

Palmer Raids Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: *What caused the Palmer Raids?*

Materials:

- United Streaming Video Segment: Attorney General Mitchell Palmer and the Prosecution of Communism (from *The Cost of Freedom: Civil Liberties, Security, and the USA PATRIOT Act*):
<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=1DDDA06E-9C8F-486E-843E-85DB52BDCD7B>
- Palmer Raids Documents A and B
- Transparency of Document A: “Case Against the Reds”
- Palmer Raids Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Do now: What is communism? What is socialism? Why does the United States have a long history of opposition to socialist ideas?

Pair-share: Have students turn to their neighbor and discuss what they wrote for the Do Now.

Then, elicit student responses.

2. (OPTIONAL) Lecture (if students are shaky on the basic concepts):
 - *Communism is a theory. It says that one day all the people/workers will own all the ways of making money—all the land, all the machines, all the stores (so there will be no private business, and there will be no way for one person to become very rich).*
 - *In this theory, socialism is when you're on the way to communism. (Today, many people believe in socialist ideas without necessarily believing in communism). Some signs of socialism would be government owning of major private businesses (like banks); government owning of major public services (like hospitals and healthcare); and laws that make rich people contribute more taxes so that there isn't a huge difference between rich and poor.*
 - *In the United States, there's been a long history of fear of communism and suppression of socialist ideas because the ideas of communism and socialism threaten the individual's right to private wealth.*

- *In the early 1900s, many people in the United States believed in socialism. Why?*
 - *Industrialization created a huge gap between rich and poor and when people looked around, they thought that wasn't fair.*
 - *Many people joined labor unions. Not all labor unions were socialist. Some, like the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), thought they would be more successful by only organizing skilled workers. But some labor unions, like the International Workers of the World-I.W.W., were socialist—wanted all workers to unite (black, white, men, women, skilled, unskilled).*
 - *In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia established a communist country. Many people in the United States were inspired by their success. Others were very scared by the potential spread of communism.*
 - *At this time, some people were also anarchists—people who didn't believe in any government. Some anarchists thought the government should be overthrown with violence. Although anarchists, socialists, and communists shared some of the same ideas (for example, they all opposed government protection of private wealth), they represented different theories.*

Today, we're going to learn about what happened to people who believed in socialist ideas right after WWI.

2. Play United Steaming Video Segment: Attorney General Mitchell Palmer and the Prosecution of Communism:
<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=1DDDA06E-9C8F-486E-843E-85DB52BDCD7B&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US>
3. Hand out Documents A and B and Palmer Raids Guiding Questions.
4. Work through Document A together. Cognitive modeling on sourcing and contextualization and guided practice on close reading:

Sourcing:

- *I see at the bottom that this is written by Palmer and it's called a "Case Against the Reds."*
- *I know that "red" is another way to say "communist" and I know that the Red Scare happened in 1919-1920, so I'm going to predict that Palmer will defend/justify why he rounded up Communists.*

Contextualization

- *Before I read, I'm also going to look at this headnote. I see here that it gives me some of the context—Russian Revolution, a lot of labor strikes. So maybe this is a time when Americans were super paranoid that there would be a Communist Revolution in this country.*

Close Reading

- Begin reading. After first paragraph, ask students:
 - What is he talking about? What is the fire?
 - Why would communism or socialism be like a fire to him?
 - What is he worried that it's going to destroy?
- Continue reading next two paragraphs. Ask students:
 - Who does he think is spreading these ideas? What type of people? What are they promising people?
- Read final paragraph. Ask students:
 - What does Palmer intend to do?

5. Students should answer questions for Document A before reading and answering questions for Document B.

6. Discussion:

- Review contextualization questions for Palmer and Goldman.
- What is happening at this time? (Remind students of Espionage and Sedition Acts during WWI; this is the same time that Debs is arrested).
- Why does Palmer think Goldman is dangerous? Why does Goldman think Palmer is violating her rights?
- Why did the nation allow the Palmer Raids to take place? (They were announced on front pages of newspapers). Why were people so afraid of anarchists, socialists and communists?

7. Closing mini-lecture.

- *The “Red Scare” technically ended in 1920, but in many ways the 1920s continued to be a time of intolerance.*
- *Sacco and Vanzetti—two Italian anarchists were arrested in 1920 from robbery and murder. The evidence was very sketchy and many have argued that their trial was extremely unfair but they were executed in 1927.*
- *KKK membership exploded—at its peak in 1924 it had 4 million members.*
- *National Origins Act of 1924 severely restricted immigration by setting quotas and limited the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (favoring immigrants from Northwest Europe).*

[Because Western Hemisphere was excluded from the National Origins Act, this actually became a time of high Mexican immigration].

Citations:

A. Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" 1920.
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/hist409/palmer.html>

Emma Goldman, Deportation Statement, New York, October 27, 1919.
<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Exhibition/plea.html>

Document A: "The Case Against the "Reds" (Modified)

In 1917, Russia became a communist country. Also, right after WWI, the country experienced high inflation, high unemployment, and a number of labor strikes. Against this backdrop, the United States began arresting and deporting anyone suspected of "radical" thinking (e.g., communism, socialism, anarchism, pro-labor). These arrests became known as the "Palmer Raids" after the Attorney General of the United States, A. Mitchell Palmer.

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workmen, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into schools, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, burning up the foundations of society.

My information showed that thousands of aliens supported communism in this country.

The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass organization of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decencies of private life, to usurp property that they have not earned, to disrupt the present order of life. Communism distorts our social law.

The Department of Justice will pursue the attack of these "Reds" upon the Government of the United States with vigilance, and no alien, advocating the overthrow of existing law and order in this country, shall escape arrest and prompt deportation.

Vocabulary

Aliens: Foreigners

Usurp: take over

Distort: Twist out of shape

Source: Excerpt from an essay written by A. Mitchell Palmer called "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" 1920.

Document B: Emma Goldman Deportation Statement (Modified)

I wish to register my protest against these proceedings, whose very spirit is nothing less than a revival of the ancient days of the Spanish Inquisition or Czarist Russia (when anyone who disagreed with the government was deported or killed). Today so-called aliens are deported. Tomorrow American citizens will be banished. Already some “patriots” are suggesting that some native-born American citizens should be exiled.

The free expression of the hopes of a people is the greatest and only safety in a sane society. The object of the deportations and of the anti-anarchist law is to stifle the voice of the people, to muzzle every aspiration of labor. That is the real and terrible menace of these proceedings. Their goal is to exile and banish every one who does not agree with the lies that our leaders of industry continue to spread.

Emma Goldman
New York, October 27, 1919

Vocabulary

Banish= Exile= Deported= Kicked out of the country

Aspiration: hope or ambition

Menace: danger, threat

Source: Excerpt from the statement Emma Goldman gave at her deportation hearings. Goldman was an anarchist and socialist who sympathized with the working poor. She was deported during the Palmer Raids.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

Document A: “The Case Against the Reds”

1. (Sourcing) Read the sourcing information and the headnote.

Who wrote this document and what is his perspective?

What do you predict he will say in this document?

2. (Close reading) Read the document carefully.

According to Palmer, what is spreading like a fire? (Don't just write 'revolution!' Explain what he's referring to).

How does Palmer describe communism? Why does he think it's dangerous?

What is he promising to do?

3. (Contextualization) Think about what's happening at the time.

According to this document, who is Palmer going to arrest?

Document B: Emma Goldman

1. (Sourcing) Read the sourcing information at the bottom.

Who wrote this document and what is her perspective?

What do you predict she will say in this document?

2. (Close reading) Read the document carefully.

According to Goldman, what is wrong with the Palmer Raids?

According to Goldman, what is the goal of the Palmer Raids?

3. (Contextualization) Think about what's happening at the time.

According to this document, who did Palmer arrest?

(Corroboration) Use evidence from the two documents to answer the question:
Why did Palmer arrest thousands of people and deport hundreds between 1919-1920?