

## 1920s Rapid Review

### **Economic Conditions in the 1920s**

\*Signs of Prosperity: the standard of living rose, and more and more people moved to urban centers. Larger numbers of women and men worked in office jobs; increased emphasis on advertisements & the marketing of consumer goods; the strong increases in the stock market; the assembly-line production of Henry Ford's Model T enabled average American families to purchase automobiles; Beginning in 1920, the number of children aged ten to fifteen who were in the industrial workforce began to decline.

### **Signs of Trouble**

\*The least prosperous groups in the 1920s consisted of farmers in the Midwest and South; for American farmers, the years 1921 to 1929 were a period of falling agricultural prices (less demand following World War I) and reduced profits for farmers. Many farmers bought their expensive farm equipment with loans to keep up with demand from World War I. When demand and prices fell afterwards, many were left with large debts and farm foreclosures increased.

### **Republican Politics and Foreign Policy: Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover**

\*Republican Presidents of the 1920s favored tax cuts for wealthy Americans; despite its isolationist position in the 1920s, the U.S. government participated in decisions regarding international finance and the payment of war reparations.

\*The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 was an agreement in which 62 nations pledged to swear off war.

\*The Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 was called to restrain the naval arms race among the U.S. Britain, Japan, Italy and France. These nations agreed to limitations on the number of battleships each nation could build.

\*The U.S. adopted the Dawes Plan which rescheduled German reparation payments and opened the way for American private loans to Germany.

### **The Culture of Modernism: The Arts and Mass Entertainment**

\*The "Lost Generation" of the 1920s: Key writers included Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald; they were called the *Lost Generation* because they were disillusioned with American society during the 1920s (in fact, many moved to Europe); *the Lost Generation criticized middle-class materialism and conformity.*

\*Jazz: Black musicians such as Joseph King Oliver, W.C. Handy, and "Jelly Roll" Morton helped create jazz; jazz was especially popular among the youth because it symbolized a desire to break with tradition and genres of music.

\*Mass Entertainment/Pop Culture: Movies were the most popular form of mass entertainment; led by baseball, sports became a big business; technological innovations made long-distance radio broadcasting possible; national radio networks reached millions of Americans.

### **Responses to Modernism: Religious Fundamentalism and Nativism**

\*Religious fundamentalism was an anti-liberal, anti-secular (against attitudes/morals without religious basis) movement that gained strength throughout the 20s. Fundamentalists opposed the new morals and behaviors in the 1920s, including drinking, gambling, casual dating, and the “flapper” movement among some young women.

\*The Scopes Trial was an important test case: Scopes was a high school biology teacher in Tennessee who was indicted for teaching evolution; *the Scopes Trial illustrates the cultural conflict in the 1920s between fundamentalism and modernism.*

### **Nativism**

\*The KKK: The 1920s witnessed a dramatic expansion of the KKK; The resurgence of the KKK provides a good example of the nativist *reaction* to increasing cultural diversity of America. D.W. Griffith’s film, *The Birth of A Nation* glorified the KKK; the KKK favored White supremacy and restrictions on immigration; the KKK was hostile toward immigrants, Catholics, Jews AND African Americans.

### **Prohibition: The Noble Experiment (1920-1933)**

\*Many groups, such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and fundamentalist religious groups fought to outlaw alcohol in the early 1900s as a way to solve the problems caused by alcohol, including crime, domestic abuse, and public health concerns. Nativists—such as the Anti-Saloon League—also sought to restrict alcohol because many immigrant cultures consumed alcohol as a social activity and saloons were a popular gathering place in immigrant neighborhoods.

\*In 1919, Congress ratified the 18th Amendment, which banned the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol. Consumption of alcohol was not illegal, however, and this contributed to the impossible task of enforcing prohibition. The federal gov’t severely underfunded the enforcement of the law and only provided 1,500 federal Prohibition agents for the entire country. Speakeasies, illegal underground bars where liquor was sold, popped up in numerous cities and alcohol.

\*Prohibition gave rise to smuggling operations ran by bootleggers. Bootlegging became a wealthy business opportunity and rival gangs clashed in large cities for control of the illegal liquor trade. The most notorious gangster of the 1920s, Al Capone, made his fortune from bootlegging, spreading violence across Chicago to dominate the illegal alcohol market.

### **The Immigration Act of 1924**

\*The primary purpose of the Act was the use of quotas to restrict the flow of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe; the number of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans migrating to the U.S.

increased because neither group was affected by the restrictive immigration acts. These restrictive laws limited the number of total immigrants that could come into the country and set quotas (a maximum number) for immigrants from certain countries. For a period in the 1920s, Asian immigration was banned entirely.

\*The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: Two Italian immigrants were tried, convicted and executed for robbery...but also because they were anarchists and immigrants from southern Italy; this case illustrated a fear of radicals and recent immigrants. (This was during the aftermath of the *First Red Scare* in the 20s.)

### **The Struggle for Equality: African Americans and Women during the 20s**

\*African Americans: The Harlem Renaissance thrived during the 20s; it was an outpouring of Black artistic and literary creativity; Harlem Renaissance writers and artists expressed pride in their African American culture. They supported full social and political equality for African Americans; key figures included James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Louis Armstrong. \*The Great Migration: The migration of Blacks from the rural South to the urban North and West continued during the 20s; the demand for industrial workers was the primary pull; the primary push came from the restrictions of Jim Crow laws and segregation.

\*Marcus Garvey: was the charismatic leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA); Garveyism was identified with the following = Black pride, Black economic development, and Black nationalism (Garvey was committed to the idea that Black Americans should return to Africa.)

\*Women: Flappers symbolized the new freedom by challenging traditional American attitudes about women; they favored short bobbed hair, smoked cigarettes in public, and wore shorter skirts and new one-piece bathing suits. Though flappers were a popular image in the 1920s, they only represented a small minority of women in the country .

\*Women and the workforce: Although new jobs became available in offices and store, the percentage of single women in the labor force actually declined between 1920 and 1930; women did NOT receive equal pay and continued to face discrimination in the professions; most married women did NOT seek employment outside the home.

\*Margaret Sanger: was an outspoken and controversial reformer who openly championed birth control for women; she thought all women should have access to birth control...the Catholics disagreed.