

## American Society in the 1920s

Introduction: political philosophies

- A. **Radical** (socialist, communist or anarchist in this era) -- refers to advocating drastic revolutionary changes in society and in the gov't
- **Anarchists** were the most radical and resorted to political assassinations, bombings, and other radical activities in Europe and the U.S.; they sought absolute direct democracy and local control—some saw them as the most extreme form of communism
  - **Socialists** sought a government sympathetic to workers and government ownership of basic industries (such as railroads, telephone, and steel)
  - **Communists** were often inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and believed that the government should control all means of production and redistribute wealth evenly among the people.
- B. **Conservative** -- refers to preserving the existing order, rather than changing (often means pro-business in this era)
- C. **Reactionary** -- desire to move society back into a past society, usually idealized.
- Included Mugwumps and some Progressives who wanted to impose traditional WASP ideals on a changing society; KKK was the most reactionary in these groups.
- D. **Liberal (Progressive)** -- advocating changes in society's institutions to reflect changing conditions (e.g. Robert LaFollette, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson)
- The progressive movement embodied liberalism
- E. These terms refer to means as well as ends; one can pursue radical goals by conservative means, e.g., socialists running for political office in a democratic political system (e.g. Eugene Debs)

I. "Americanism" in the 1920s

- A. "**Red Scare**" and the "Great Unrest"
1. U.S. fears of radicalism (e.g. Bolshevism), large numbers of strikes, and bombings resulted in street violence and government crack-downs on suspected radicals.
  2. October 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia sparked paranoia that communism would spread to the U.S.
    - a. Two small communist parties formed in the U.S. (70,000 members total)
    - b. WWI anti-German hatred was now transferred to the continued "new immigrants" from eastern and southern Europe who might

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have communist sympathies.

3. Large numbers of strikes occurred after World War I (the U.S. economy was not yet ready for returning soldiers from Europe)

a. Largely the result of inflation during the war and failed union-organizing drives.

- More strikes occurred in 1917 but the number of strikers grew by 1919 (4 million workers)
  - This represented 20% of all workers; the largest proportion in U.S. history.
- President Wilson lifted war-time price controls but did not suspend anti-strike regulations.
- Business leaders withdrew war-time concessions they had made to labor.
- Millions of returning veterans were furious at the economic situation back home.
  - The price of food doubled; the cost of clothing nearly tripled
- Labor had sacrificed during the war and would now expect payback.

b. Many Americans believed that U.S. labor troubles were the result of the spread of Bolshevism.

- The evangelist **Billy Sunday** was among the most famous anti-Bolshevik personalities.
- President Wilson's 6-month absence from the U.S. to negotiate the Versailles Treaty reduced the federal government's responsiveness to the Red Scare and racial violence ("Red Summer") in 1919.

c. Seattle General Strike (Jan 1919): most famous general strike in U.S. history

- 35,000 shipyard workers went on strike after they failed to get wage increases to compensate for inflation during the war.
- All unions in Seattle, and 65,000 additional workers, including the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) 65,000 additional workers, demanded higher pay for shipyard workers.
- Although the strike was peaceful and orderly, conservatives feared a European-style labor takeover.
- Seattle Mayor Ole Hanson called for federal troops charging falsely that the strike was a Bolshevik uprising.
  - Many saw Hanson as a hero for snuffing out the "anarchy of Russia"

d. Labor unions sought industrial democracy, especially the AFL, liberals and Socialists.

- Called for permanent federal ownership of railroads (like all

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- other industrialized nations)
  - Wanted a board of directors to represent, consumers and labor
  - The gov't would set policy but workers would manage the railroads.
  - The public and railroad workers would divide all profits.
- Conservatives viewed this as socialist attack on capitalism and representative gov't.
  - The idea for government ownership of railroads was voted down by Congress in August 1919.
- e. **Boston Police strike** (Sept. 1919)
  - Over 70% of Boston's 1,500 policemen went on strike seeking wage increases and the right to unionize.
    - Some worked 73 to 98 hrs per week with no pay for parade duty.
    - Conservatives characterized the strike as another victory for the Bolsheviks.
  - The police strike was one of the most frightening strikes in the minds of many Americans.
    - If law enforcement went on strike, anarchy might result
    - Policemen went on strike in 37 other cities.
  - Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge called out the National Guard stating there was "no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime."
    - He refused AFL leader Samuel Gompers' offer to settle strike, believing that police had no right to form a union.
    - Coolidge became a national hero (and vice president in less than 2 years)
  - Police strikers were fired and a new force was recruited from the National Guard.
- f. **"Great Steel Strike,"** September 1919
  - The AFL attempted to organize the steel industry
    - Represented a major shift in AFL policy as it was now seeking to organize unskilled labor by industry.
    - Demanded an 8-hour day, 6-day week, an end to a 24-hour shift every two weeks, and union recognition.
  - Elbert H. Gary, head of U.S. Steel, refused to negotiate on the grounds that representatives of the AFL were not his employees.
    - Nearly half of American steel workers worked for U.S. Steel
  - The strike was portrayed effectively by U.S. Steel executives as part of an overall communist movement and public opinion eventually turned against the strikers.
    - Many of the workers were immigrants which played into nativist fears

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- After much violence and the use of federal and state troops, the strike was broken by January 1920.
- Many Americans became increasingly anti-labor.
- g. **United Mine Workers of America Strike**, Nov. 1919
  - Led by **John L. Lewis** (perhaps the most important labor leader of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with Samuel Gompers)
  - Demanded shorter hours and higher wages
  - Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer got injunctions and the union called off the strike.
    - President Wilson used WWI legislation, that had prohibited strikes in war industries, to attack the UMW
  - An arbitration board later awarded the miners a wage increase.

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#### 4. The Palmer Raids

- a. Anarchist bombings
  - In the wake of anti-war activity, increased nativism, and major labor strikes, a wave of bombings made the threat of radicals in the U.S. appear real
  - In late April, 1919, nearly 30 mail bombs were sent to prominent government officials and businessmen but few were injured and few of the bombs reached their intended targets.
  - In June, bombs in 8 cities exploded, including one that damaged the home of **Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer**.
- b. After the bomb scares, Palmer acquired \$500,000 from Congress to "tear out the radical seeds" of anarchy.
  - Palmer had presidential aspirations in 1920 and used the issue to harvest public opinion.
  - The identities of persons who sent the bombs were never identified but anarchists, Bolsheviks and IWW "Wobblies" were blamed.
  - May Day violence occurred against Socialists by U.S. servicemen in Cleveland, Boston and New York (although servicemen in Europe were even more violent towards radicals)
  - Several cities made teachers sign loyalty oaths; emphasized "Americanism" (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values)
- c. November 1919, 249 "radicals" were deported to Russia after nationwide raids; most deportees were anarchists
  - Many of the orders came from First Lady Edith Wilson and the president's secretary.
  - The American Legion took the lead in going after dangerous foreigners, a role during WWI that they had inherited from the post-Civil War GAR (Grand Army of the

- Republic)
- d. Jan. 2, 1920, 5,000 suspected communists were arrested in 33 U.S. cities
- Most suspects were seized without warrants, denied attorneys, and deprived of food, heat and other bathroom facilities.
  - 550 Russians were deported; many were U.S. citizens.
- e. Public reaction
- Most Americans condoned Palmer's actions.
  - Critics of the raids questioned the compromising of individual rights.
    - "Wobblies" and other radicals were vigorously prosecuted
    - In 1920, 5 members of the New York legislature were denied seats because they were Socialists.
- f. The "Red Scare" ended in the summer of 1920 when alleged May Day strikes did not occur; Palmer was discredited.
- g. Conservatives used the "red scare" to break the backs of new labor unions.
- Labor's call for the "closed" shop was criticized as being communist.
  - The Recession of 1921 further weakened unions
    - Prices fell faster than wages (which helped workers); by 1922 real wages were up 19% compared to 1914 which paved the way to the economic prosperity of the 1920s.
  - Employers campaigned for "open" shop—"the American plan"—that would further weaken labor unions
  - The AFL lost 25% of its members.

## B. Sacco and Vanzetti case

1. 1921, Nicolo Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists and atheists who had dodged the WWI draft, were convicted of killing two people in a robbery in Massachusetts.
2. Jury and judge appeared to have nativist prejudices against the two men.
  - a. The defendants' radicalism became an issue during the trial.
  - b. Although the evidence was not conclusive, many believed their conviction was due to prejudice.
3. Repeated motions for a new trial were denied by Judge Webster Thayer and the Massachusetts Supreme Court.
4. In 1927, Judge Thayer sentenced the men to death by electric chair.
  - a. The case attracted world attention: riots broke out in Japan, Warsaw, Paris, and Buenos Aires after the executions.
  - b. Because the powers that convicted Sacco and Vanzetti were members of the upper class, the execution seemed to be class-

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- based.
- c. Distinguished Americans such as Felix Frankfurter, Albert Einstein, and George Bernard Shaw protested; the Italian-American community was deeply affected.
5. In 1977, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis vindicated both men claiming faults existed in the case.

### C. Ku Klux Klan

1. The resurgence of the Klan began in the South but also spread heavily into the Southwest and the Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio
  - a. The Midwest accounted for 40% of the new Klan membership compared to only 6.1% in the far West
    - Total membership reached as high as 5 million by the 1920s
  - b. The Klan's resurgence was spawned by the 1915 movie *Birth of a Nation*, by D. W. Griffith.
    - First blockbuster epic in movie history (3 hours long)
    - Based on the 1905 book *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the KKK*, by Thomas Dixon
2. The KKK more resembled the nativist "Know-Nothings of the 1850s (who were anti-Irish & anti-German) and the American Protective Association of late-19th century (which was anti-Catholic and anti-Irish) than the anti-black terrorist organization of the Reconstruction era.
  - a. Opposed immigration, Catholics, Jews, communists, blacks, bootleggers, gamblers, adulterers, and public advocates of birth control
  - b. Extreme pro-WASP values (White Anglo Saxon Protestant)
  - c. Opposed to modernism in U.S. society and diversity.
  - d. In sum, the KKK was extremist, ultraconservative, and racist.
3. Demise of the KKK
  - a. 1925, David Stephenson, KKK leader in Indiana, went to jail for second degree murder of a woman he kidnapped and abused
    - At one point he claimed, "I am the law in Indiana"
    - The scandal led to a large-scale decline in the Klan's influence.
    - Stephenson provided evidence of other Klan activities by high-level officials in Indiana
  - b. Embezzlement by Klan officials led to a congressional investigation that found that the KKK's \$10 initiation fee constituted a racket.
4. Violence against blacks during "Red Summer" in the 1919 race riots were partly due to the attitudes spread by KKK.

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D. **Nativism:** Anti-Immigration Laws

1. Many in America, especially in rural areas, believed immigrants were eroding traditional American values.
2. **1921 Immigration Act:** ended open immigration with a limit and quota system.
  - a. Allowed 350,000 total per year and no more than 3% of a specific ethnic population already in U.S.; numbers were based on the 1910 census
  - b. Allowed only 158,367 from countries other than northern and western Europe
3. **1924 National Origins Act** (Immigration Act of 1924)
  - a. Reduced immigration to 152,000 total per year.
    - Congress perceived the 1921 law as too weak
  - b. Only 21,847 immigrants allowed from countries other than northern and western Europe; 3% cap was reduced to 2%
  - c. Census year to base figures was changed from 1910 to 1890.
    - Dramatically reduced the numbers from eastern and southern Europe as most had come *after* 1890.
    - Poles, Italians and Russians were seen as "less American."
  - d. Asians were banned completely
  - e. Irish and Germans not as affected (unlike in the 1850s)
  - f. Canadians and Latinos were exempt from the quota system.
    - Mexicans migrated to L.A., San Antonio, and Denver in large numbers where they held low-paying jobs and lived in poor neighborhoods - barrios.
4. The Immigration Act of 1929, using 1920 as quota base, virtually cut immigration in half.
  - a. By 1931, more foreigners left than arrived.
  - b. Congress abolished the national origins quota system in 1965.

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E. **Scopes Trial**, 1925 (Dayton, Tennessee)

1. **Fundamentalists** challenged Darwinism
  - a. They believed the teaching of evolution in public school was undermining Christianity while contributing to the moral degradation of youth during the jazz age.
  - b. Numerous attempts were made to pass laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the public schools.
    - Tennessee and two other states adopted such laws
2. High-school biology teacher John Scopes was indicted for teaching evolution.
  - a. Tennessee's Butler Law of 1924 banned any teaching of theories that contradicted Creation in the Book of Genesis.
  - b. The **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** wanted to fight the case and ran an ad in the *NY Times* asking for a teacher to volunteer to challenge the law; Scopes agreed
  - c. The case attracted an enormous public following and was

broadcast over the radio.

3. **Clarence Darrow** defended Scopes
4. **William Jennings Bryan** was the prosecutor and a Presbyterian fundamentalist
5. The view of fundamentalism itself seemed to be on trial.
  - a. Darrow put Bryan on the witness stand on the last day of the trial to defend the literal interpretation of the Bible.
  - b. Bryan was asked at length about his literal biblical beliefs: Did he think the earth was created in 6 days?
    - Bryan: "Not six days of 24 hours"
6. John Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100.
  - The Supreme Court of Tennessee, however, set aside the fine on a technicality.
7. Fundamentalism suffered a setback as well.
  - a. Bryan was aware of his contradictions and died less than a week after the trial due to a stress-caused stroke.
  - b. Yet, Fundamentalism remained vibrant especially in the Baptist church and the rapidly growing Churches of Christ.

F. **Prohibition** (one of last of the Progressive reforms)

1. **18th Amendment** was ratified by the states in 1919.
  - a. Supported heavily by churches and women.
    - Drew heavy support in the Mid-west and especially, the South.
    - Southern whites were eager to keep alcohol from blacks.
  - b. The **Volstead Act of 1919** enforced the amendment.
  - c. Prohibition was opposed in the larger eastern cities where "wet" immigrants traditionally consumed alcohol.
2. Problems with enforcement
  - a. Federal authorities had never satisfactorily enforced a law where the majority of the people -- or a strong minority -- were hostile to it.
    - Most drinkers ignored "dry" laws. (Everybody that continued to drink became a criminal for something they had done legally before.)
  - b. Lack of enforcement officials crippled prohibition
  - c. Alcohol could be sold by doctor's prescription.
  - d. Alcohol was necessary for industrial uses (poison was supposed to be added to it to prevent consumption).
  - e. Alcohol could be manufactured in small amounts almost anywhere
    - 700 million gallons of home brew were made in 1929!
3. Results of Prohibition
  - a. Rise of organized crime
    - Huge profits from "**bootlegging**" became the foundation for corruption.

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- **Al Capone** was the most powerful gangster of the 1920s from his headquarters in Chicago
    - In 1925, he began bootlegging business that lasted six years.
    - He was eventually jailed for tax evasion and served most of 11-year sentence before dying in prison
  - Increased gang violence: About 500 gangsters killed in Chicago in 1920s.
  - Many gov't officials accepted bribes and did not enforce prohibition.
  - Organized crime spread to prostitution, gambling, and narcotics.
  - Honest merchants were forced to pay "protection money" to gangsters.
  - By 1930, profits from the black market were several times the income of the federal gov't!
- b. Rise of speakeasies (secret bars operated by bootleggers)
- Became middle class havens for drinking.
  - Women could now drink in speakeasies where before they were forbidden to drink in saloons.
- c. Saloons disappeared, denying immigrants access to alcohol  
d. Many Americans became used to casually breaking the law.
4. Prohibition repealed in 1933, only 14 years after it was passed.

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### III. America's Mass-Consumption Economy in the 1920s

A. Business was glorified in the 1920s (almost like a religion)

1. ***The Man Nobody Knows*** by **Bruce Barton**: top selling book in 1925-1926.
  - a. Called Jesus the first modern businessman
    - "Picked up 12 men from the bottom of society and forged an organization that conquered the world."
    - "Every advertising man ought to study the parables of Jesus. They are marvelously condensed, as all good advertising should be."
  2. Calvin Coolidge: "The man who builds a factory builds a temple; The man who works there worships there."
  3. Businessmen were considered the people that "ruled" the nation.

B. The Booming U.S. Economy

1. U.S. came out of WWI the world's largest creditor nation.
  - a. A brief post-war recession occurred in 1920-1921 but the economy soared thereafter.
  - b. Andrew Mellon's "**trickle down**" tax policies favored the rapid expansion of capital investment.
  - c. Buying on credit became another innovative feature of the

postwar economy.

- Hordes of consumers were attracted to a “buy now; pay later” philosophy
2. Between 1922 and 1928, industrial productivity (amount of goods produced by each hour of labor) rose 70%.
  3. Wages were at an all-time high, albeit far lower for the poor
  4. Electric power increased 19-fold between 1912 and 1929.
    - a. Before WWI, 20% of homes had electricity; by 1930, 70%.
    - b. Refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and electric stoves came into vogue.
  5. New technology resulted in greater efficiency
    - a. Electric motors were more efficient than steam engines
    - b. The assembly line dramatically accelerated production
  6. New industries led to a growing economy
    - a. Light metals such as aluminum, synthetics for clothing
    - b. Movies, radio, and radio manufacturing
    - c. The auto industry became king.
      - Spurred the petroleum, steel, rubber, machine tools, and road building industries
  7. Construction industry grew significantly
    - a. Skyscrapers began to change the horizon of major cities.
    - b. Empire State Building -- tallest building in the world at 102 stories was completed in 1931
  8. Medical breakthroughs
    - a. Iron lung (respirator), cures for TB and small-pox
    - b. Life expectancy in 1910 = 49 years; 1930 = 59 years
- C. Consolidation of trusts continued at a fast pace in the 1920s
1. By 1929, 1/2 nation's wealth absorbed by top 200 corporations
  2. Chain stores became common (e.g., Woolworth, Sears and Roebuck)
  3. Corporate leadership began to be controlled by college-trained, replaceable managers rather than traditional Henry Ford-types.
- D. White Collar Workers
1. 1920-1930, white collar jobs rose 38.1%; 10.5 million to 14.5 million
    - a. 1900, 18% of workers were white collar; 44% by 1930
    - b. Manual labor jobs rose only 7.9%, 28.5 million to 30.7 million.
  2. Huge increase of consumer products created need for advertising and sales people.
    - Sales profession was attractive to men with promises of high incomes
  3. Women increasingly entered the work force.
    - a. Almost all typists were middle-class, high school-educated and female.

- Lower class men and women lacked the necessary language skills.
  - b. Women also were teachers, shop clerks, cashiers, and switchboard operators.
  - c. 57% of the female work force were African American and foreign-born women, mostly in domestic service jobs.
- E. **Advertising** emerged as a new industry.
1. Manufacturers tapped mass markets for their goods through advertising
    - a. Workers tended to be young white college grads or former newspaper writers.
    - b. Men outnumbered women 10 to 1.
  2. Used persuasion, allure, and sexual suggestion in magazine, newspaper, and increasingly radio and movie ads
    - By 1925, U.S. corporations spent over \$1 billion on advertising.
  3. Sports became big business
    - a. **Babe Ruth** and **Jack Dempsey** became famous through the "image making" of advertising
    - b. Yankee Stadium became known as "the house that Ruth built" due to the huge crowds that bought tickets to see Ruth play.
    - c. 1921, thousands of people saw heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey knock out lightweight George Carpentier in the first million-dollar grossing boxing match
- F. **Scientific Management: Frederick W. Taylor – assembly line**
1. Taylor developed more efficient working methods to increase productivity which ultimately led to increased profits (and later, wages).
  2. *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) was influential in the developing the mass-production movement
    - a. Henry Ford and other auto makers were the first to adopt Taylor's practices.
    - b. Workers hated **Taylorism** as it concentrated power in the production process to managers, rather than workers, and initially resulted in lower wages.
      - No established regulations yet existed to protect workers from the challenges of mass-production work
- G. **Henry Ford** and the assembly line
1. Detroit emerged as the automobile capital of the world
    - a. 1890s, some U.S. inventors began to adapt the European gasoline engine to produce cars.
    - b. By 1910, 69 companies existed with a total annual production of 181,000 units.

- Henry Ford and Ransom E. Olds (Oldsmobile) were the most successful through their use of assembly line methods
- c. 1929, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler ("the Big Three") made 83% of cars produced in the U.S.
- 2. Ford realized workers were also potential consumers of his cars
  - a. In 1914, he raised worker salaries from \$2 a day to \$5 if workers adopted "thrifty habits" (e.g. learning English, no gambling, drinking, etc.)
    - Ford hired company spies to check on employees' out-of-work behavior
  - b. Ford paid good benefits, hired handicapped workers, convicts, and immigrants.
  - c. Ford was called a "traitor" to his class by many wealthy people who resented his reducing the gap between the higher and lower classes
- 3. Ford's assembly line could produce a car in only 1.5 hours (compared to 14 hours prior to the advent of the assembly line)
  - a. One car was produced every 10 seconds at his Rouge River plant near Detroit!
  - b. The **Model-T** became the staple car in the U.S. for many years.
    - By 1930, Americans owned almost 30 million cars, 2/3 of which were Model T's.
  - c. Drawback: assembly line work was incredibly tedious as machines often set the pace of production.
    - Sometimes, workers were actually chained to a machine to prevent accidents.
- 4. Ford became controversial due to his strong anti-Semitism (his success and views on Jews made him a hero to Hitler and the Nazis)
- 5. Automobile's impact on the U.S. economy
  - a. Cars replaced the steel industry as the top American industry
    - Employed huge numbers of workers (about 6 million by 1930).
  - b. Supported industries such as rubber, glass, fabrics, highway construction, and thousands of gasoline stations and garages.
    - The steel industry was given a further boost
    - The U.S. petroleum industry exploded as Texas became the center of the oil boom (California and Oregon also)
    - A new network of highways emerged; 387,000 miles built in 1921, rose to 662,000 in 1929
  - c. U.S. standard of living improved.
    - Leisure time was increasingly spent traveling to new open spaces.
    - Suburbs spread out even further as home ownership increased

- Food could now be delivered quickly before perishing
- d. Railroad industry was decimated by cars, buses, and trucks.
- e. Social changes resulted from the advent of autos
  - Women became less dependent on men
  - Home life was affected as youths became more independent
  - Isolation of certain regions (e.g. Southwest) decreased as some states lost population at an alarming rate.
  - Buses made possible consolidation of schools and in some cases, churches.
- f. Fatalities increased: 1 million Americans had died in car accidents by 1951, more than all killed in all America's battles combined.
- g. Bootleggers used trucks to undermine prohibition

#### H. The **Airplane**

1. December 17, 1903, **Wright Bros.** (Orville and Wilbur) flew a gasoline-powered plane 12 seconds and 120 feet at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, launching an age in aviation
2. The airplane used with some success during World War I.
3. Shortly after the war, passenger lines with airmail contracts came into being.
  - By the 1930s and 1940s, travel by air on regularly scheduled airlines was much safer than on many overcrowded highways.
4. 1927, **Charles Lindbergh** flew the first solo flight across the Atlantic.
  - a. *Spirit of St. Louis* flew from New York to Paris in 39 hours and 39 minutes.
  - b. Lindbergh became an American icon and world hero.
  - c. Female aviator **Amelia Earhart** furthered the cause of women's liberation by repeating Lindbergh's feat in 1932
5. Impact of the airplane:
  - a. Civilization became more closely linked as the time to travel vast distances shrank considerably
  - b. Railroads received yet another setback as airplanes siphoned passengers and mail service.
  - c. Airplanes were later used with devastating effects on cities during WWII

#### I. **Radio**

1. Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian, invented wireless communication in the 1890s.
  - Radio technology was used during WWI.
2. The radio was used publicly in November 1920 when **KDKA** in Pittsburgh carried the first broadcast (announced Harding's victory on the presidential election of 1920).
  - The range of the broadcast was only a few square blocks

3. Shortly thereafter, radio broadcasts grew exponentially.
4. National radio networks emerged: National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1926; Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS) in 1927
5. The radio profoundly impacted American society:
  - a. Stimulated the economy with a new industry that employed thousands of workers
  - b. Entertained millions of families during their leisure time (much like television in the 1950s)
  - c. Nation became more closely-knit culturally
    - Different regions of the country broadcasters with standardized accents.
    - Millions of listeners heard comedies like "Amos and Andy."
  - d. Advertisers used radio extensively
  - e. Sports events became more profitable with radio broadcasts
  - f. Politicians increasingly campaigned on the radio
  - g. Newscasts brought news to millions of listeners, many who did not read newspapers regularly
  - h. Music of famous music artists and symphony orchestras were broadcasted, enhancing American culture

## J. Movies

1. Emergence of the movie industry
  - a. 1890s, peep-show penny arcades gained some popularity
  - b. First real moving picture was released in 1903: *The Great Train Robbery* attracted thousands of working-class patrons to 5-cent theaters – known as "nickelodeons."
  - c. First full-length classic was **D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*** (1915) which glorified the KKK and defamed blacks.
  - d. Movies got tremendous boost through anti-German propaganda during WWI.
  - e. **Hollywood** soon became the movie capital of the world.
    - Silent movies were the industry standard until 1927
    - Major stars included Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino, and Clara Bow
    - **Cecil B. de Mille** helped found Paramount Pictures in 1914 and he produced and directed more than 70 films in the next 40 years that collectively grossed about \$750 million.
  - f. 1927, the first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, featured Al Jolson in a blackface doing a minstrel act.
    - Silent movies lost popularity as a result
    - By 1930, some color films were being produced.
2. Impact of movies on American society
  - a. Emerged as the nation's premier entertainment industry (more than radio, music, and live theater)
    - Sports was second, but grossed only 1/10 of movie receipts

- By 1930, 100 million tickets were purchased per week!
  - The Vaudeville industry was effectively killed and the live theater decreased in attendance.
- b. Employed about 325,000 people in 1930.
  - c. Actors and actresses, some with huge salaries, became more popular than the nation's political leaders.
  - d. American culture was bound more closely together as movies became the standard for taste, styles, songs, and morals.
  - e. Provided education through newsreels and travelogues.
  - f. Tabloids and the cheap movie magazines emerged as two by-products of the movie industry.

#### K. Changes in Working Conditions

##### 1. Reduction in work hours

- a. 1923, US Steel gave workers three eight-hour shifts instead of a 12-hour shift, partially because of pressure from President Harding.
- b. By the mid-20s, steel production was so efficient that workers were given even more time off.

##### 2. **Welfare Capitalism** - An American Plan of Business

- a. Owners came to believe that if workers are taken care of, labor unions or strikes would no longer be needed.
  - New employee benefits included: one-week paid vacations (two-weeks for those with seniority), basketball courts and baseball diamonds located near factories where workers could play for an hour, availability of a nurse or doctor at the factory to treat injuries or illnesses, and cafeterias with good food at low prices.
  - Union membership declined in the 1920s -- AFL had 5 million members in 1920, but only 3.5 million by 1929.
- b. Unions could not compete with industrial prosperity so that wages were not raised significantly (Ford was an exception)
  - Workers had more time off but no money to spend
  - Prices increased faster than wages so that workers could not buy many of the products they manufactured themselves.
  - Attempts were made to sell U.S. products overseas, but high tariffs on foreign imports resulted in retaliatory tariffs from European countries.

#### IV. Social life and culture during the "Roaring 20s"

- A. The census of 1920 revealed for the first time that a majority of Americans lived in cities rather than the countryside.

##### B. **The sexual revolution**

1. Theories of **Dr. Sigmund Freud** mistakenly were interpreted by Americans that sexual repression was responsible for a variety of

emotional problems.

- Good health thus required sexual gratification and liberation in the minds of many younger Americans
2. The "flaming youth" of the "Jazz Age" emphasized sexual promiscuity, drinking, and new forms of dancing considered erotic by the older generation.
    - a. Occurred mostly among some urban dwellers, middle class people, and students, who were relatively wealthy for the era.
    - b. New behaviors emerged for dancing and dress.
      - **Flapper** styles expressed the new freedom of women
        - Sleeveless, thinner dresses with shorter skirts.
      - One-piece bathing suits shocked older Americans.
      - The Charleston became a dance craze
    - c. Women began to assert publicly their right to imitate male standards of sexuality.
    - d. Reasons for changing standards
      - The maxim "eat, drink, and be merry" often appears after major wars.
        - WWI had the highest ratio of killed and injured to participants in any war.
        - Morality seemed less important after the carnage
      - Women saw greater independence, less parental supervision, and the 19th Amendment
      - Women increasingly joined the labor force in large numbers and more lived alone.
      - Impersonality of urban areas
      - Automobile gave people more mobility and privacy
4. Birth control was promoted by **Margaret Sanger** and others and became widely accepted.
    - a. Her pamphlets on birth control violated the Comstock Law of 1873
    - b. In 1916, she established the nation's first family planning clinic in Brooklyn while smuggling in diaphragms and other birth control devices for distribution
      - She served 30 days in jail for these activities
      - In 1918, a New York court allowed doctors to prescribe contraception
    - c. She founded the American Birth Control League in 1921
    - d. In her 80s, she campaigned for the new birth control pill in the early 1960s and saw her life-long crusade validated a year before her death when the Supreme Court validated birth control in marriages
  5. As women became more independent, they continued to organize
    - a. National Women's Party, led by **Alice Paul**, began in 1923 to

- agitate for an **Equal Rights Amendment** to the Constitution
  - The idea shocked traditionalists
  - The amendment was finally defeated in the early 1980s.
- b. The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 by leaders of the NAWSA.
- c. Divorce laws were liberalized in many states at the insistence of women
  - In 1920, 1 divorce occurred in 7.5 marriages; in 1929, 1 in 6
- d. Many women stayed in the work force after WWI
- e. Rise in church and synagogue membership served as a conservative and traditionalist reaction to a changing society.
  - Nationally popular evangelists touted traditional values: Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson

### C. "Jazz"

1. The term "Jazz" became popular after WWI (dance music)
  - Emerged as America's "classical music"
2. Pre-WWI development
  - a. African-influenced slave spirituals grew into jubilees and the blues in the rural South
  - b. Black folk music retained a certain melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic element that formed a common body of sound.
  - c. Ragtime works in the late 1890's are considered by some to be the earliest jazz (e.g. Scott Joplin)
    - First black music ever to achieve widespread popularity.
  - d. Blues developed simultaneously along with ragtime
3. New Orleans Dixieland Jazz eventually spread to the North
  - a. Included group improvisation, syncopation, instrumental solos, and moderate to fast tempos in 2/4 meter
  - b. Louis Armstrong: first master improviser--some see this as the true beginning of jazz.
  - c. During WWI, the migration of blacks north also meant the migration of jazz to northern cities.
4. In the 20's, Chicago became a center among jazz musicians.
  - a. Many came from New Orleans. Would later become *the* center of jazz music during the 1930's swing era.
  - b. New York also flourished during the Harlem Renaissance

### D. The Harlem Renaissance

1. Development
  - a. Harlem, a black enclave in New York City with about 100,000 residents in the 1920s, grew rapidly during and after WWI (largest black population in the northern U.S.)
  - b. Significance: Harlem produced a wealth of African American poetry, literature, art, and music, expressing the pain, sorrow, and discrimination blacks felt at this time.

- c. Black writers and artists sought to prove their work was equal to that of whites.
2. Poets & writers: **Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston**
3. **Duke Ellington** (1899-1974) and the **Cotton Club** (famous night club)
  - Piano player, band leader, and composer/arranger who formed one of most famous Jazz bands in music history.
4. **Marcus Garvey**
  - a. Leader of the **United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)**
    - "Back to Africa Movement": Purpose was to promote the resettlement of American blacks to Africa.
    - Advocated black racial pride and separatism rather than integration.
      - Urged blacks to buy only from blacks & founded chain of businesses including grocery stores, restaurants, and laundry mats.
    - Garvey was a native of Jamaica and founded UNIA there.
  - b. Black Star Steamship Co. was founded to transport his black followers to Africa; the company went bankrupt in 1923.
  - c. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover monitored Garvey and eventually sought to have him arrested and imprisoned.
    - Garvey was convicted of mail fraud in the sale of his company's stock, imprisoned, and then deported.
  - d. Garvey instilled self-confidence and self-reliance among blacks, and later became the basis for the Nation of Islam (Black Muslim) movement in 1960s

#### E. The "Lost Generation"

1. After WWI, a new generation of writers outside of the dominant Protestant New England emerged.
  - a. Their works often conveyed resentment of ideals betrayed by society; criticized the materialism of the 1920s
  - b. The term was coined by Gertrude Stein, one of leaders of "Lost Generation" who was based in Paris
2. **Henry L. Mencken**, *American Mercury* magazine
  - a. Attacked marriage, misguided patriotism, democracy, prohibition, and the Victorian-minded middle-class.
  - b. Attacked the perfectionist ideal Puritanism as outmoded
  - c. Supported and patronized many young authors who he admired for their critical attitude toward American society.
3. **F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896-1940)
  - a. At age 24, published *This Side of Paradise*; he became an overnight celebrity.
    - The book a guideline for the new generation (e.g. flappers)

- who sought to break the constraints of traditional society.
- b. **The Great Gatsby** (1925) -- depicted the glamour and cruelty of a materialistic and achievement-oriented society.
4. **Theodore Dreiser** (1871-1945), **An American Tragedy** (1925)
    - Dealt with the murder of a pregnant working girl by her socially ambitious boyfriend.
  5. **Ernest Hemingway** (1889-1961)
    - a. Fought in WWI on the Italian front in 1917 and the war left an indelible imprint on his psyche.
    - b. He responded to gov't propaganda and the overblown appeal of patriotism by devising his own lean, word-sparing style.
    - c. **The Sun Also Rises** (1926): wrote of the disillusioned, spiritually numb American servicemen who served in Europe.
    - d. **Farewell to Arms** (1929): One of the finest novels ever written about the war experience.
    - e. He committed suicide in 1961.
  6. **Sinclair Lewis** (1885-1951)
    - a. Criticized Midwestern life (he was a native of Minnesota)
    - b. **Main Street** (1920): Story of one woman's unsuccessful war against small-town provincialism and traditionalism
    - c. **Babbitt** (1922): George F. Babbitt was a wealthy and vulgar middle-class real estate broker who was obsessed with materialism
  7. **William Faulkner** (1897-1962) – southerner from Mississippi
    - a. Considered perhaps the best American novelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
    - b. **Soldier's Pay** (1926): Bitter war novel
    - c. **The Sound and the Fury** (1929) and **As I Lay Dying** (1930)
      - "Stream of consciousness" novels were written through the perspective of the characters; not 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient
  8. **T. S. Eliot** (American poet who later became a British citizen)
    - "The Waste Land" (1922): One of most influential poems of the century; conveys the pessimism and desolation many experienced after World War I

## Terms to Know

radical	Babe Ruth
anarchy	Jack Dempsey
communism	scientific management
socialism	Frederick W. Taylor
conservative	assembly line
reactionary	Henry Ford
liberal	Model-T
"Americanism"	airplane
"Red Scare"	Wright Brothers
Billy Sunday	Charles Lindbergh
Seattle General Strike	Amelia Earhart
Boston Police Strike	radio
steel strike	KDKA
United Mine Workers	movies
John L. Lewis	Hollywood
Palmer Raids	Cecil B. De Mille
A. Mitchell Palmer	<i>The Jazz Singer</i>
American Legion	welfare capitalism
Sacco and Vanzetti case	sexual revolution
Ku Klux Klan	Dr. Sigmund Freud
<i>Birth of a Nation</i> , D. W. Griffith	flapper
nativism	Margaret Sanger
Immigration Act of 1921	Alice Paul
National Origins Act, 1924	Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
Scopes "Monkey" Trial	Jazz
fundamentalism	New Orleans Dixieland Jazz
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)	Louis Armstrong
Clarence Darrow	Harlem Renaissance
William Jennings Bryan	Langston Hughes
Prohibition	Claude McKay
18 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Countee Cullen
Volstead Act, 1919	Zora Neale Hurston
"bootlegging"	Marcus Garvey
Al Capone	United Negro Improvement Association
speakeasies	The "Lost Generation"
mass-consumption economy	H. L. Mencken, <i>American Mercury</i>
Bruce Barton, <i>The Man Nobody Knows</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>This Side of Paradise</i> ; <i>The Great Gatsby</i>
"trickle down" tax policies	Theodore Dreiser, <i>An American Tragedy</i>
"buy now, pay later"	Ernest Hemingway, <i>Farewell to Arms</i>
white-collar workers	Sinclair Lewis, <i>Main Street</i> ; <i>Babbitt</i>
advertising	

## **Essay Questions**

**Note: This sub-unit is a high probability area for the AP exam. In the past 10 years, 4 questions have come wholly or in part from the material in this chapter. Below are some questions that will help you study the topics that have appeared on previous exams.**

1. Analyze the factors that led to a rise of “Americanism” in the U.S. during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. How did Americanism play out in American society during the 1920s?
3. Analyze the issues that brought modernists and traditionalists into conflict during the 1920s.
4. What were the causes of the booming economy of the 1920s and how did the economy’s growth alter American society?
5. How did culture (e.g. radio, movies, music & literature) reflect American society in the 1920s?

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