

Nativism & Immigration Restrictions

A. Mitchell Palmer, The Case Against the Reds (1920)



In this brief review of the work which the Department of Justice has undertaken to tear out the radical seeds that have entangled American ideas in their poisonous theories, I desire not merely to explain what the real menace of communism is, but also to tell how we have been compelled to clean up the country almost unaided by any virile legislation. Though I have not been embarrassed by political opposition, I have been materially delayed because the present sweeping processes of arrests and deportation of seditious aliens should have been vigorously pushed by Congress last spring. The failure of this is a matter of record in the Congressional files.

The anxiety of that period in our responsibility, when Congress, ignoring the seriousness of these vast organizations that were plotting to overthrow the Government, failed to act, has passed. The time came when it was obviously hopeless to expect the hearty cooperation of Congress...to stamp out these seditious societies in their open defiance of law by various forms of propaganda.

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workman, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws, burning up the foundations of society...

...Crime is the degenerate factor in society. Upon these two basic certainties, first that the "Reds" were criminal aliens, and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime, it was decided that there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws. An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish, nor will he do so, so long as the rights of common citizenship can be exerted to prevent him.

It has always been plain to me that when American citizens unite upon any national issue, they are generally right, but it is sometimes difficult to make the issue clear to them. If the Department of Justice could succeed in attracting the attention of our optimistic citizens to the issue of internal revolution in this country, we felt sure there would be no revolution...

...One of the chief incentives for the present activity of the Department of Justice against the "Reds" has been the hope that American citizens will themselves become voluntary agents for us, in a vast organization for mutual defense against the sinister agitation of men and women aliens, who appear to be either in the pay or under the criminal spell of Trotsky and Lenin.

Behind, and underneath, my own determination to drive from our midst the agents of Bolshevism with increasing vigor and with greater speed, until there are no more of them left among us, so long as I have the responsible duty of the task, I have discovered the hysterical methods of these revolutionary humans with increasing amazement and suspicion. In the confused information that sometimes reaches the people, they are compelled to ask questions which involve the reasons for my acts against the "Reds." I have been asked, for instance, to what extent deportation will check radicalism in this country. Why not ask what will become of the United States Government if these alien radicals are permitted to carry out the principles of the Communist Party as embodied in its so-called laws, aims, and regulations?

There wouldn't be any such thing left. In place of the United States Government we should have the horror and terrorism of Bolshevik tyranny such as is destroying Russia now. Every scrap of radical literature demands the overthrow of our existing government. All of it demands obedience to the instincts of criminal minds, that is, to the lower appetites, material and moral. The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation 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 regardless of health, sex, or religious rights. By a literature that promises the wildest dreams of such low aspirations, that can occur to only the criminal minds, communism distorts our social law...

...It has been inferred by the "Reds" that the United States Government, by arresting and deporting them, is returning to the autocracy of Tsardom, adopting the system that created the severity of Siberian banishment. My reply to such charges is that in our determination to maintain our government we are treating our alien enemies with extreme consideration. To deny them the privilege of remaining in a country which they have openly deplored as an unenlightened community, unfit for those who prefer the privileges of Bolshevism, should be no hardship. It strikes me as an odd form of reasoning that these Russian Bolsheviks who extol the Bolshevik rule should be so unwilling to return to Russia...

It is my belief that while they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and unclean morals, we can get rid of them! And not until we have done so shall we have removed the menace of Bolshevism for good.

Calvin Coolidge, "Whose Country is This?" *Good Housekeeping*, volume 72 number 2, February 1921¹, pages 13-14, 109



We want no such additions to our population as those who prey upon our institutions or our property. America has, in popular mind, been an asylum for those who have been driven from their homes in foreign countries because of various forms of political and religious oppression. But America cannot afford to remain an asylum after such people have passed the portals and begun to share the privileges of our institutions...

...All native-born Americans, directly or indirectly, have the advantage of our schools, our colleges, and our religious bodies. It is our belief that America could not otherwise exist. Faith in mankind is in no way inconsistent with a requirement for trained citizenship, both for men and women. No civilization can exist without a background—an active community of interest, a common aspiration—spiritual, social, and economic. It is a duty our country owes itself to require of all those aliens who come here that they have a background not inconsistent with American institutions...

...Any such restriction, except as a necessary and momentary expediency, would assuredly paralyze our national vitality. But measured practically, it would be suicidal for us to let down the bars for the inflowing of cheap manhood, just as, commercially, it would be unsound for this country to allow her markets to be over flooded with cheap goods, the produce of cheap labor. There is no room for either the cheap man or the cheap goods.

I do not fear the arrival of as many immigrants a year as shipping conditions or passport requirements can handle, provided they are of good character. But there is no room for the alien who turns toward America with the avowed intention of opposing government, with a set desire to teach destruction of government—which means not only enmity toward organized society, but toward every form of religion and so basic an institution as the home.

If we believe, as we do, in our political theory that the people are the guardians of government, we should not subject our government to the bitterness and hatred of those who have not been born in our tradition and are willing to yield an increase to the strength inherent in our institutions. American liberty is dependent on quality in citizenship. Our obligation is to maintain that citizenship at its best. We must have nothing to do with those who undermine it. The retroactive immigrant is a danger in our midst. His purpose is to tear down. There is no room for him here. He needs to be deported, not as a substitute for, but as a part of his punishment.

We might avoid this danger were we insistent that the immigrant, before he leaves foreign soil, is temperamentally keyed for our national background. There are racial considerations too grave to be brushed aside for any sentimental reasons. Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not

¹ Coolidge served as the 30th president of the United States from 1923 to 1929. His response to the Boston Police Strike of 1919 thrust him into the national spotlight and gave him a reputation as a man of decisive action. The next year, he was elected vice president of the United States, and he succeeded to the presidency upon the sudden death of Warren G. Harding in 1923. (Source: Wikipedia)

mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With our races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides. Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigration law.

We must remember that we have not only the present but the future to safeguard; our obligations extend even to generations yet unborn. The unassimilated alien child menaces our children, as the alien industrial worker, who has destruction rather than production in mind, menaces our industry. It is only when the alien adds vigor to our stock that he is wanted...The only acceptable immigrant is the one who can justify our faith in man by a constant revelation of the divine purpose of the Creator.

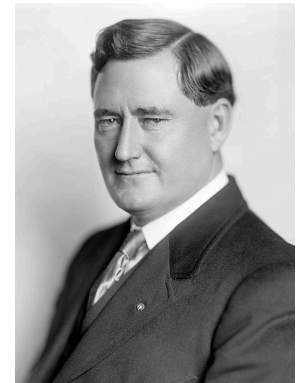
Lucian W. Parrish (TX), A Congressman Calls for Restriction, (1921)

We should stop immigration entirely until such a time as we can amend our immigration laws and so write them that hereafter no one shall be admitted except he be in full sympathy with our Constitution and laws, willing to declare himself obedient to our flag, and willing to release himself from any obligations he may owe to the flag of the country from which he came.

It is time that we act now, because within a few short years the damage will have been done. The endless tide of immigration will have filled our country with a foreign and unsympathetic element. Those who are of sympathy with our Constitution and the spirit of our Government will be here in large numbers, and the true spirit of Americanism left us by our fathers will gradually become poisoned by this uncertain element...

...Our country is a self-sustaining country. It has taught the principles of real democracy to all nations of the earth; its flag has been the synonym of progress, prosperity, and the preservation of the rights of the individual, and there can be nothing so dangerous as for us to allow the undesirable foreign element to poison our civilization and thereby threaten the safety of the institutions that our forefathers have established for us.

Now is the time to throw about this country the most stringent immigration laws and keep from our shores forever those who are not in sympathy with the American ideas. It is the time now for us to act and act quickly, because every month's delay increases the difficulty in which we find ourselves and renders the problems of government more difficult of solution. We must protect ourselves from the poisonous influences that are threatening the very foundation of the Governments of Europe; we must see to it that those who come here are loyal and true to our Nation and impress upon them that it means something to have the privileges of American citizenship. We must hold this country true to the American thought and the American ideals. . . .



Small Group Seminar

As part of your homework, please read _____ and complete the following (**this part IS due for a grade, & these last 2 pages WILL be turned in**):

Name:	Block:
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Name three connections to the textbook (6 points)

1.
2.
3.

Summary of the article(s) (15 points)

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(not done yet, turn over to complete)

Two things you learned from the article(s) (5 points)

1.
2.

Three Questions you have from the article(s) (9 points)

1.
2.
3.

Please remember that your entries should show evidence of thoughtful and reflective work and are primarily meant to help you generate discussion points for your group. Flippant answers and closed-ended responses won't really add to the discussion or help you discover anything useful that you may have otherwise missed on your own.