



**THE BOMBING OF
WALL STREET**

1 x 52 HD



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On September 16, 1920, as hundreds of Wall Street workers headed out for lunch, a horse-drawn cart packed with dynamite exploded in front of Morgan Bank—the world’s most powerful banking institution. The brutal Wall Street attack struck at a moment in history when millions of people around the globe were challenging capitalism as an economic system. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia spurred similar workers movements around the globe, including in the U.S. While the so-called Gilded Age had produced great wealth, it had also created great poverty, fracturing the U.S. into the haves and the have-nots. World War I, which had just concluded a year earlier, had been enormously profitable for capitalists, but had created economic and political divisions that would prove fertile ground for revolt.

The bombing came on the heels of a series of violent labor battles from Seattle, Washington to Boston, Massachusetts. In April and May of 1919, 30 bombs targeting bankers and government officials were mailed to arrive on May Day. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, an ambitious man with his eye on the White House, ordered the United States Justice Department’s Bureau of Investigation to draw up a list of possible suspects.

Palmer created “The Radical Division” at the Bureau and appointed an ambitious 24-year-old, J. Edgar Hoover, to run it. In its first year of operation, the unit amassed more than 200,000 files on radical activities but, to Palmer’s critics, it was not enough. He silenced them on November 7, 1919, the second anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, with a massive raid that resulted in the deportation of 249 Russian immigrants, including the anarchist Emma Goldman.

The blast turned the nation’s financial center into a bloody war zone and left 38 dead and hundreds more seriously injured. As financial institutions around the country went on high alert, many wondered if this was the strike against American capitalism that radical agitators had threatened for so long. A mostly-forgotten act of terror that remains unsolved today, the bombing helped launch the career of a young J. Edgar Hoover and sparked a bitter national debate about how far the government should go to protect the nation from acts of political violence. Based in part on Beverly Gage’s *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror*.

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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CREDITS

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