**Handout 7, Hist. 261, Prof. Mogren**

**I. Red Scare**

Violence and intolerance occurred because Americans believed that they were under attack at home. Unplanned demobilization caused a inflation, unemployment, and strikes. Americans blamed the strikes on radicals, while Congress blamed Bolsheviks in America.

The menace of communist subversion was overblown. The Left also suffered from split within its own ranks.

In April, bombings and attempted bombings convinced Americans of an organized conspiracy to overthrow the government.

Attorney General Palmer launched an anti-radical campaign in November 1919. The Palmer raids rounded-up hundreds of suspects. Most were held in violation of their legal rights. New raids in January 1920 were more excessive than the earlier raids.

Such abuses created a backlash. Responsible people denounced the extremism. The flame of hatred had burned itself out. In September, when a bomb exploded on Wall Street, Americans concluded, accurately, that it was the work of a few demented anarchists rather than a revolution.

**II. Industry and Commerce**

America experienced a second industrial revolution -- manufacturing output and output per work hour increased. The economy experienced the largest peacetime growth rate ever.

Technology was partly responsible, as electricity supplanted steam power in industry. Machines replaced workers and "technological unemployment" was the problem.

As the industrial economy matured, more consumer goods appeared. New appliances changed household habits.

The improvement in industrial productivity helped to drive down prices. Americans enjoyed a high standard of living.

Economic danger signals appeared. Americans were saving less despite increased wages. Personal debt was increasing faster than personal income. Eventually, consumer buying power would be exhausted, and the economy would grind to a halt.

**III. Boom Industries**

New boom industries promoted economic growth. The construction industry has always been one of the most important American industries because it stimulates so many other industries and businesses. A massive construction boom filled the wartime backlog for offices, homes, factories, and warehouses.

Residential construction mushroomed as people rushed to the suburbs. Road construction increased to accommodate these new commuters.

Perhaps the most important boom industry was the automobile industry. Auto makers bought steel, rubber, plate glass, nickel, and lead. By the end of the 1920s, one American in four earned a living directly or indirectly from automobiles.

Ford succeeded in making an affordable car for the masses. The key to his success was standardization of the product, made possible by his perfection of the moving assembly line.

According to Ford, workers with money would spend it and thus keep the economy expanding. Ford introduced the "$5 day." He reduced working hours and tried to make his work force approximate the percentages of ethnics and races found in Detroit.

But many Ford workers were unhappy. Ford was violently anti-Semitic. His operations had made jobs monotonous. Ford recouped his labor costs by speeding up the assembly line. A company "Sociological Department" sent company representatives to workers homes to inspect their personal lives.

General Motors copied Ford's manufacturing techniques but not his social or business strategies. Ford relied on instinct, Slone of GM relied on market analysis. Ford centralized operations, Slone decentralized them. Ford tried to sell everybody the same car, GM created different models to satisfy a broad range of tastes. Cars became symbols of distinction and social prestige.

The car changed America. Paved roads fueled urban sprawl. Auto travel and tourist industries sprang up. The car broke down provincialism and gave the young freedom from parental authority.

**IV. Business and Welfare Capitalism**

Progressives had condemned business for its social irresponsibility. But industry and business service during the war and the general prosperity of the nation in the 1920s enhanced their reputations.

Business consolidation increased and oligopolies dominated industries. The trend toward professionalism of management accelerated, making the new giant corporations operate even more efficiently. "Scientific management" standardized business practices and stressed good labor- management relations (because it was more cost-effective to keep worker than to re-train a new one).

A new philosophy of labor relations developed, Welfare Capitalism. Several business and industries adopted the "American Plan," aimed at destroying unions. Employees signed agreements disavowing union membership. In exchange, many companies offered better working conditions and insurance.

Welfare capitalism benefitted about 5% of American workers, usually the most skilled. Unemployment never dropped below 5% the entire decade. Average industrial wages were less than what was needed for a family. Child labor continued. Many companies accomplished the union-busting part of the American Plan without offering the benefits.

**V. Consumer Culture**

The network of industrial and manufacturing systems created mass markets. Consumption was the key to prosperity, and consumption rested on two inventions: advertising and credit.

In the 1920s, advertising shifted from emphasizing products to stressing consumer wants. The war propaganda demonstrated the power of advertising. Soon businesses were shaping American tastes and desires. Advertising aimed at emotions. The goal was not to sell products, but to sell desires.

The consumer credit industry grew into the tenth largest business in the U.S. Consumer debt skyrocketed.

**VI. New Society: Women and Blacks**

The war was a powerful engine of social change that ended many of restrictions directed toward women.

The "flapper" image of women in the 1920s was hardly representative. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote. But when they voted, they voted along class, ethnic and religious lines rather than gender lines.

Women did not benefit in the work place. The female labor force grew by more than 2 million in ten years, but that was barely a 1% gain. By 1930, 60% of working women were Black or foreign born and worked in low paying jobs. Professional women came to dominate the fields of education, social work, and library management. But at the same time, some professional advancement, such as medicine, was closed to women.

Wartime labor shortages encouraged migration of Blacks from the rural South to the urban North. After the war, unemployment and persistent racism disillusioned Blacks. Many found an outlet for their discontent in Marcus Garvey.

Garvey decried racism, stressed Black pride, and called for separation from Whites. His goal was to return Africans to Africa, and Africa to the Africans. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) claimed to have 4 million members. It was the first mass movement of Blacks in America. In 1925, Garvey was convicted of mail fraud and the UNIA collapsed.

In Harlem a renaissance in Black literature, music, and visual arts blossomed. Often supported by Whites, the new Black artists drew their inspiration from the street life of the cities and their heritage. Though not a racial protest, the Harlem Renaissance drew on the new assertiveness and racial consciousness of Blacks as well as on the alienation and depression of White intellectuals.

**VII. Mass Media and Entertainment**

Hollywood became a trend-setter, dictating standards of physical attraction, taste, and fashion.

Motion pictures had first been shown in tiny theaters called "nickelodeons." Gradually, the movies lost their lower-class flavor and became the entertainment for middle-class America. By the end of the 1920s, theaters were drawing 100 million patrons a week -- roughly the equivalent of the national population.

In the spring of 1920, Frank Conrad of Westinghouse Company began sending out phonograph music and baseball scores to local radio operators. In October 1920, Westinghouse officials opened the first licensed broadcasting station in history. By 1922 there were 430 radio stations. By 1931, nearly one home in three had a radio.

Radio changed national habits. Families gathered around radios instead of the fireplace. Rather than go out to listen to music, people tuned in at home. Radio and movies nearly killed vaudeville and other forms of live entertainment.

Print journalism flourished. Magazines like Reader's Digest and Time reached large readerships. Giant newspaper chains distributed hundreds of daily papers to about 13 million people. They pioneered the use of centralized news techniques, editorials, sports, gossip, and Sunday features for national audiences.

People had more time for entertainment, and upper-class sports like tennis and golf spread to the middle-class. Spectator sports remained popular, and those who could not attend games could follow them on the radio.

Dancing was popular, and the music was jazz. Many Whites found its bold style and its origins in the Black community disturbing. Jazz bands combined the soulfulness of the blues with the syncopated rhythms of ragtime. Its dynamic quality came from improvisation. As the jazz style was adopted by White musicians, and jazz found a wider audience and became more mainstream.

**VIII. Nativism and Immigration Restriction**

America in the 1920s was a nation divided. Modernists embraced the future, but others cherished an older era associated with rural life, small communities, and comfortable sameness. The emergence of a mass culture sharpened awareness of the differences -- and dangers -- each saw in the other.

One symptom of the traditional defense was nativism. Most immigrants were Catholics or Jews from eastern Europe or Mexico. The population of Protestant, native-born Whites of native-born parents, had fallen to only about half the total population. Many called for immigration restriction.

In 1921, a quota set the number of entrants at 350,000 a year and allocated them on the basis of 3% of each nationality living in the U.S. as of 1910. Asian immigration was banned entirely. In 1924, the National Origins Act cut the quota to 150,000, pushed the base year back from 1910 to 1890 (before the bulk of the southern and eastern Europeans had arrived), and made the quota permanent.

The National Origins Act set the pattern of immigration for 40 years. Support for restriction was strong among rural people who saw it as a matter of race, religion, and loyalties.

**IX. Prohibition**

Another symptom of the fear of modernity was prohibition. The Eighteenth Amendment, banning the sale, manufacture, importation, and transportation of liquor, took effect in January 1920.

Prohibition was not total -- private citizens could consume private stores, and alcohol could be to be used industry as long as it had been rendered poisonous. Prohibition never completely stamped out liquor, but it did reduce consumption nationally. Enforcement was understaffed and underfunded. Corruption was rampant among the agents. A few states refused to enact local enforcement statutes.

Ironically, prohibition increased consumption of hard liquor since hard liquor brought greater profits to bootleggers. Women gained prestige -- once barred from saloons, women were welcomed by speakeasies. Prohibition promoted large-scale crime.

Prohibition was a form of class and cultural legislation. The steepest decline in drinking was among the working-class ethnics. Working classes also found themselves deprived of their saloons, which had operated as their labor exchange, union hall, and social club as well as their source of corruption.

**XI. The Klan**

William Simmons founded the new Ku Klux Klan. In 1920, Simmons turned over recruiting to professionals, and the Klan spread rapidly. The new Klan was not confined to the rural South, but spread throughout the U.S. It was also an urban phenomenon -- more than one half of its members came from cities of 100,000 people or more. By 1924, only 16% of Klansmen were in the South, but over 40% of the Klan membership was in Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois alone. At its height in 1923-24, it had about 2 million members.

Klansmen worried about the changes and conflicts in American society, which they attributed to the increasing numbers of immigrants (Jews and Catholics), feminists and "uppity women," and of course, Blacks.

The Klan was fraternal, patriotic, and philanthropic. A typical Klan gathering involved whole families. The Women of the Ku Klux Klan had chapters in 36 states.

Many (but not all) who joined the Klan were working-class Americans who had fallen to the bottom of industrialized, urbanized society and lived on the brink of unemployment and poverty. Klan membership gave them reassurance. But the Klan was a cross-section of white middle-class society that drew support from all but the wealthy and the extremely poor. Klan members were not all freaks, reactionaries, or misfits.

The Klan drew on the culture of the small town, hoping to restore an older America. They believed in White supremacy, chastity, parental authority, prohibition, law and order, and an America free from foreigners. Their focus was on morality. Some members of the Klan were violent, but the violence has been exaggerated -- most Klan members were content to hate without acting out their emotions.

As the Klan expanded it moved into politics, electing six governors, three senators, and thousands of local officials. The Klan took over Colorado. Beginning in November 1925, several prominent Klan leaders were convicted of crimes, and the Klan never recovered. In elections, non-Klan candidates fought back. Immigration restrictions removed much of the Klan's appeal.

**XII. Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial**

Many Protestants believed that their faith was under attack. Catholics and Jews were demanding a place in America. Equally disturbing were the secular culture of modern America and new scientific theories.

Proponents of the literal truth of the Bible, who became known as "Fundamentalists," saw themselves as defenders of traditional religion.

Fundamentalists were frightened by the theories of Charles Darwin which denied the divine origin of humankind. In 1925, the Tennessee legislature made it a crime to teach evolution. Skeptics in the small town of Dayton, together with the American Civil Liberties Union, tested the legitimacy of the Tennessee law. In the spring of 1925, John Scopes was charged with having violated the statute. Scopes's sponsors were as interested in boosting their towns's commercial fortunes as with free speech.

Millions of Americans followed the first trial ever broadcast on the radio.

Clarence Darrow represented the defense. He was the most famous defense lawyer in the nation and a professed agnostic. The prosecution was led by William Jennings Bryan.

Judge Raulston ruled immediately that scientists could not be called to support the theory of evolution. The defense collapsed. To keep the trial going the judge allowed Darrow to call Bryan as an expert on the Bible. Darrow's aim was to make Bryan look foolish for believing in the literal truth of the Bible and thereby discredit the Fundamentalists. Darrow succeeded in making Bryan look ridiculous and got him to admit that the "truth" of the Bible was not always easy to accept.

The trial became more of a national joke than a fight between the forces of light and darkness. Scopes was found guilty and fined $100. Bryan died of diabetes a week after the trial ended. Some attributed his death to the trial, but that is unfair to Bryan. Bryan's rejection of Darwin was rooted in his personal faith that all humans were creatures of God and thus capable of striving for perfection and equality. He also firmly believed in the democratic ideal that communities had the right to determine their own destinies.

The public ridicule of the Scopes trial took toll on the Fundamentalists. Many retreated from politics. But they did have some successes -- publishers, fearing commercial losses, removed all references to Darwin from their school text books, a policy that remained in force until the 1960s.

**XIII. Art and Alienation**

Even before the war, a generation of writers had been rebelling against Victorian morality. During the war, many lost faith in reason, progress, and the goodness of humanity and began to embrace a nihilism that denied all meaning to life. When the war ended they turned their resentment against small towns, big business, conformity, technology, and material culture. Examples: T. S. Elliot, The Waste Land (1922); Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (1926) and A Farewell to Arms (1929); Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio (1919); Sinclair Lewis, (first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature), Mainstreet (1920) and Babbitt (1922). John Dos Pasos was an exception. He attacked politics-as-usual, embracing individualism and communism, battled against entrenched power, and saw the nation divided along class, ethnic, and racial lines.

Artists also changed their style. Many turned to the urban scene for inspiration. George Bellows painted violent prizefights. The photographer Charles Sheeler snapped stark, raw photos of the machine age.