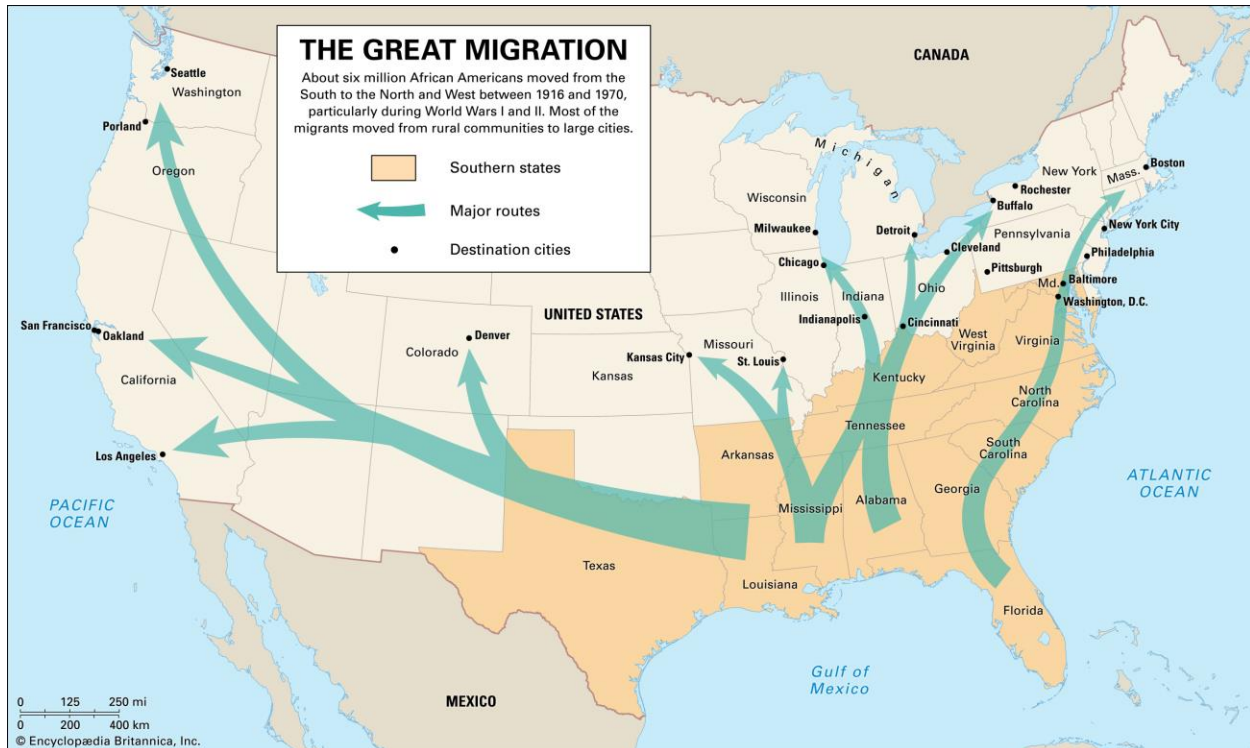


## WWI and American Society

World War I had major economic, social, and political effects on American society. Every citizen was called upon by the government to participate in the war effort. Almost five million served in the armed forces while others worked on the **home front**, especially women and African Americans. **The Great Migration** of African Americans to the industrial north had lasting effects on all of American society.

Wartime challenges to civil liberties were seen in the Supreme Court, especially with the decision in *Schenck v. United States (1919)*.



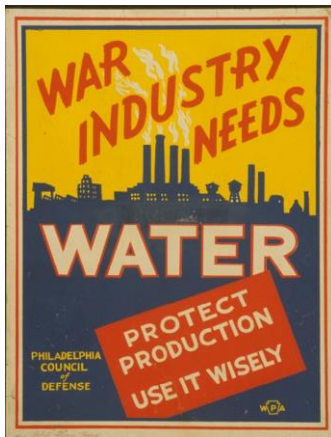
After the war, the threat of communism from the **Bolshevik Revolution** led to the nation living in fear of radicalism and xenophobia (racism), resulting in the **Red Scare**. In addition the national was hit hard by the Global Flu Pandemic and a postwar recession.

American entered World War I in **April 1917**. The immediate need was to train, equip, and transport overseas some five million members of the armed forces and then continue with their supplies and support. In 1916, **before** American entered the war, Congress passed the **National Defense Act**, the **Revenue Act**, and the **Navy Act** to expand and finance the armed forces.

In May 1917, Congress passed the **Selective Service Act**, known as the **draft**. **All males between 18 and 45 had to register**. The Constitutionality of the draft was challenged but upheld by the Supreme Court. Those in favor of the draft saw it as being fair and democratic while those opposed wanted voluntary military service. Those in opposition saw the draft as an example of the rich and educated flexing their power over the poor, the working class, and the immigrants.

Mobilizing the nation for war was not an easy job. **President Woodrow Wilson** centralized the government through a series of agencies run by the **Council of National Defense**. The government now had control over areas not previously controlled such as housing, labor relations, public utilities and the telephone and telegraph systems.

To organize and standardize all aspects of war production, the **War Industries Board (WIB)** was created. It was a cooperation between government and private industry that would be of great help later on during the Great Depression.



About 16 percent of the nation's male workers went into the military during World War I. Their jobs were filled mostly by women, African Americans, and immigrants also saw an increase in employment opportunities.

### The role of Women during World War I

Although temporary, women contributed to the war effort as **volunteers**. They use their household experience to run and maintain the many volunteer organizations needed on the home front. Many women even served overseas in organizations such as the **Red Cross** and **Salvation Army**.

More than 21,000 women served as nurses in the **Army Nurse Corps**, stationed in American hospitals or even in active duty in Europe. They were **not** given a military rank **nor** did they receive equal pay. Over 6,000 women filled clerical jobs in the Army, but were hired as contract civilian employees.

The **U.S. Navy took a different approach** to women. They hired 13,000 for clerical jobs. These women received military ranks and pay, and after the war, veterans benefits equal to those of men who served.

Some women worked in munitions factories, banks, and the post office but most stayed in traditional female jobs. At the war's end, women were expected to quit their wartime jobs and go back to traditional female jobs again. Labor Unions lobbied the government to prevent women from holding "men's jobs." Laws were also passed prohibiting women to work overtime or night jobs.

The contribution of women during the war contributed to the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Right to Vote for Women). Post war industry continued to grow so that by 1920

- Women were 21% of the nation's workforce
- 25% of women held clerical jobs or worked as telephone operators
- 13% of women were employed as nurses, teachers, and social workers.

## The Role of African Americans during World War I

Many African Americans saw it as their patriotic duty to serve their country and join the military, even though they were subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Those who enlisted did so with great distinction and honor.

Approximately 2.3 million African Americans registered for the draft and 375,000 served in the military, mostly in the Army, only a few in the Navy, none in the Marines. Most African American soldiers worked as laborers in noncombat units. Of the 200,000 African American soldiers that were sent overseas, only about 42,000 saw wartime combat.

The **369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment**, called the *Harlem Hellfighters* by the Germans, earned the medal for bravery by the French government and returned home to New York as heroes. They even formed a regimental band and brought jazz music to France.



Most African American civil rights leaders supported World War I. They used the slogan **“Make the world safe for democracy”** to try and achieve more liberties and freedoms for those who served in Europe. Sadly, upon their return, especially in the South, the Jim Crow Laws meant a return to segregation and a fight for their rights.

## The Role of Immigrants during World War I

The new immigrant population also supported the war effort but they too faced prejudice and discrimination. About 500,000 American troops were foreign born, about 300,000 of them took full advantage of the law that allowed them citizenship if they were in military service.

During the war, immigration to the United States came to a halt. Those families already here faced fierce social and job discrimination due to the antiforeign climate created by the war. However workers were needed in all industries and many immigrants worked in the steel, coal, oil, and lumber industries.

Unions saw an opportunity to increase membership and recruited immigrants. President Wilson and other members of Congress advanced labor reforms as part of the government effort to keep the factories producing necessary war items. However the social beliefs of nativism worked against the immigrants and after the war many wartime reforms were rescinded. Native born Americans were offered higher paying jobs, in fact any job, before it went to an immigrant. Strikes were now common.

## The Great Migration

**Push-Pull factors** greatly contributed to the Great Migration.

Quality of life issues **pushed** African American out of the South. Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans the full rights of citizenship. They could not vote, had little or no education, and were ruled by the White minority. These laws were strictly enforced and backed by physical violence. In 1919, 76 African Americans were lynched in the South. The Great Migration was a migration for freedom, a political statement, and a hope for better economic situations.

African Americans were **pulled** northward and westward because of the availability of jobs and higher wages. As World War I stopped immigration, additional workers were needed in the war factories, mostly in the industrial northern regions of the country such as New York, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Oakland. Industries sent recruiting agents to the South to recruit African American laborers. The floods and destruction of the cotton crops by the boll weevil beetle devastated Southern agriculture, which caused major job losses.

- Between 1916 and 1918, close to 500,000 African Americans moved from the South to the industrial North, Midwest, and West
- Another 700,000 left the South during the 1920's
- Between 1915 and 1970, slowed only by the Great Depression, some 6 million African Americans left the South
- In recent decades, there has been a growing trend of African Americans returning to the South

Despite having a higher standard of living than if in the South, African Americans still earned less than white workers and experienced a high rate of unemployment. The migration greatly changed the demography of American cities. Many African Americans were concentrated in **city ghettos**, faced with higher prices for rent, food, and other basics. They were not permitted to join labor unions. Competition for jobs, housing, and political offices increased urban racial tensions, many times ending in acts of violence and riots.

Organizations such as the **NAACP** and **Urban League** now spread into the African American communities in the cities. The best-known African American cultural movement during this time was the **Harlem Renaissance**.



Typical inner-city ghetto in Chicago

## American Patriotism and Propaganda during World War I

President Woodrow Wilson believed that World War I was to be the war to end all wars. The United States Committee on Public Information was created to spread propaganda and encourage patriotism during the war. Songs, posters, and pamphlets praised America, attacked Germany, urged the purchase of Liberty Bonds, and encouraged people to preserve resources needed for the war. American planes even dropped propaganda leaflets over Germany and Austria.



American patriotism showed itself in an outbreak of anti-German nativism and xenophobia that extended to other immigrant groups. **Nativists** praised American superiority over other countries and demanded an end to immigration. People now had a fear of foreigners and other strangers. Ironically, Germans were one of the first groups of American immigrants. They arrived in Pennsylvania before the Revolutionary War and then in then another wave in the 1850's settling in various regions in the country. However, during World War I, almost 9 million German immigrants and those of German ancestry were seen as possible spies and traitors. The **Committee on Public Information** campaigned against Germany, German literature and music, German language being taught in schools, and demanded the closure of German language newspapers.

In addition to German Americans, anyone who was considered a socialist, anarchist, pacifist, or anyone who even questioned the war, was seen as a possible traitor. Actions were taken by the government that restricted people's civil rights, often in the name of national security.

The **1917 Immigration Act**, passed before the war, despite Woodrow Wilson's veto, extended racial bias against the Chinese and Japanese. The Act created an **Asiatic Barred Zone in East Asia** prohibiting immigrants from this region. The law also required a **literacy test**, an attempt to **restrict immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe**. However it turned out most of the people from these regions could read and write, if only in their native language. Of the 800,000 who took the test between 1920 and 1921, only 1,450 were denied entry on the basis of literacy.

The **Espionage Act of 1917** made it a crime to interfere or undermine the war effort. Inciting insubordination, disloyalty, or mutiny in the military was against the law. Aiding enemies of the United States during wartime was prohibited. It even allowed the postmaster general to prohibit "treasonous" materials from being sent by mail.

The **Sedition Act of 1917** amended the Espionage Act to make it a crime *"when the United States is at war to willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag of the United States or the uniform of the Army or Navy of the United States."*

Under these two acts the government prosecuted more than 2,100 people, 1,500 of them being sent to jail. A special target was the **IWW – Industrial Workers of the World**, an industrial union in the West. Its leaders were arrested, its strikes broken up, and many members jailed.

In 1919, the Supreme Court Case of ***Schenck v. United States*** ruled that free speech could be restricted during wartime. Charles Schenck, the general secretary of the Socialist Party of America, opposed the war. He sent out 15,000 flyers to possible soldiers urging them to resist the draft. Schenck was prosecuted for violating the Espionage Act. Schenck’s argument was that the new law violated his First Amendment Rights.

In a unanimous decision, **Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.**, wrote:

***“Free speech would not protect a man falsely shouting ‘fire’ in a movie theater and causing a panic.”***

He added that during wartime the government has more authority when balanced with constitutional rights. Congress has the right to prevent words that would cause **“a clear and present danger.”**

Holmes acknowledged that cases such as *Schenck* should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

In 1920 Congress repealed the Sedition Act. With amendments, the **Espionage Act of 1917 still remains law**. **Eugene V. Debs** as well as **Ethel and Julius Rosenberg** were convicted under the Espionage Act. **Daniel Ellsberg** was charged under it but the charges were dismissed. **Edward Snowden** faces charges under the Act. Within months of the *Schenck* decision, Justice Holmes dissented in a 7-2 decision in *Abrams v. United States*, that under the Sedition Act, distributing two leaflets did not constitute a “clear and present danger.” Justice Holmes was known as a justice who was a defender of the First Amendment right of freedom of speech.

## **The Red Scare**

This took place in the 1920’s due to political unrest in Russia combined with social and economic events in the United States.

In November 1917, the **Bolshevik Revolution**, a second revolution, this time lead by **Vladimir Lenin** and his communist party, disrupted the world and threatened the Allied cause in World War I. The communist system was openly hostile towards American beliefs and values. In American, communists were less than 1% of the population but by 1918, an intense fear of communism spreading into America swept the nation. In addition, others were viewed as un-American, such as socialists, anarchists, labor leaders, and foreigners.



The **Red Scare** was a crusade led by **Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer**. It lasted from late 1918 to 1921. The underlying reasons for the Red Scare were

- The super patriotic sentiment during World War I
- Existing feelings of nativism and xenophobia
- Tensions between Americans
- Fear of radicals in general
- Hysteria over the Bolshevik Revolution and the trouble it was causing in Europe
- Turmoil caused by job losses, strikes, race riots, and unrest at the end of the war
- Concerns due to a postwar recession lasting from 1918 until 1919
- Vows to avoid future wars as Americans confronted the war deaths and casualties

Race riots had broken out in more than 25 cities. Even the Boston Police went on strike. Across America 365,000 steel workers, mostly immigrants, went on strike to try and keep the rights they had during the war. Anti-Immigrants campaigns grew in number, using the slogan **“Americanism versus Alienism.”** Several unexplained bombings, probably by anarchists, added to the hysteria. Many believed that all of this was a **communist conspiracy**.

The **Palmer Raids** took place in late 1919. In 33 cities, police without warrants raided the headquarters of communists and other organizations. Over 4,000 people were arrested, held without being charged or given legal counsel. Some 560 aliens were deported. Palmer’s actions and statements soon turned the public against him. The Red Scare had lingering effects as many Americans were still afraid to speak freely in public.



The case of **Sacco and Vanzetti** was closely linked to the Red Scare. Two Italian immigrants, **Nicola Sacco** and **Bartolomeo Vanzetti**, admitted anarchists, were convicted of murder related to a Massachusetts robbery in 1921. Many people questioned the evidence against them, concluding that they were convicted for their beliefs rather than the crime. In spite of appeals and mass demonstrations, they were executed in 1927. The governor of Massachusetts eventually cleared the men of their crime in 1977.