

◀◀ KAPITAL: Back Story ▶▶

*In many ways, the pivotal events and clashes of ideology in the early 20th Century came to shape the very character of the United States of today — a capital-centered nation where “go for the gold” individualism often transcends the ideals of equality. **KAPITAL** strives to capture many of the elements that shaped that time and our own:*

CAPITAL VS. KAPITAL

The industrialism of the era transformed the nation with electric lights and telephones, Model Ts and electric toasters. But progress extracted a price — maimed bodies, child labor, overcrowded cities, and an underclass forever caught in an undertow. For many, capital was a beneficent king. For others, Marxist ideology offered a better alternative. The ensuing (and sometimes bloody) battle between the two beliefs left an indelible mark upon the nation.

REFORM OR REVOLUTION

For more than 100 years, the limited role of the federal government had been to defend its borders, maintain financial stability, and prevent rebellion. When the excesses of the era’s elites were provoking Wobblies and others to “rock the boat” by spreading radical ideas among the masses, the political leaders of the time did what all their predecessors had always done: They reformed the political and economic systems *just enough* to keep the ship of state on course. Thus was the “Progressive Era” — with its unprecedented regulations — born.

ANARCHY (TERRORISM)

The threat of anarchy (real and imagined) and its alleged ties to foreign-grown socialism (coupled with the super patriotism and jingoism of the era) was used to silence, intimidate, persecute, and prosecute the voices of dissent. It proved to be a very effective tactic.

CHALLENGING SOCIETAL NORMS

Wobblies, anarchists, and socialists weren’t the only ones seeking to radically alter society. Crusades for universal suffrage, temperance, and black emancipation shook societal norms. Birth control and a thing called jazz also threatened to subvert a Puritan nation.

MUCKRAKING AND THE POWER OF THE PRESS

The era’s muckraking journalists exposed the cruelty and corruption of robber barons, labor czars, and political bosses. The press was competitive, partisan, and hungry for sensation. At the same time, newspapers (virtually the *only* source of “news”) were being concentrated into expanding corporate chains. Uniformity and “objectivity” began to replace partisanship. A smorgasbord of ideas was increasingly replaced by the common gruel of corporate media.

CONSUMERISM, ADVERTISING, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The rapid introduction of consumer goods created a crowded marketplace. The promotion of products soon became as important as making them. Professionally crafted advertising began to saturate society. Soon, this advertising acumen, coupled with the “mass psychology” theories of the day, and the growing concentration of the media combined to make the manufacture of propaganda an acceptable, lucrative, and *powerful* enterprise.

