

Alexander Mitchell Palmer Biography

Alexander Mitchell Palmer

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Alexander Mitchell Palmer Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

As U.S. attorney general, Alexander Mitchell Palmer (1872-1936) was instrumental in creating the "red scare" of internal Communist subversion after World War I and was responsible for the illegal arrest of thousands of aliens.

Born in Moosehead, Pa., on May 4, 1872, A. Mitchell Palmer graduated *summa cum laude* in 1891 from Swarthmore College. He then read law for 2 years and became a prominent attorney in Pennsylvania. A moralist and moderate reformer, he was elected to the U.S. Congress as a Democrat in 1908 and again in 1910 and 1912. His personal charm and debating skill, together with his championship of tariff reform, woman's suffrage, and abolition of child labor gave him a considerable reputation. Yet the partisan, dogmatic, and combative qualities which ultimately compromised his career were already evident.

After declining appointment as secretary of war because of his Quaker beliefs, Palmer ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1914. President Woodrow Wilson then named him to a judgeship on the U.S. Court of Claims, but he rejected the appointment because of his unwillingness to abandon active politics. In 1917 Palmer returned to government service as alien property custodian and was soon enveloped in controversy over his partisan appointments and loose construction of the law.

Appointed attorney general in March 1919, Palmer used the office to further his presidential aspirations. He perceived, among other things, that public sentiment was turning against labor, a group he had supported generously in the past. Prompted partly by J. Edgar Hoover, then a division chief in the Department of Justice, Palmer freely issued injunctions against strikers and soon charged striking miners, steelworkers, and railroad workers with promoting economic and social revolution. Meanwhile, influenced partly by the bombing of his own home, and again encouraged by Hoover, he authorized the unconstitutional dragnet arrest of thousands of suspected alien radicals. The action is generally regarded as the most flagrant violation of civil liberties up to that time. By most estimates, the bitter reaction of liberals and organized labor cost him the presidential nomination in 1920.

Palmer stayed on in Washington and practiced law. He maintained a peripheral interest in politics through the 1920s, and in 1932 he composed the more conservative sections of the Democratic platform. He died in Washington on May 11, 1936.