The Emergency Quota Act, 1921 !- A law which restricted the number of immigrants to 357,000 per year, and also set down a quota - only 3 per cent of the total population of each ethnic group already in the USA in 1910 could come in after 1921.

## 2.2 Restrictions to immigration 2

The National Origins Act, 1924 !- This law cut the quota of immigrants to 2 per cent of its population in the USA in 1890. The act was aimed at restricting southern and eastern European immigrants. It allowed more people from northern Europe to enter.

Immigration Act, 1929 !- This restricted immigration to 150,000 per year. No Asians were allowed. Northern and western Europeans were allocated 85% of places.

The Open Door was now closed to many. The government did not believe that the new immigrants enriched the life and culture of the USA. As a result, there was more fear of immigrants, xenophobia and racial persecution.

## 2.3 Americanisation

- In addition to the restrictions on the numbers of immigrants, measures were introduced to Americanise them.
- The Federal Bureau of Naturalization organised patriotic 'Americanisation Day' rallies. The Americanisation Day was designed for citizens to reaffirm their loyalty to the USA and the heritage of freedom.
- People were invited to put on appropriate ceremonies in schools and similar places.
- Courses on politics and democracy were organised by the Federal Bureau of Education to prepare immigrants for the citizenship examination.



## Why did immigration become such a major issue in American society?

### 2.4 The Palmer Raids

- In 1919, there was a series of bombings by extreme anarchist groups.
- In one famous attack, the home of Mitchell Palmer, the Attorney-General (Head of the US Department of Justice), was bombed.
- The press stirred up public feeling and insisted that the attack was further evidence of a widespread communist takeover plot.
- The Palmer Raids were organised by the Attorney-General, Mitchell Palmer.
- The police attacked socialist parades on May Day 1920 and raided the offices of socialist organisations.
- Many innocent people were arrested because of their supposed dangerous political beliefs.
- It was a response to the Red Scare and it involved the arrest of over 6000 suspected communists in 36 cities across America.
- Trade unionists, Catholics, Jews and black people were particularly targeted.
- The 'Palmer Raids' were illegal, but there were few who protested against them.
- These people were held for several weeks without charge and several hundred Russian immigrants were sent back in a ship nicknamed the 'Soviet Ark.'



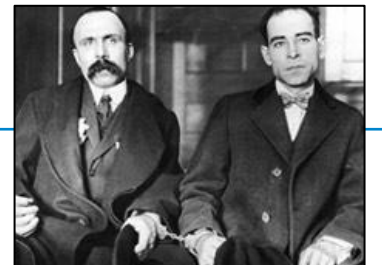
### 2.5 The Sacco & Vanzetti case

- On 5 May 1920, two Italian immigrants - Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti - were arrested and charged with carrying out a robbery at a shoe factory in Massachusetts in which two people died.
- !They had radical anti-government pamphlets in the car when they were arrested and both owned guns!
- Their trial started in May 1921 and lasted 45 days. The case against them was not strong - 61 eyewitnesses identified the two men, but the defence produced 107 witnesses who said they were elsewhere at the time of the robbery.
- The case aroused mass media attention and the Judge, Webster Thayer, seemed determined to find the two men guilty.
- On 14 July, 1921, the jury delivered a guilty verdict and they were sentenced to death.
- Sacco and Vanzetti took their case to appeal in several higher courts but all attempts failed.
- Although a man named Celestino Madeiros later admitted that he had committed the crime, Sacco and Vanzetti lost their appeal! Their last appeal in 1927 failed and they were executed by the electric chair in August 1927.

The treatment of these two anarchist immigrants highlights the hysteria of the Red Scare the attitudes and discrimination immigrants experienced.

### 2.6 The importance of the trial

- The trial was reported all over the world and showed the intolerance of American society. As Italian immigrants, the two men were victims of racial discrimination and were denied the rights that they were entitled to.
- It exposed the unfairness of the American legal system. The two men were convicted on flimsy evidence, although subsequent evidence suggests that Sacco may have been guilty.
- In the 1970s, the Governor of Massachusetts granted Sacco and Vanzetti a formal pardon and agreed that a mistrial had taken place.





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1.1

## Jim Crow Laws

Jim Crow Laws introduced **segregation**, separating black and white Americans in schools, parks, hospitals, swimming pools and other public places.

Life for black Americans living in the south was very hard. They were discriminated against and found it difficult to get fair treatment. They could not vote and were denied the right to a decent education and a good job.



## Was America a country of religious and racial intolerance during this period?

### Key Words

**Bible Belt**- an area of southern America where Christian belief was strong.

**Fundamentalist** - a very religious person who believes the Bible word for word..

**Segregation** - keeping a group separate from the rest of society.



1.5

## The treatment of Native Americans

¥ Until the passing of the Indian citizenship Act of 1924, America's native people had been denied full US citizenship.

¥ They had been forced to live on reservations, often on poor quality land.

¥ During the 1920s, the white authorities tried to destroy the Indian culture and traditional way of life.

¥ They were encouraged to reject their own culture and integrate fully into white society.

¥ Their children were sent away to boarding schools where they were taught English, forced to wear western clothes and encouraged to convert to Christianity. Children found speaking their own language were beaten.

¥ Indian traditions were banned; for example, performing the Sun Dance, boys having long hair and the wearing of traditional clothes.

¥ While the granting of citizenship gave them the right to vote Native Americans continued to be treated as second-class citizens and remained victims of racial intolerance.

1.2

## The growth of the Ku Klux Klan

¥ The movement was revived in 1915 by William J. Simmons following the release of the film Birth of a Nation.

¥ Membership was only open to **WASPS**; members saw themselves as being superior to other races.

¥ Concerns over immigration and the **Red Scare** caused Klan membership to rise sharply. By 1925, there were 5 million members.

¥ The head of the Klan was the Imperial Wizard - a post held in the 1920s by Hiram Wesley Evans. Grand Dragons were in charge of each state.

¥ Klan members dressed in white robes and white hoods - the colour symbolising **white supremacy**. Members carried the American flag and burnt crosses during their night-time meetings.

¥ Klan members often killed black people by hanging without trial (lynching) - Rope Law.

¥ Sometimes the local police could not protect the victims and even took part in the killings.

¥ Klan members were rarely brought to justice; they knew that their 'friends' in the courts would not convict them.



1.1

## The Great Migration

¥ Many black Americans decided to migrate to cities in the north in search of a new job and a better standard of living.

¥ Between 1916 and 1920 almost 1 million people moved to the north in what became known as the '**Great Migration**.'

¥ Black Americans were treated like second-class citizens.

¥ They received low pay and lived in poor neighbourhoods called ghettos, such as Harlem in New York.

1.4

## The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP)

¥ Founded in 1910 by William Du Bois.

¥ By 1919 it had 90,000 members in 300 branches.

¥ Objected to the persecution under the Jim Crow Laws and protested against **segregation**.

¥ Believed in peaceful, non-violent protest using legal methods such as marches

¥ They protected the rights of black people using the law and law courts, helping to fund and fight legal cases.

## The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)

¥ Established in 1914 by Marcus Garvey.

¥ UNIA members were more militant.

¥ Garvey encouraged black people to establish their own businesses and to employ black people only.

¥ He encouraged black people to return to their homeland, Africa.

¥ "Black is beautiful" was his most famous slogan.

1.6

## The Monkey Trial

¥ There was a growing divide between the rural areas and the more modern city culture of America.

¥ The rural areas tended to be very religious, especially those in the Bible Belt states.

¥ Many of the people in these states were Christian fundamentalists who believed that the Bible had to be taken literally and must not be questioned.

¥ Traditional and modern America clashed over the 'Monkey Trial,' which was an argument over Darwin's theory of evolution.

¥ The Bible Belt states believed in creationism and in 1924 the state of Tennessee passed the Butler Act which banned the teaching of evolution in their schools. Five other states passed similar laws.

¥ A biology teacher called John Scopes from Dayton, Tennessee, ignored the ban. He was arrested and put on trial in July 1925.

¥ Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution and fined \$100.

¥ The case was important because it showed how the fundamentalists were trying to curb the freedom of thought.

1.3

## The decline of the Klan

¥ Membership of the Klan fell by 1928.

¥ The Klan declined following the conviction in 1925 of David Stephenson, the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan, for the rape and mutilation of a woman on a Chicago train.

¥ During the trial Stephenson spoke about illegal Klan activities which discredited the movement and brought it much bad publicity.

# The USA: A nation of contrasts, 1910-1929

## 1.1 Why did people want to emigrate to America?

- During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, about 40 million people emigrated to the USA.
- The majority of these came from Southern and Eastern Europe and became known as the 'new immigrants.'
- People made the journey to the USA for many different reasons. These can be grouped into the 'push' and 'pull' factors. The push factors explain why immigrants wanted to leave their homeland and the pull factors relate to the attractions of a new life in the USA.



For example:

- The USA was the land of opportunity for all.
- The USA was the land of the free and a country which guaranteed basic human rights.
- The promise of religious tolerance and freedom.
- Escaping political persecution in their home country.
- The USA was booming industrially, creating many employment opportunities.

The USA followed an 'Open Door' policy. The Open Door policy was designed to make entry into the USA as easy as possible.

## 1.2 Key terms

 Open door policy	Free admission of immigrants.
WASP	White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant.
Communist	A person who believes in a classless society.
Anarchist	A person who wants to remove all forms of government.
Red Scare	Fear that immigrants from Eastern Europe were spreading communist ideas across America.
Xenophobia	An irrational fear or hatred of foreigners.

## Why did immigration become such a major issue in American society?

### 1.3 The growing demand to restrict immigration

In the 1920s many Americans were starting to question the **open door policy** towards immigration.

Traditionally, the immigrants had tended to come from northern and western Europe - Britain, Ireland, Germany. Between 1900 and 1914, 13 million arrived, mainly from southern and eastern Europe - Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Western Poland and Greece. People started feeling angry towards these 'new' immigrants because:

- These 'newer' immigrants were seen to offer little - they were often poor, illiterate and could not speak English.
- The immigrants moved to cities where they tended to live with people from their own country of origin and ghettos developed. Many immigrants were failing to 'Americanise.'
- There was a growing feeling that the 'new' immigrants would take jobs and work for very low wages.
- It was thought that immigrants were responsible for increases in crime, drunkenness and prostitution.
- The cultural and religious backgrounds of immigrants from Eastern Europe were different from those of many Americans and this led to fear and hatred.
- The growth of **xenophobia** and the idea that the ideal citizen was a **WASP**, led Americans to look down on the immigrants from Eastern Europe.
- **The rise of Bolshevism (Communism) in Russia following the revolution in 1917 led to a fear of immigrants bringing communist ideas with them into America.**

### 1.4 World War One

- There was opposition to further immigration when the USA became involved in the First World War and hostility to German immigrants increased alarmingly.
- The teaching of German was banned in schools in several states.
- Involvement in the First World War also caused many Americans to fear future entanglements in European affairs. They wanted the USA to isolate itself from events in Europe and restricting immigration was a way of doing this.
- The USA had a policy of isolationism, which meant staying out of world affairs.

## 1.5 The Red Scare

Many Americans became alarmed over events in Europe, especially after the **Bolshevik Revolution** in Russia in 1917, which led to a communist system of government being set up.

- Many feared that immigrants would spread communist and anarchist ideas into America. A number of events added to these fears leading to a growth in xenophobia.
- In Germany, a group of communists attempted to seize power in January 1919.
- A communist party was formed in the USA in 1919. Many Americans began to fear that there would be a revolution in their own country.
- Americans tended to see any new political ideas, such as anarchism, as branches of communism. All people who believed in these ideas were classed as 'Reds' (communists).
- There were 3,600 strikes in 1919. They were protests against poor working conditions and low pay. Even the police went on strike in Boston. To many, the strikes seemed to indicate the beginnings of a communist revolution.



## 1.6 Actions of anarchists

- In 1919, there were a series of bombings by extreme anarchist groups.
- During 1919 a bomb planted by an anarchist group badly damaged the house of the Attorney-General, Mitchell Palmer.
- In April 1919 a bomb planted in a church in Milwaukee killed ten people.
- In September 1920, an anarchist bomb exploded on Wall Street killing 38 people.
- Such action gave rise to the Red Scare, the fear that anarchists and communists threatened America.

