Chapter 30

American Life in the "Roaring Twenties"

1920-1929

**Seeing Red**

Fear of **Russia** swept across the country in the years following the communist Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

The "**red scare**" of 1919-1920 resulted in a nationwide crusade against people whose Americanism was suspect.  Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer rounded up people who were in question.

In 1919-1920, some states passed **criminal syndicalism laws** that made it illegal to advocate the use of violence to obtain social change. Traditional American ideals of free speech were restricted.

Striking employees were viewed as Un-American. Some business supported the **American plan**, in which employees were not required to join unions.

**Anti-redism** and **antiforeignism** were reflected in the criminal case of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.  The two men were convicted in **1921** of the murder of a Massachusetts paymaster and his guard.  Although given a trial, the jury and judge were prejudiced against the men because they were Italians, atheists, anarchists, and draft dodgers.  Despite criticism from liberals and radicals all over the world, the men were electrocuted in **1927**.

**Hooded Hoodlums of the KKK**

The **Ku Klux Klan**(**Knights of the Invisible Empire**) grew in the early 1920s out of the growing intolerance and prejudice of the American public. It was most popular in the Midwest and the South.  The Klan was antiforeign, anti-Catholic, anti-black, anti-Jewish, antipacifist, anti-Communist, anti-internationalist, antievolutionist, antibootlegger, antigambling, antiadultery, and anti-birth control.  It was pro-Anglo-Saxon, pro-"native" American, and pro-Protestant.

It fell apart in the late 1920s after it was discovered that Klan official were embezzling money.

**Stemming the Foreign Blood**

Isolationist Americans of the 1920s felt they had no use for immigrants. The **Emergency Quota Act of 1921** placed a **quota** on the number of European immigrants who could come to America each year; it was set at 3% of the people of their nationality who had been living in the United States in 1910.

The **Immigration Act of 1924** replaced the Quota Act of 1921, cutting quotas for foreigners from 3% to 2%.  Japanese were banned from coming to America.  Canadians and Latin Americans were exempt from the act, because their close proximity made it easy to attract them when they were needed and it was easy to send them home when they were not needed.

The quota system significantly reduced immigration.

The Immigration Act of 1924 ended the era of unrestricted immigration to the United States.

**The Prohibition "Experiment"**

The **18th Amendment**, passed in **1919**, banned alcohol. It was enforced by the **Volstead Act**.  **Prohibition** was popular in the South, where white southerners wanted to keep stimulants out of the hands of blacks, and in the West, where alcohol was associated with crime and corruption.

Prohibitionists were naïve in believing that the law could be enforced; the Federal government had a weak track record of enforcing laws that controlled personal lives. Prohibition might have started off better if there had been a larger number of enforcement officials.

"**Speakeasies**" replaced saloons.  Prohibition caused bank savings to increase and absenteeism in industry to decrease.

**The Golden Age of Gangsterism**

Violent wars broke out in the big cities between rival gangs, who sought control of the illegal booze market.

In **Chicago**, "Scarface" Al Capone, a murderous booze distributor, began 6 years of gang warfare that generated millions of dollars.  Capone was eventually tried and convicted of income-tax evasion and sent to prison for 11 years.

Gangsters began to move into other profitable and illicit activities:  prostitution, gambling, narcotics, and kidnapping for ransom.

After the son of Charles A. Lindbergh was kidnapped for ransom and then murdered, Congress passed the **Lindbergh Law** in **1932**, making interstate abduction in certain circumstances a death-penalty offense.

**Monkey Business in Tennessee**

In the 1920s, states started to put a larger focus on**education**. Professor John Dewey set forth the principles of "learning by doing" that formed the foundation of so-called progressive education.  He believed that "education for life" should be a primary goal of the teacher.

Science and healthcare also improved during the 1920s.

**Fundamentalists**, old-time religionists, claimed that the teaching of **Darwinism** **evolution** was destroying faith in God and the Bible, while contributing to the moral breakdown of youth.

In **1925**, John T. Scopes was indicted in Tennessee for teaching evolution.  At the "**Monkey Trial**," Scopes was defended by Clarence Darrow, while former presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan prosecuted him.  Scopes was found guilty and fined $100.

**The Mass-Consumption Economy**

World War I and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon's tax policies brought prosperity to the mid-1920s.

Bruce Barton founded **advertising**.

**Sports** became a big business in the consumer economy of the 1920s.

Buying in **credit** was another new feature of the postwar economy.  Prosperity thus led to increased personal debt, and the economy became increasingly vulnerable to disruptions of the credit structure.

**Putting America on Rubber Tires**

The automobile industry started an industrial revolution in the 1920s.  It created a new industrial system based on assembly-line methods and mass-production techniques.  **Detroit** became the motorcar capital of the world.

Henry Ford, father of the moving assembly line (**Fordism**), created the **Model T**.  By 1930, more than 20 million Model Ts were being driven in the country.

**The Advent of the Gasoline Age**

The **automobile** **industry** exploded, creating millions of jobs and related support industries.  America's standard of living rose. The petroleum business grew, while the railroad industry was hard hit by the competition of automobiles.

The automobile freed up women from their dependence on men, and it allowed suburbs to spread out. It was responsible for millions of deaths, but it brought more convenience, pleasure, and excitement into peoples' lives.

**Humans Develop Wings**

Gasoline engines led to the invention of the airplane. On **December 17, 1903**, Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first **flight**, lasting 12 seconds and 120 feet.

After the success of airplanes in WWI, private companies began to operate passenger airlines with airmail contracts.

Charles A. Lindberg became the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean in **1927**.  His flight energized the new aviation industry.

**The Radio Revolution**

Guglielmo Marconi invented wireless telegraphy (the **telegraph**) in the 1890s.

In the 1920s, the first voice-carrying radio broadcasts were transmitted. Automobiles drew Americans away from the home, but the radio brought them back.  The radio made significant educational and cultural contributions.

**Hollywood's Filmland Fantasies**

**Motion picture**, which had been partially developed by Thomas A. Edison, began in the 1890s.  The true birth of motion picture came in 1903 with the release of the first story sequence:  *The Great Train Robbery*.  Hollywood became the movie capital of the world.

Motion picture was used extensively in WWI as anti-German propaganda.

The spread of motion picture led to increased assimilation of immigrants.

Los Angeles able to thrive because of **aqueduct system** developed by **Mulholland**.

**The Dynamic Decade**

By the 1920s, most Americans had moved from rural areas to urban (city) areas.

Margaret Sanger led a birth-control movement.  Alice Paul formed the **National Women's Party** in **1923** to campaign for an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution.

The **Fundamentalists** lost ground to the **Modernists** who believed that God was a "good guy" and the universe was a friendly place.

Sex appeal in America grew in the 1920s. **Flappers**: young women who expressed their disdain for traditional women behavior by wearing short skirts, drinking, driving cars, and smoking.

Dr. Sigmund Freud argued that sexual repression was responsible for a variety of emotional problems.

**Jazz** thrived in the 1920s.

Racial pride grew in the northern black communities.  Marcus Garvey founded the **United Negro Improvement Association** (UNIA) to promote the resettlement of blacks in Africa.  In the United States, the UNIA also sponsored stores and other businesses to keep blacks' dollars in black pockets.

**Cultural Liberation**

In the decade after WWI, a new generation of writers emerged.  They gave American literature new life, imaginativeness, and artistic quality.

**Modernism**: philosophical movement during the 1920s; a key component of this movement was the questioning of social conventions.

H.L. Mencken attacked marriage, patriotism, democracy, and prohibition in his monthly *American Mercury*.

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *This Side of Paradise* in **1920** and ***The Great Gatsby*** in **1925**.

Earnest Hemingway was among the writers most affected by the war.  He responded to propaganda and the overblown appeal to patriotism.  He wrote of disillusioned, spiritually numb American expatriates in Europe in *The Sun Also Rises* (**1926**).

Sinclair Lewis wrote *Main Street* (**1920**) and *Babbitt* (**1922**).

Sherwood Anderson wrote *Winesburg, Ohio* (**1919**).

**Harlem Renaissance**: a black cultural movement that grew out of Harlem

Architecture also became popular as materialism and functionalism became popular.

**Wall Street's Big Bull Market**

In the 1920s, the **stock** **market** became increasingly popular to the average citizen.

The Federal government did little to manage the national debt after WWI.

In **1921**, the Republican Congress created the **Bureau of the Budget** to help the president submit an **annual budget** to Congress.  It was designed to prevent haphazardly extravagant appropriations.

Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon's belief was that taxes forced the rich to invest in tax-exempt securities rather than in factories; this hurt business. Mellon helped create a series of tax reductions from 1921-1926 to help rich people. Congress also eliminated the gift tax, reduced excise taxes, the surtax, the income tax, and estate taxes.  Mellon's policies shifted the tax burden from the wealthy to the middle-income groups.  Mellon reduced the national debt by $10 billion.