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## INTRODUCTION

### APPROACH AND RATIONALE

*The Constitution in Crisis: The Red Scare of 1919–1920* is one of nearly seventy teaching units published by the National Center for History in the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific issues and dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers, magazines, literature, contemporary photographs, paintings, and other art from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of 'being there,' a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation, and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

### CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teacher Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, and Introduction to *The Constitution in Crisis: The Red Scare of 1919–1920*; A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with primary and secondary source documents. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 9–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your

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own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

## TEACHER BACKGROUND

### I. Unit Overview

The anticommunist hysteria of 1919–1920 capped a decade during which the American people had experienced the most unsettling changes since the 1860s. Recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had filled to overflowing ethnic neighborhoods in American cities. At the same time, millions of rural whites and African Americans migrated from the Jim Crow South to northern cities. Through out the country, reform politics from Progressivism to Socialism became highly organized, and political views were more forcefully debated than usual. World War I brought these trends together. During and after the war, the federal government and other agencies attacked supposed American enemies of the nation and many native-born citizens led local witch-hunts against any one not, in their opinion, “100 percent American.”

This unit is designed to instill in the student the recognition that the guarantees of the Bill of Rights are fragile and must be secured by a commitment to principles. When exaggerated fears of political, racial, or ethnic groups are encouraged, the basic freedoms of Americans can be lost.

### II. Unit Context

The lesson may be introduced as either an immediate follow-up to the study of World War I or as a culminating study of the radical labor movement of the early twentieth century. It offers a good prelude to the study of restrictive immigration laws of the post-war period. The lessons focus on the fragile nature of the Bill of Rights and the dangers that result from unreasoned response to real or imagined threats to national interests. The lesson could be tied to an earlier study of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and as a bridge to later readings on the McCarthy era in the 1950s.

### III. Correlation to National History Standards

*The Constitution in Crisis: The Red Scare of 1910–1920* provides teaching materials to support the *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Lessons within this unit address **Standards 2C and 3A of Era 7, *The Emergence of Modern American (1890–1930)***. Lessons have students analyze the impact of government policies on civil liberties and assess state and federal government reactions to the growth of radical movements during and immediately after World War I.

This unit like wise integrates a number of specific Historical Thinking Standards including: analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, consider multiple perspectives (**Standard 3, Historical Analysis and Interpretations**); formulate historical questions, obtain historical data from a variety of sources (**Standard 4, Historical Research**); and, evaluate the implementation of a decision: (**Standard 5, Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision Making**).

#### IV. Unit Objectives

- ◆ To understand the historical context in which the Red Scare occurred.
- ◆ To evaluate the impact of the wartime Espionage and Sedition acts on free speech guarantees of the First Amendment.
- ◆ To explain the Supreme Court's decisions in the Schenck, Abrams, and Gitlow cases.
- ◆ To recognize the importance of dissent in a free society.
- ◆ To analyze the impact of fear on society.
- ◆ To recognize the long-range impact of policy decisions on internal affairs.

#### V. Introduction to *The Constitution in Crisis: The Red Scare of 1919-1920*

Prior to United States' entry into World War I, a passionate debate raged over American national policy toward war-torn Europe. This was partly because the nation had never taken part in a European war and the majority of voters did not wish to become involved. Another source of passion was the fact that many ethnic and political groups advocated, for their own specific reasons, policies favorable to one European coalition or the other, and were opposed to President Wilson's official and traditional policy of neutrality. In the national election of 1916, both major parties tried to convince voters that they would keep the country out of war and to intimidate those who were not 100 percent American.

When President Wilson led the country into war in 1917, he inspired Americans with his cause to establish democracy and national self-determination throughout the world, but the underside of this quest was a campaign against dissidents who took issue with the government's policies. The administration especially exerted pressure on American socialists after the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian Revolution at the end of 1917. The Bolsheviks consolidated their power by signing a separate peace treaty with the Germans. American leaders regarded this move by their former ally as a betrayal and hence looked upon all American socialists with greater suspicion than ever.

Wartime mobilization had provided an escape for thousands of African American workers wishing to leave the segregated South. Southern blacks undertook a great migration to northern industrial cities to work in railroad yards, shipyards, packing houses, steel mills and coal mines. Conditions worsened when American soldiers returned home after the war to find that no provisions existed for reintegrating them into the workforce. At the same time, unions raised demands to secure better conditions for workers including an eight-hour workday, and

struck when opposed by employers. Unemployment and inflation also contributed to riots staged by white working men against blacks in numerous cities. By the beginning of 1919, moreover, the country began to be alarmed by a number of mysterious bombings, most of which were never tied to any specific culprits.

During 1919 over four million workers took part in 4,000 strikes. Dramatic events followed closely upon one another. In reaction to news that police had discovered a number of mail bombs, police and others in many towns mobbed socialists' May Day parades. In July, the worst race riot of the year broke out in Chicago, after a black youth swimming at a segregated white beach was hit by a rock and drowned. In the days that followed, thirty-eight people died; fifteen whites and twenty-three blacks. Over five hundred others were injured. In September, it was Boston's turn to experience chaos when the unionized police struck: an army of National Guardsmen and citizens seized control, denounced the union as communist, and hired a non-union police force. On September 22, hundreds of thousands of steel workers went on strike, and the U. S. Army besieged Gary, Indiana. On November 1, 400,000 coal miners began a long strike.

Throughout the rising crisis, President Wilson devoted himself to foreign affairs and gave broad authority to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer to silence political dissidents. The President was laid low by cerebral thrombosis on October 2. Palmer hoped to be the Democratic party's nominee for the presidency in 1920. Thus, throughout much of 1919 he resisted political pressure to take extreme measures against dissidents that might cost him votes. He organized the General Intelligence Division (GDI), later the FBI, a special antiradical division within the Justice Department, and put a young man named J. Edgar Hoover in charge. Only when he was sure that he had a mandate from the president and many interest groups did he conduct an all-out attack on various radical organizations. Between November 1919, and March 1920, the police arrested thousands of people around the country and the government deported over 800 dissidents to Russia. Concurrently, local civic organizations purged governments, schools, and church organizations of all those who were, in their opinion, too radical. The Palmer raids constituted the most massive assault on civil liberties in twentieth-century American history.

Palmer's Justice Department tried to continue the witch-hunt, but the public became skeptical and Palmer earned little credit by his raids. When a huge bomb exploded in Wall Street on September 20, 1919, the public was not aroused by the claims of the Justice Department that it was the work of a nationwide plot by radicals. The residual hysteria of some people persisted in the nativist, anti-Catholic, and anti-black movements in the 1920s.

## **V. Lesson Plans**

1. The Law
2. The Case Against the Reds
3. The Courage of Their Convictions
4. Role Playing: A Meeting of the Minds