

■ 5A The legacy of the Great War

1 INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

War had taught government how to mobilise workers and increase production with union support, use the new labour sources of women and Afro-Americans and to link industrial production to government needs. The requirements of the War left the USA as the strongest industrial producer in the world, thanks to innovation and technical advancements. The federal government now also had a stronger bureaucracy to implement its wishes.

2 EQUAL RIGHTS AND BLACK MIGRATION



SOURCE 5.1 Some of the black soldiers of the 369th Infantry (15th N.Y.) who won the Croix de Guerre for gallantry in northern France

Whilst immigrants and women were recognised for their war efforts, black soldiers had had to serve in segregated regiments usually doing menial tasks. Of those who fought, many received awards from the French government, but none from their own. The War had raised expectations of greater equality for Afro-Americans. As one black veteran said, 'I'm glad I went. I done my part and I'm going to fight right here till UNCLE SAM does his'. The flow of black workers from the South to the North increased after 1915, many settling in Chicago. Wartime demands for labour provided them with jobs, better pay and raised expectations. But by 1919 resentment amongst white workers and competition for scarce housing led to rioting in 25 cities across the country. The Chicago riots, lasting five days, were the most violent with shootings and lynchings.

3 THE RED SCARE

The defeat of Germany did not end hate and intolerance towards those with different and potentially threatening beliefs. The menace of the 'Hun' was replaced by the supposed menace of communism. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (which had overthrown the Tsar) and the THIRD INTERNATIONAL in 1919 (which pledged its members to revolution throughout the world) revived fears of radical violence in the USA. A series of bombings in the summer of 1919 induced a reaction led by the Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer to order wholesale arrests and jailing of both aliens and citizens, without any legal process. Homes were entered without search warrants and property removed or destroyed. The Department of Justice also sent propaganda to newspapers, which excited public opinion against radicals. After the dramatic seizure of 6000 suspected radicals in New York in January 1920 and an unproven threat of revolution in May, lawyers and politicians began to realise how Mitchell Palmer was abusing his power, and by the summer the hysteria was over.

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4 THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

First reported at an army camp in Kansas, in March 1918, the influenza virus spread rapidly – into American cities, into the American army in France, and then across the world during 1918 and 1919. It was estimated that 40 million people died, including large numbers of the young and old. In the USA there were 700,000 deaths, from an illness that started like a cold but then could kill swiftly, and had no cure. It seemed as uncontrollable as the war in Europe and as difficult to end.

5 THE FAILURE TO JOIN THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Congress rejected President Wilson's ideal of a world free of war, when it refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations. Wilson's illness and lack of political skills played their part in his failure to persuade Congress, but this refusal was symbolic of the USA's unwillingness to realise that its post-war power was needed within such an international organisation.

Extension information.

Social and economic problems

Unemployment and strikes

Four million soldiers were demobbed in 1919. At the same time, industries, geared up to high levels of production during the war, laid off workers so returning soldiers were lucky to find employment. There was more trouble on the work front. Prices had doubled between 1914 and 1919 but wages had hardly risen at all. Workers demanded higher wages but bosses knew that high unemployment gave them a strong hand, and were unwilling to compromise. The result was a wave of violent strikes, which went on throughout 1919.

Fears of radicalism

In Europe the war had triggered the Communist revolution in Russia. And in the USA, the home of capitalism, two Communist parties were established in 1919. ANARCHISTS started a wave of bomb attacks.

The rise of Communism combined with the violent strikes by workers, made people terrified that revolution was spreading to the USA.

Race riots

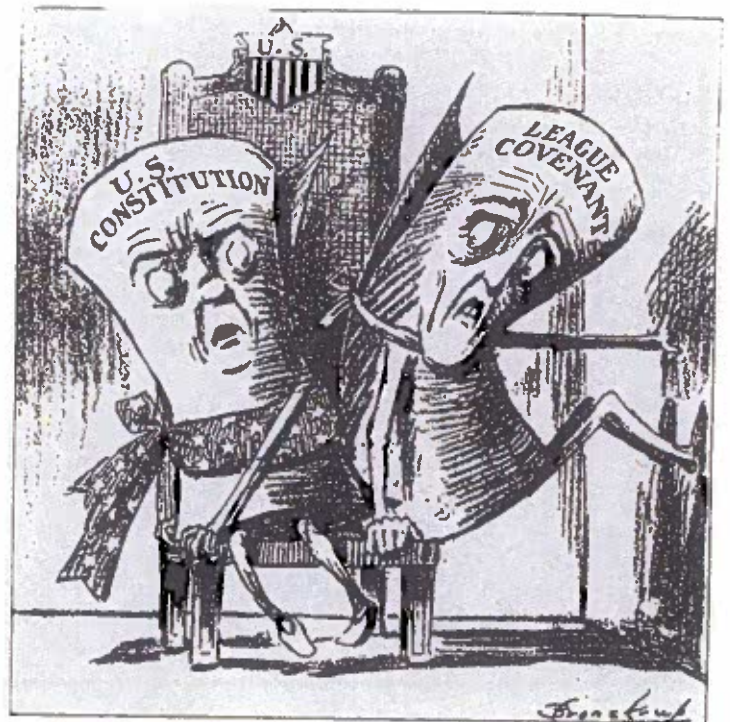
In 25 cities across the USA, there were race riots in 1919. Many black people, who had moved to the northern cities from the South after 1910, found themselves under attack from the white communities around them. These riots were also a reaction to the discrimination and poor economic circumstances that blacks faced after the war.

Isolationism

President Woodrow Wilson was expecting the USA to take a leading role in world affairs after the war. He had drawn up the 'Fourteen Points' which became the basis for the newly created League of Nations. He desperately wanted the USA to play a major part in the League and thus achieve his dream of world peace.

But in 1919 the mood in the USA was against the League and against Wilson. Many thought America had already done more than enough in the First World War. Americans did not want their soldiers to be killed trying to resolve disputes around the globe. They were afraid that the USA would end up paying the bill for European squabbles. The vast majority of Americans wanted to return to the ISOLATIONISM of the nineteenth century.

In 1919 and 1920 Congress refused to support Wilson and rejected the League. Shortly afterwards they rejected Wilson himself. They voted for what the new Republican President Harding called 'normalcy'. Harding had invented this word and no one at the time knew exactly what he meant. But it was a powerful idea. Americans wanted to get back to normal – to what life had been like before the shock of the war.



SOURCE 2 A cartoon from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which comments on President Wilson's struggle with Congress over whether America should join the League of Nations