Civil Liberties during the two Great Wars

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION:** To what extent does government have the right to cut back on civil liberties during times of war?

**General Background**

- What are **civil liberties**? (KT #1)
  - Rights and freedoms guaranteed to an individual
- Our scope: America during the 2 world wars
  - WWI (1917–1918)
  - WW2 (1941–45)
WWI – Background

• U.S. finally enters in April 1917
• President = Woodrow Wilson: 1912-20 (KT #2)
  – Slogan in 1916: “He Kept Us Out of War” (?!)
• BTW, Wilson was a **big** hypocrite & racist
  – Wants to keep the world “safe for democracy”… except for non-white people!
  – Particularly anti-immigrant & anti-black

Woodrow Wilson
The Creel Committee (1)

- In America, opinion over WWI is divided
- Wilson creates a new gov’t body: the Committee on Public Information (CPI)
- Headed by journalist George Creel, so often called the Creel Committee (KT #3)
The Creel Committee (2)

• Oversaw distribution of over 75 million pieces of printed material
• Controlled virtually all published material
• Hired thousands of politicians, artists, singers, etc. to “sell” WWI to the public
• Churned out countless propaganda posters

Uncle Sam Propaganda (1917)
Anti-German Propaganda

Creel Committee (3)

• Creel urges Americans to “report to the authorities any evidence among their neighbors of disloyalty, pessimism, or yearning for peace.” (Brinkley 614)

• Congress passes acts saying it’s illegal to:
  – Publicly oppose the war
  – Criticize the president

• Um...what about the Constitution?!?
Targeting Anti-Capitalists

• Russia just turned communist in 1917 ➔ fear it will spread to U.S.
• Wilson & Creel target anti-capitalist groups
  – esp. Socialist Party, Industrial Workers of the World
  – **1st Red Scare**: 1919-20 (KT #4)
• In 1918 alone, 11,500 people arrested

Targeting German-Americans

• Campaign to purge America of all things German
  – Music, books, food... *(liberty cabbage?!)*
  – Many Germans fired from their jobs
• “Neither before nor since these campaigns has the United States come closer to becoming a police state.” (Loewen, 1995, p. 30)
Onto WW2!  Let’s meet President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

WW2 – Background

• President = Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) (KT #5)
  – Serves unprecedented FOUR terms (1932–45)
  – Did you know: FDR was crippled from 1921 on?
• Just like WWI, America remains isolationist for 2+ years
  – FDR tries like CRAZY to get Congress, public to join
  – Pearl Harbor obviously changes things…
One of only **TWO** known images of FDR in a wheelchair

Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941)
FDR’s Dark Side...

• Though FDR helped America overcome 2 of its greatest challenges ever, he wasn’t perfect

• 3 black marks on his presidency
  – 1) 1939: refuses to accept *St. Louis*, a ship of 900 Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler
  – 2) September 1941: FDR lies to the public about the so-called “Greer Incident”
  – 3) 1942–45: Japanese Internment...

Anti-Japanese Sentiment (c. 1920)
Origins of Japanese Internment

- Unlike WWI, German-Americans treated fairly well during WW2 – not so for the Japanese...
- In 1941, approx. 127,000 Japanese-Americans
  - About 1/3 ➔ unnaturalized and *Issei* (1st gen.)
  - About 2/3 ➔ naturalized and *Nisei* (2nd gen.)
- In general, JA’s are culturally isolated in U.S.
  - Many Americans assume they’re all spies
  - Basically ZERO evidence that any of them were

Anti-Japanese Propaganda (1)
Anti-Japanese Propaganda (2)

JA’s try to Prove their Patriotism
Executive Order #9066

- California already quite racist against JA’s – after Pearl Harbor, intensifies further
- **February 1942**: FDR issues Executive Order #9066 (KT #6)
  - Authorizes army to “intern” all JA’s
  - Affects 110,000 of 127,000 JA’s (Issei and Nisei)
  - They’re given mere days to pack up, abandon ALL property and belongs & enter camps

Life in the Camps

- Internment camps are basically prisons in western desert and mountains
  - JA’s not allowed to work at all
  - Pitiful food, shelter, medical care, education
- Camps continue through end of war – some imprisoned for 3 years
  - When finally released in 1945, all their belongings have been seized & no restitution
Where were the camps?

Japanese American Imprisonment during World War II

A picture of Manzanar
Korematsu v. U.S. (1944)

- Fred Korematsu (age 25) is sent to a camp → decides to fight back
- First, he flees, becomes a fugitive
- Then, challenges Executive Order #9066 to S.C. in Korematsu v. United States (1944) (KT #7)
  - Supreme Court says FDR acted legally (6–3)

The Legacy of Internment

- 1988: Congress passes and President Reagan signs the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (KT #8)
  - Issues a formal apology for Japanese Internment
  - Cites it a result of “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.”
- Additionally, pays out $1.6 billion to survivors and their heirs
  - $20,000 payments to over 82,000 people
Wrapping up – Your 2 final tasks...

• 1) Return to the essential question – write a full paragraph response that references specifics from this powerpoint. You don’t need to type or cite, but it must be **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**. Come to class ready to discuss.

• 2) This presentation focuses on two of the most negative examples in U.S. History of the gov’t cutting back on people’s civil rights. Brainstorm at least **two** scenarios (real or fictional) when you believe that doing this during wartime **IS** justified.