

Critical Paper for HIST 241

Friday, December 1

Write an 8-10-page essay in which you discuss and compare two of the three assigned books for the course. Your choices are limited to: Jackson Lear's *Rebirth of a Nation*, Lynn Dumenil's *The Modern Temper*, and Ronald Edsforth's, *The New Deal*. You should start (after your introduction) with a concise summary of each book. Your summarization should not run more than a total of two pages. The rest of your paper should be spent in a discussion of the ways in which each book presents its subject. It is absolutely crucial that you find some basis, or bases, for comparison of the two books, and then make this the focus of your paper. Among the critical questions your paper might consider are: Do the books under review recount the past with one single overarching narrative or with a number of overlapping narratives. To what extent, and in what ways, is race or gender used as an analytical category? What is each author's conception of how, and for whom, government works? How central is class conflict as an historical force? What sort of evidence is used (e.g. newspapers, governmental records, literary artifacts, oral histories) and to what effect? These are just a handful of the almost infinite number of critical questions it would be possible to generate. I would urge everyone to try to generate their own questions based on your own reading and understanding of the books you choose to write about.

Book1 “*The Modern Temper Summary*” by Lynn Dumenil

In Lynn Dumenil's account of the era commonly referred to as the “roaring twenties” in *The Modern Temper*: Turning to the flip side of the '20s' flapper image, Dumenil looks at the darker side of the decade forming the central motifs that have shaped the modern American temper." Between the end of WWI and the stock market crash, the aura of get-rich-quick prosperity overshadowed tensions resulting from the highly skewed distribution of wealth. American Culture and Society in the 1920s there is an intentional emphasis placed on the effort to dispel the popular notion that the new, revolutionary transformations in culture and society that took place at this time in history were direct results of the First World War. In the stead of this less insightful means of analyzing the 1920's in America by assuming that the post war era was a direct creation and consequence from the war, the author offers the suggestion that the seeds of the twenties were planted much earlier during the industrial revolution and through the effects of a culture rapidly industrializing in a capitalist society.

The unfettered capitalism of the time is reflected by Calvin Coolidge, who famously said, “The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there, worships there.” In 1920, for the first time, half the U.S. population lived in cities. While life grew more organized, complex and sexually liberated, the reaction increased, too. Capitalists fanned a Red Scare following the 1919 Bolshevik Revolution, forcing American reformers to confront this inflated fear along with homegrown poverty and racism. Dumenil points to the mass consumer culture, corporate mentality, job structure that eroded individual autonomy, assembly lines, intense special-interest lobbying in Washington and the fusion of sexuality with consumption as among the decade's legacies to later American culture. Even so, she has captured the fire of this volcanic time and weaves together scores of social and political threads into an insightful overview.

The war period simply served to expedite the process by contributing to the economic boom that created the prosperity of the twenties, sparking the migration of the rural population of African Americans and whites into urban areas, and by increasing opportunities for women in the work force. Furthermore, Dumenil goes even as far to say that the popular image and connotation of this era being a time of unparalleled prosperity and success in America is also somewhat inaccurate. For the most part, this view of America becoming an ever more opulent society during this period is correct, but, just as in many other aspects of American society, not everyone had an equal share of this abundant prosperity. The author also mentions how the farming industry had never fully recovered from the negative economic effects of war which caused many farmers to live in poverty throughout the entire period of the twenties.

Analysis & Critics:

While in some respects of skillful synthesis of existing secondary work rather than detailed primary research, Dumenil's thematic approach emphasized the "Erosion of community and personal autonomy" ethnic and racial diversity and growing cultural pluralism. One base we can focus on this book the experience faced by Differently group of people during the time when the natural modern identity was arising. Each individual group of people somehow experience the modern change from a unique perspective. In an increasingly heterogeneous society which we can see as forming the main contours of modern America. The Picture the author paint is much more complicated than the simple rural divide often used by other. As more space is devotes considerable to women, African Americans, different ethnic and religious groups as well as those representing traditional white Anglo Saxon Protestant value. The experience of blue and white-collar workers can be compare and contrasted to relation of both work and leisure in order to show how different sections of society were affected by, and responded to, the changes brought about the development of mass production and mass consumption. Considerable space is devoting to religion. The emphasis is, more on culture and cultural conflict. Any discussion of traditional politics or economic history is minimal. new Social Values surfaced in the cities and move to the countryside

Additionally, African Americans and other minorities were still victims of racial inequality and were not able to partake in the increased opportunities for work that would secure a more comfortable life. As discrimination was very frequent at work place, this step apart different social classes. As the working-class struggle for better working condition (number of hours of work, vacations and better paid), the main beneficiaries of the capitalistic, industrial growth in America were the middle and upper class White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or WASP's, who lived in ever expanding urbanized areas. It was these fortunate members of society who more often enjoyed the increase of the standard of living brought about by the mass production of goods such as electric irons and vacuum cleaners that contributed to the simplification of life's everyday tasks. A central theme that pervades many of the factors that contributed to the shift in American culture that made this period so unique is the rapid urbanization that was taking place. People move to cities for better opportunity and proximity to factories and service. According to

the 1920 census, exactly one half of the American population lived in the city, the largest percentage to date. However, this calculation can be somewhat misleading when one considers the fact that the cutoff point for an urban population was 2,500 people. Even during this time in history 2,500 people was not a significantly high number in regard to population. Regardless, the effects of this trend were clear.

The book shows a process of urbanization that was a natural and obvious evolution from the previous era into a period that mirrors our own modern way of life. One major factor that helped contribute to this end was the migration of African Americans to northern cities in search of work and escape from the racist south; however, this trend was not exclusive to African Americans. Other minorities such as Mexicans and rural whites also moved to the city in search of good paying jobs created by the economic boom. As the cities grew and became more diverse the ethnic pluralism contained therein formed a foundation of fundamental resentment of foreigners that has survived in one form or another to this day. The most concentrated method in which this nativism surfaced was in the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Started in our own backyard in Stone Mountain, the “new” KKK had a new policy that was much more modern and open minded as compared to its predecessor. Instead of reserving their hate only for African Americans, the new Klan thought all who were not WASP’s as they themselves were should have an equal entitlement to their hate and persecution. This new policy was a direct result of the increased competition that immigrants and African Americans brought into the cities as they all frantically scurried there to find work in the rising economy.

The US Government was not oblivious of this mind set either as legislation was passed during this period that had the objective of limiting the number of possible immigrants into America by setting a barrier depending on each country’s past immigration levels. Many immigrant communities also saw prohibition as a blatant attack on their lifestyle by imposing a specific cultural value on them that they did not share. Women of this era, conversely, were able to gain much headway in their quest for gender equality at many locations. Putting more emphasis on the more legitimate, professional means of liberation rather than the flapper ideals. The women’s suffrage amendment did much to enhance women’s role in politics and the war helped increase opportunities available to women in the workforce. Even though women were only able to get few concessions politically, were still paid less than men for the same work, and when the men came back from war the stereotypically male jobs were quickly given back to the men, many victories for gender equality were won during this period by the women of the country. Again, however, these victories rarely meant much to minorities as they were rarely given equal treatment.

Conclusion

There are aspects to this period that I feel this particular text does not give proper acknowledgement to. Dumenil book does a good job of showing the prevailing winds of the time and analyzing the forces that pushed society forward into what it is today; however, little is said about the opposing forces that tried to collectively pull back the reigns of capitalism, secularism, and urbanization.

These forces, which came in the form of the Industrial Workers of the World, William Jennings Bryan, and many others who attempted to retain the Victorian way of life also played an instrumental role in shaping society through their broad range of dissent from the path of urbanization and secularization that America traveled throughout this period. Throughout this text, Dumenil attempts to paint a more accurate picture of how American society was formed in the temper of the twenties. She accomplishes this by accurately capturing the fire of this explosive era and by documenting the various cultural and political changes taking place to give greater clarity as to the influence these events had on our society. While accomplishing this end, a deliberate emphasis is placed on presenting ideas that transcend the basic ideology about the cause and effects of the events that transpired during the roaring twenties.

Book 2: “*Rebirth of Nation*” by Jackson Lears Summary

In his work *Rebirth of a Nation*, Jackson Lears provides a synthesis of the years between the end of the Civil War and World War I. Unlike previous historians that argue for economic change as the main force of the period, Lears argues that the desire to be reborn, regenerated, or revitalized (rooted in Protestant desire for spiritual rebirth or conversion) is the driving force behind the “making of modern America”. These private ideas of regeneration began to penetrate public life, inspiring movements and policies that shaped the nation. Lears argues that the period between the end of the American Civil War and the First World War saw a ‘regeneration’ of American society from the ground up. Everywhere during this time, he notes, the symptoms of a nation rebuilding could be seen. Although different groups had very different ideas about how the nation should be reconstructed after such a devastating and divisive war- from the agrarian populists to the urban progressives to the utopian socialists-, they all nonetheless shared the idea that out of the ashes of the old nation could come something better. This, he argues, explains the spirit of reform that marked this era.

He traces Americans’ desire for rebirth throughout the major trends and events of the age: the rise of industrial capitalism, the expansion of American empire and the explosion of Jim Crow. Lears posits that the idea of regeneration shaped America in term of politics, morality, military ambition (masculinity), race (specifically desires for African American regeneration squashed by white supremacy and violence), women, urbanization, imperialism, big business, immigration, workers, etc. These ideas of rebirth and revitalization touched basically every aspect of American life in the early 20th century. Lear’s study focuses on two main forms of rebirth- militarism (often in the form of imperialism, America search for influence in other country) and reform (such as Progressivism). Lears uncovers Americans who embraced militarist fantasies of rebirth through violence, war and empire, as well as Americans who dreamt of American revitalization through reform movements. Lears uncovers both of these impulses in his “poster boy” Theodore Roosevelt. He also examines lesser known Americans who developed their own ideas version of American heroism and rebirth such as William Jennings Bryan, Jane Addams and William

James. When we examine the book deeper, we can see that Lears is at his best when he focuses on an individual and how they were influenced by (and in turn influenced) their environment: Harry Houdini, Eugene Debs, Jane Addams, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and especially Emily French (pp. 76–79). But these examples are way too few to make the rest of the journey interesting. The narrative just re-treads the same events and people (e.g. William James gets discussed in eleven different places, spanning pages 9 to 330), which would be fine if the book had more thematic variety.

The Books ends his synthesis with American involvement in World War I, arguing that it caused the death of both the militaristic and reformist vision of rebirth due to the brutal realities of fighting, the suppression of dissent at home and the failure of Wilson's version of the League of Nations. Lears' work provides an interesting and unique perspective on the years between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I by focusing on the ideas of rebirth, regeneration and revitalization that he argues influenced the era's most important movements and policies. He argues that this quest for regeneration took two distinctive forms- the mission to bolster masculinity through militarism and imperialism, as well as reform. His argument for the desire of rebirth affecting every large development during this time, although very intriguing, is not always totally convincing. His focus on rebirth as the main force in the making of modern American obscures the other forces that were also responsible for the shaping of the American nation in the early 20th century. Despite these minor issues, in the end Lears has revised the common narrative of this era by placing emphasis on the idea of regeneration as it derives from Protestant ideas of conversion and has provided a fresh perspective on well-known historical movements and developments.

The end of Reconstruction in 1877 also marked the beginning of decades of social and economic upheaval that transformed the nation from a sleepy republic to a world power. From the Civil War's widespread destruction emerged an intense longing for rebirth. The struggle between farmers and bankers, workers and industrialists, pacifists and militarists, immigrants and nativists, as a battle for the nation's soul. During this contentious period, the noble Republican Party of Lincoln become the captive of big business, while the old bugaboo of race kept Northern and Southern Democrats from mobilizing an effective opposition. In richly allusive and lively prose, the desire for reconciliation among whites was achieved at the price of equal rights for blacks and a reign of racial terror. The populist dream of a cooperative commonwealth ultimately yielded to the elite cult of manliness and militarism, the pervasive power of capital and a managerial and political class convinced that the nation's road to renewal ran through empire. The author's cast of characters ranges from the unexpected Harry Houdini, Buffalo Bill to the predictable array of Gilded Age villains mainly Morgan, Rockefeller and Carnegie. The idealists and dreamers determined to wrest meaning from the Civil War's awful sacrifice. He cites the work and commentary of people like Jane Addams, Mark Twain, William James and Eugene Debs. For him, Teddy

Roosevelt was a monster and Woodrow Wilson a tragic figure, overwhelmed by dark forces. Though the author's take on the era is partisan, readers need not agree with his politics to appreciate the high style and obvious passion he brings to this difficult subject.

Analysis & Critics:

On the bases, for comparison of the two books, Lynn Dumenil's *The Modern Temper*, Jackson Lears's construct new history of the United States, from the end of Reconstruction to the wrap-up of World War I, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, smolders with banked rage at the age in which it was written. The author's idea of truly virtuous patriotism (American Nationalism) as distinct from the jingoism that indelibly mark Teddy Roosevelt, for one, as an overgrown adolescent appear toward the end of the fifth chapter, "Crisis and Regeneration." We can sort of compare and contrast this book on the base of Different group contribution to America nationalism and self-esteem which really trigger the development of modern America. Writing of the end of the century of tensions that were occasioned by the Philippine question (whether to liberate and withdraw the formerly Spanish possession, or to occupy it), Mr. Lears follows a lengthy, and tacitly outraged, summary of imperialist views with a passage of level-headed serenity that has not been struck in all the preceding material. America sought for imperialist power in the Caribbean(Cuba), Philippine and more for the promotion of democracy and geographical partner for economic and military purpose.

Two separate levels of American society appear at this time. Firstly, the social- the inner thoughts and workings of the American people and their relationship to the rhetoric of rebirth that was so prevalent in society at this time. the American citizen's relationship with the lingering memory of the Civil War (the opposing north and the south), looking specifically at the ways in which fantasies of regeneration through war inspired a militaristic culture. Secondly, the broader context in which the traditions of the late nineteenth century converged with American Protestantism to create the environment in which reform could occur. America notice more of the public shifts, changes and reforms that took place in this period by placing them in the context of the private and the social, crucially linking them all back to the protestant reformation.

Essentially The Civil War nostalgia combined with the tenets of American Protestantism and the 're-birth' associated with both drove American society between 1877 and 1920, guiding such cultural phenomena as temperance, body-building, US imperialism, frontier mythology, the taming of capital, restriction of immigration(for specific group of people for example the Chinese exclusion: which systematically reduce the number of Chinese worker in the nations) and ultimately US involvement in WWI which followed after the discovery of the Zimmerman code. We said that we author view of American expansion and need for influence as a way to go back on the track for prosperity economically and conquest of more power. The era was saturated with the language of personal and social reform as the whole country sought regeneration and rebirth on multiple levels, from the political to the personal

which reformers often linked. This created a milieu of intervention in which public health and welfare became hot topics for conversation and the government grew in size and strength. The need for these programs resulted from the necessity of government level intervention to minimize the gap and lack of opportunity to those who could not keep up with the growing modern economy. However, the reform impulse took many different forms and manifestations, strike as different groups sought to 'rebuild' the nation in their own image- this meant for some a welfare-drive, Debs-style socialist state, for others a liberal, business driven nation, and for others a segregated, white-supremacist society. We can argue that while the 'taming' of capitalism and the ending of the laissez-faire system was the most obvious and often-discussed result of this age of rejuvenate thought, the myriad of other consequences cannot be untied from the same 'social rebirth' movement that spurred on progressivism and its antecedents. Utopian visions were rooted in moral absolutism for certain group of people and often enforced strict moral codes and moral and social engineering as a part of their progressive vision- i.e. temperance, the control of sexuality, the control of women, eugenics etc.

Anti-imperialism at its best was characterized by a particularity of vision, a refusal of euphemism, a realism tempered by ethical concerns about the corrupting influence of imperial power on both the rulers and the ruled. In Philippine and the Caribbean, certain reformed attempt to protest against US imperial power and sought for self-governance. These concerns came straight from the framers of the Constitution, who were haunted by the historical pattern of republics trading liberties for the false comforts of empire. Mahan caught the conflict in 1897, when he complained that "any project of extending the sphere of the United States, to annexation or otherwise, is met by the constitutional lion in the path." Acquisition of overseas empire was a departure from republican tradition. Anti-imperialists drew strength from disparate sources. African-Americans were skeptical about the beneficence of white paternalism. "The white man's burden," wrote the black editor James Jefferson Roche, "is never so heavy that he cannot carry it out the door or window of the house he has just burglarized." The anti-imperialists also included prominent public figures, from Adams and Bryan and Andrew Carnegie to Mark Twain and William James. Carnegie's presence in this group suggests that even robber barons were not driven entirely by their economic interests. He, like the others, was appalled by the betrayal of the principals that had supposedly led us into war with Spain in the first place. US-Spanish war can be seen as the fruit of each colonial power interest and search for domination, which is critical when each power compete. Unlike Roosevelt, the anti-imperialists knew the difference between a republic and an empire.

Mr. Lears does not say so, but *Rebirth of a Nation* appears to take its title from a "racist epic," D W Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*; unlike Griffith, Mr. Lears obviously intends the title to be taken ironically. His book is a sustained attack on the addictive use of organic metaphors to prescribe the conduct of national affairs. The two words in the chapter heading that I've mentioned are both quasi-medical terms; "revitalization" is another organic-sounding thread. But the word "rebirth" contains in itself a powerful

critique of much American thought in the aftermath of the War Between the States. It carries the orthodox Christian idea of resurrection one step too far, implying an actual physical rebirth here and now. It encapsulates the wishful thinking that characterized the American response to a catastrophically unresolved conflict. Another toxic abstraction from Mr. Lears's period is "Anglo-Saxon," a term that swelled with narcissistic self-esteem as the nation swelled with immigrants from places other than Northern Europe. The authors show, in several contexts, how assimilation into a social fabric that equated the American with the Anglo-Saxon depended upon the exclusion of obviously non-Anglo-Saxon African Americans, Chinese Americans and American Indians. The Irish, despised in the Northeast, where neither blacks nor Asians were common, were able to advance their status considerably in San Francisco, by speaking out against the influx of Chinese labor. The rapid commercialization of popular entertainment toward the end of the century provided another avenue of assimilation, similarly widened. "The common American idiom that united disparate ethnic groups in a mass culture depended for its coherence on the exclusion of African Americans, or on their ritual humiliation if they appeared in public at all."

Between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the liberation of African Americans, still today thought to have been one of the purposes as well as an achievement of the Civil War, had yielded to the institution of an American version of apartheid that was as potentially lethal, especially for black males, as state-sponsored terrorism anywhere. Even more familiar to today's readers will be the lineaments of the class conflict that convulsed the United States during the Second Industrial Revolution. Mr. Lears quotes Henry Ward Beecher at length, to show how "good-guy," abolitionist thinking metastasized into the heartless endorsement of another kind of inequality. Beecher, he writes, was a representative figure, an outspoken abolitionist and supporter of John Brown before the Civil War. His postwar career revealed the Republicans' increasing use of free labor ideals as a defense of economic privilege. His sermons summarized the regnant mix of laissez-faire and natural law. the chaos of unregulated economic life contained (at least rhetorically) by the stasis of unchanging principle. "Are the working men of the world oppressed?" he asked. "Yes, undoubtedly, by governments, by rich men, and by the educated classes not because of selfishness and injustice but because it must be so. Only in the household is it possible for strength and knowledge and power not to oppress weakness and ignorance and helplessness." This was "a great natural law": "no being against being, or little being against much being, must always kick the beam. The volume of power that is in any class must have scope and operation." Lest anyone misunderstand that last statement, Beecher quickly added that "the American idea recognizes no classes.

There is no rich class before the law, and there is no working class before the law; and in the intense sense in which the term 'class' is now coming to be used in the controversies of the day it is un-American, it is unphilosophical, it is undemocratic, it is false. We are all common citizens, having the same liberty as one another; and he who classifies men and seeks to antagonize them is an enemy of the country

and of his kind." For Beecher and his comfortable audience, the "American idea" was clear: "God gave me my right to liberty when he gave me myself: and the business of government is to see that nobody takes it away from me unjustly that is all." This was the worldview that left unprotected labor at the mercy of unregulated capital. Theodore Roosevelt's indulgence in this sort of talk, so strongly reminiscent of Ronald Reagan and, even more, of Margaret Thatcher, elicits an even sharper judgment: Roosevelt was a master of this sort of mystification. He despised Bryan as a "small man" unwilling to take up the burdens of national greatness. "A man goes out to do a man's work, to confront the difficulties and overcome them, and to train up his children to do likewise," he announced. "So, it is with the Nation." The portentous vacancy of this formula, its utter lack of evidence or argument, and its fundamental confusion of individual and national courage — all these qualities were characteristic of Roosevelt's imperial rhetoric, and non-proved a barrier to his popularity. Indeed, the melding of moral into physical courage and the merging of nations with individuals proved enduring features of militarist posturing. This was the sort of thinking (or not thinking) that led Senator Chauncey Depew to dismiss the anti-imperialist critique of the Philippines War as a "scuttle and run strategy. Similar category mistakes plague public discourse today.

Conclusion

Rebirth of a Nation is composed as a series of personality sketches interspersed with reporting about events such as the Haymarket Riots and the Pullman strike. As such, it is supremely readable, old-fashioned history, sprinkled here and there with relatively novel terms (such as "producer" and "organicist"), but sparing with dates and official events. Where it differs from comfortable histories is the intensity of the critical review to which it subjects the slogans and bromides that leaders made a habit of spouting, indeed, to such an extent that it is impossible to think of the period without tripping over the concept of "hypocrisy" again and again. The book is best approached as a multi-part essay on the fifty-year transformation of our Republic's ideals, with particular attention paid to its self-regard and to its detachment from an ever-liberalizing Protestantism. And only the most optimistic readers along with those who are loyal to their country whether it be right or wrong will come away from Mr. Lear's pervasive discussion of race without suspecting that, aside from the development of made-to-measure apparel, the War of 1861-1865 achieved just about nothing of a positive nature.

Reference:

Dumenil, Lynn. *"The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s"*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995. Print.

Lears, T. J. Jackson, 1947-. *Rebirth Of a Nation : the Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. New York :HarperCollins, 2009. Print.