

Lecture 2.10: The “Roaring Twenties”

“Return to Normalcy”

- Violence of WWI
- Rapid changes at turn of century
- Red scare
- Too much craziness
- Republicans run on the slogan “return to normalcy”
 - Bring things back to the way they were
 - Republicans able to return to power with Pres. Warren G. Harding, 1921-23
 - Big shift back to republican party → 3 republicans at this time
 - Harding’s administration is marred by scandal
 - Teapot Dome Scandal → secretary of the interior took bribes to grant oil leases to specific people
 - Eventually, he’s the first cabinet member to go to jail
 - He is also known for dirty letters to his lover
- Dies in office in 1923 of heart attack → VP becomes president

Pres. Calvin Coolidge R → 1923-1929

- Harding VP
- Nickname is “silence cal”
- Not a well spoken person, but he is pretty popular
- Wins reelection too
- Notable shift in economic policy
 - He and secretary of treasury shift to supply-side economics
 - Cutting gov spending
 - Lowering taxes
 - With the idea that if gov spends less, but you and businesses have to pay less taxes, you will invest more elsewhere and economy will grow
 - Shift away from previous high taxes required for progressives to make change (like 16th amendment income taxes)
 - Lower taxes, shrink gov involvement
 - Back to an era of high tariffs → taxing things coming into country, but won’t tax US businesses
 - BUT Europe isn’t able to sell as much to the US for this and they are less able to pay back debt → prolonging their recovery period after WWI
 - Shifting away from progressive reform
 - Gov which governs best is that which governs least

Welfare Capitalism:

- In terms of labor, they are trying address red scare, strikes, etc
- Try to do this by using welfare capitalism
 - Don’t want people going on strike, unions, etc
 - We could just give them some benefits to balance out the struggle
 - Could be better pay, more often healthcare

- Goal is keep employees happy and keep them from joining unions
- Henry Ford is one of biggest leaders in this
- Paid an unprecedented 5 dollars a day to his employees → high pay for assembly line employee
- But not going to drastically change how labor works

Isolation:

- Still reacting to WWI
- Major period of isolationism
 - Costs of WWI, how messy Europe is
 - Most people convinced that US is better off not getting involved in world affairs at all
 - Phrase “America First” is coined in this era
 - Very nativist idea
- era with national origins act, no treaty of Versailles, etc → keeping the world out
- one exception to this → Kellogg-Briand Pact, 1928
 - Act agreeing that world is outlawed
 - 40 countries agree on this
 - But there’s not enforcement mechanism
 - How do you outlaw war?
- Other exception → troops in Latin America throughout
 - So its okay to get involved in Latin America, just nowhere else to protect business interests
 - Isolationist, but only as far as it suits the US

Mass Culture:

- Era where Mass culture as we understand it develops
- Music, film, entertainment become national in scale rather than local
- Radios → now you can listen to music where you are
- Moving pictures → first silent movies, then talkies, but now you can actually have moving pictures
- Photographs
- All helping create more shared culture
- Access to the same things that we didn’t have previously
- Culture of celebrity
 - Could only have celebrity on local scale if we don’t have access to these people
 - People like silent film stars, radio stars/hosts, composers and musicians
 - Aviators, athletes
 - Charlie Chaplin! Louis Armstrong!
- Part of this facilitated by growing leisure time → upper and middle class, not necessarily working class
 - white collar, marketing positions
 - gaining more money, lots of new inventions that are time saving → now they have more time
 - more advanced stove technology, washing machine, pre-sliced bread, etc

- more money → can buy new tech that saves time → you have more time
- also means greater culture of consumption
- entire 2nd IR is based on selling for profit → need someone to buy
 - this is why mass marketing is necessary
 - mass marketing! Hunger for these goods
 - people are trying to buy them
- shift → becomes more socially acceptable to borrow money
 - previously, it was considered bad, or you don't have your things together if you are borrowing
 - now, people are more accepting of this bc big corporations/banks want them to borrow money to buy their goods
- more time to burn → so we get things like amusement parks
 - becoming more prevalent now that people have all this extra time
 - more public spaces available for leisure time
 - consuming in experience vs actual good

Other major thing: The Great Migration:

- huge shift of Black people leaving the South
- between 1915-1918 → half a million black people left the south mostly because of people shortages in WWI → gives opp. To escape sharecropping
- afterwards, in 1920-1930 → 1.3 million black people leave the south (more than GR)
 - new jobs, opportunities, escape sharecropping
- before GM, 90% of black people lived in the south. After 1930, only 53% of black people lived there
- they ended up moving towards big cities in the US
- people living in those places reacting to almost 2 mil black people moving to those places → not very popular
- in that time, it was called “race riots” → most of the time, it was White people reacting violently to Black people showing up in cities that they haven't been in before
- more notorious one: 1921 Tulsa Race massacre
 - brushed aside for a long time
 - 300+ black people died, 35 city blocks of black middle class community were destroyed
 - Displaced a bunch of people, taken away wealth, etc
 - For almost 100 years, we were not understanding the scale of it

Side affects of GM: Harlem Renaissance!!

- Movement to celebrate Blackness and black culture led by black creatives and intellectuals in Harlem
- Banding together in his neighborhood and creating environment to foster more opportunity to celebrate blackness rather than just trying to convince white people to accept them
- Focuses around concept of “new Negro”
 - New black person would elevate and sophisticate Black art while also working for civil rights

- Want to create realities of black brilliance, expertise, scholarship, art, also work for more rights for black people
- Thinking about what it means to be black in America and how do we celebrate culture and heritage
 - Happening through poetry, music, scholarship, art
 - Black-specific themes in literature, use of Black vernacular in literature
 - Celebrating their own culture
- Jazz and blues music → some of biggest development in this era
 - From spirituals under slavery
 - Shift into mainstream popular culture as well
 - White audiences are also looking to bring these into pop culture
- Some of the prominent people:
 - Bessie Smith
 - Blues vocalist
 - Josephine Baker
 - Performs/celebrates African American culture
 - Refuses to perform in front of segregated audience → very popular, so people agreed
 - Moved to France and became a spy in WW2
 - Claude McKay
 - Poet, author, etc
 - Langston Hughes
 - Also author
 - Zora Neale Hurston
 - Exploring history of black communities in US and scholarship
- Gives a lot of space for black communities to experiment with their sexuality
- More open to queer sexuality, playing with rules of gender

Black Nationalism:

- Marcus Garvey becomes leader of this
- Unlike interracial NAACP → Garvey doesn't believe in trying to integrate into White society
- Instead, he founds the Universal Negro Improvement Association in order to advocate for Black pride and advocate for Black business ownership → don't have to rely on white banks or white politicians to take care of us
 - Separation and pride
 - Not integrate into US culture
 - Black communities more self sufficient
- Leader of Back to Africa movement → lets go back to our roots, go back to Africa
 - Should help African communities should help improve Africa and overthrow colonists in Africa, etc
 - Pan-Africanism → black people all over the world need to work together for betterment of Black people
 - Most people don't go back to Africa, but popular among middle class Black Americans because it gives them pride, celebrating their heritage

In addition: The New Woman

- Major conflicts over women's roles in this era
- Not that all women are suddenly changing their behavior are pushing boundaries of acceptable behavior (women involved in suffrage movement)
 - Ride a bicycle, play sports
 - Shocking behavior
 - Mainly middle and upper class women
- More women going to college, having a profession
- Giving them more independence → don't have to rely on men, you have more choices
- Greater use of birth control
 - Mostly accessible to upper and middle class
 - Allows them to delay marriage and children
 - Allows them to date and have casual sex without worrying about getting pregnant
 - Era where some women use independence to date, to be more physically intimate with people, etc
- "Flappers"
 - More extreme version of the new women
 - Chopping hair short, allowing knees to be shown, dancing, going out in public, wearing makeup, dancing to jazz music, smoking, drinking, etc
 - This is the most visual extreme, not all women are flappers
- But, working class women don't have access to these things, are not as independent
 - Part of this is because 1873 Comstock Act → birth control is illegal
 - If you have money, it is easier to obtain, which working class women can't do as readily
- Margaret Sanger
 - Leading birth control activists in this era
 - Wants to protect health of impoverished women
 - Minimizing unwanted children
 - Also eugenicist → don't want impoverished immigrants to reproduce
 - In 1921 → founds American Birth Control League → becomes Planned Parenthood

Stigmatization of LGBTQ+ Relationships:

- With Harlem renaissance
- Most women were not considered sexual enough to have relations with other women?
- Smth smth
- Becomes more stigmatized
- Some people think this is an illness

Fundamentalism:

- Major
- Some people see all these things as bright and shiny and cool, others think US is going downhill (moral decay)
- Rallying around literalist interpretation of Bible → exactly how the Bible says it, not room for other interpretations

- One of biggest things they oppose → growing traction that theory of evolution is gaining
- If it is not literally part of the Bible, what other parts of the Bible are not literally true?
- Destroy Christianity? Destroy values? Anxiety
- 1925 Scopes Trial → HS teacher charged with teaching evolution in his classes
 - Found guilty, charged 100 dollars, first radio broadcasted trial in the country
 - Some people think its just for publicity, but its hard to tell

Fragile Economy:

- However pretty, lots of signs of economic fragility
- Consumer debt → loans to buy homes, radios, etc
 - But, most people are still living below poverty line
 - You needed at least \$25000 a year to live comfortably, but 71% percent of people lived below that line in 1929
 - 80% of families without savings
- Other sectors of economy struggling → American farmers have lots of debt