

Analyzing Political Cartoons

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World War I and Its Aftermath, 1914–1920

The Red Scare, Unrest, and Civil Rights Background

When U.S. soldiers returned home from World War I, many of them could not find jobs. Instead, they found the country's economy turning to shambles. Some resented African Americans who had taken factory jobs to keep the war machine running. At the same time, the cost of food, clothing, and shelter skyrocketed, but wages could not keep up with costs. A large number of workers had joined labor unions and held thousands of strikes in protest. Unemployed workers rioted. Some strikes and riots turned violent. Americans feared that outside forces were trying to bring anarchy—a state of lawlessness and disorder—to the United States. They blamed the Communists and Bolsheviks, called "Reds," who had risen to power in Russia, for sparking rebellion and chaos and trying to spread radical socialism on U.S. soil. Strikes and riots were the first steps toward revolution, they said. A "Red Scare" grew, and in June 1919 terrorists set off bombs in eight cities. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, whose house was targeted, founded an agency that became the FBI. He ordered raids on Russian and radical organizations, ignored civil liberties, and arrested thousands. Though no proof of revolution from without was ever found, hundreds of people born in other countries had been deported and Americans came to associate immigrants with radicalism and disorder.

Directions: Look at the political cartoons here and on the next page. Then answer the questions.



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Analyzing Political Cartoons *Cont.*



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Critical Thinking

1. In the first cartoon, describe the person that the flag is trying to put down and out. What does the cartoonist tell you about American attitudes in this depiction?
2. In the second cartoon, compare the figure being carried away to the men with the clubs. What is ironic about him “overthrowin’ the government,” as the other men say in the caption?
3. In 1920 the Republicans came to power in the United States. What might the cartoonist be suggesting by showing a Republican (“G.O.P. Fat Boy”) shaking a puppetlike straw figure labeled “Red Scare”?