Chapter 24
Toward a Modern America: The 1920s

Chapter Summary

Chapter 24 explores the complexities of the decade of the 1920s. Included in this chapter are examinations of the post-World War I economy, the Republican domination of national politics, the continued expansion of urbanization, the emergence of a mass culture, the opposition to modernism, and America’s new foreign policy challenges after World War I.

I. The Economy That Roared
   A. Boom Industries
   B. Corporate Consolidation
   C. Open Shops and Welfare Capitalism
   D. Sick Industries

II. The Business of Government
   A. Republican Ascendancy
   B. Government Corruption
   C. Coolidge Prosperity
   D. The Fate of Reform

III. Cities and Suburbs
   A. Expanding Cities
   B. The Great Black Migration
   C. Barrios
   D. The Road to Suburbia

IV. Mass Culture in the Jazz Age
   A. Advertising the Consumer Society
   B. Leisure and Entertainment
   C. The New Morality
   D. The Searching Twenties

V. Culture Wars
   A. Nativism and Immigration Restriction
   B. The Ku Klux Klan
   C. Prohibition and Crime
   D. Old-Time Religion and the Scopes Trial

VI. A New Era in the World?
   A. War Debts and Economic Expansion
   B. Rejecting War
   C. Managing the Hemisphere

VII. Herbert Hoover and the Triumph of the New Era
Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 24, students should be able to do the following:

1. Define the term *oligopoly* and explain its significance to American corporate development during the 1920s.

2. Define the terms *open shop*, *yellow dog contract*, and *welfare capitalism* and explain their relevance to corporate treatment of labor during the 1920s.

3. Explain the impact of mechanization and the deteriorating status of labor unions on the conditions of industrial labor during the 1920s.

4. Identify and describe the conditions of the sick industries of the 1920s.

5. Name two of the most significant members of Warren Harding’s cabinet and describe the roles they played in his administration.

6. Name three political scandals that occurred during the Harding administration.

7. Explain the means used by the Coolidge administration to establish Coolidge prosperity.

8. Identify the candidates and indicate the outcome of the presidential election of 1924.

9. List the factors that contributed to a general decline of interest in women’s issues during the 1920s.

10. Identify the major factors leading to the Great Black Migration of the 1920s.

11. Identify Marcus Garvey and explain the role of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Explain the term *Harlem Renaissance* and identify the key black writers associated with this movement.

12. Define the term *barrio* and briefly describe the living conditions among Hispanic immigrants in urban areas during the 1920s.

13. Briefly describe the impact of the automobile and suburbanization on the lives of middle-class Americans.

14. Describe some of the methods used by advertisers to promote consumerism, and identify the key markets targeted by 1920s advertisers.

15. Explain the term *Jazz Age* and why it is often used to describe the 1920s.

16. Explain the term *The New Morality* and identify the factors that contributed to its emergence.

17. Identify what is meant by the Lost Generation and connect the term to the major American literary figures of the 1920s.
18. Compare and contrast the impact of immigration restriction on the Japanese and Filipinos.

19. Distinguish the modern Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s from its Reconstruction predecessor.

20. Briefly identify the factors leading to poor enforcement of the Volstead Act. Explain why increasing numbers of Americans began to question prohibition during the 1920s.

21. Define the term fundamentalism and explain its significance to the Scopes trial. Identify the prosecuting and defending attorneys in the Scopes trial and indicate the outcome of the trial.

22. Offer two examples of international agreements signed during the 1920s that rejected the principles of war.

Topics for Classroom Lecture

1. Prepare a lecture on the impact of the automobile industry on American life. Consider the economic impact on employment, wages, and profit; the impact of road construction on infrastructure and politics; the impact of improved transportation on national unity; and the social and moral impact on American youth who gained independence by escaping in the automobile.

2. Trace the early development of the American motion picture industry. Many early films are available on videocassette for use in the classroom. By showing brief clips from a few significant films, students can see the rapid technological development in film production from the turn of the century until the Depression. Some films to examine might include The Great Train Robbery, Birth of a Nation, and The Jazz Singer. The inclusion of some films from the 1930s such as The Wizard of Oz or Gone with the Wind would illustrate how far film technique had come by that time. Another issue connected to this topic is racial and gender stereotyping in early twentieth-century film. This issue could be examined in both Birth of a Nation and The Jazz Singer.

3. Examine the Jazz Age within the larger context of the history of American music as well as African American history. Look at the regional aspects of the blues by focusing on its origins in rural America and its fruition in urban America. Examine the blues as an expression of African American despondency in the rural South. What happened to the blues and jazz emanating from cities? Supplement the lecture with recordings from blues and jazz artists.

4. Prepare a presentation on print advertising in the 1920s. Examine the images and text associated with advertising during the early twentieth century. What markets are being targeted? What kind of lifestyle is being promoted? Invite students to compare and contrast advertising of this era with modern day print ads. What evidence do we see in the ads of the 1920s of the Modern Era and the New Morality?

Topics for Class Discussion and Essays

1. The Republican presidents of the 1920s often identified themselves with a return to laissez faire economics. To what extent was this true? Review the literal meaning of laissez faire. Did the federal government of the 1920s refrain from interfering in the economy? Is government support of business any less an abandonment of laissez faire than government regulation or restriction of business?

2. Discuss Marcus Garvey as a black separatist. Have students begin to think about American efforts to resolve racial problems in the twentieth century. What is the difference between racial
integration and racial segregation? How is racial separatism distinct from both? What solution to racial problems will Americans embrace as a result of the Civil Rights Movement? Are there still divisions in the African American community over the merits of racial integration, of racial segregation, of black separatism?

3. How does the decade of the 1920s reflect the continuation of the urban-rural conflict in America? Did the decade hold the same promise for rural Americans that it did for middle-class urban and suburban dwellers? Does the gap between urban and rural lifestyles narrow or widen during the 1920s?

**Topics for Class Projects and Term Papers**

1. Research the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. Explore its organization under the leadership of William Simmons, Edward Clarke, and Elizabeth Tyler. How was the Klan modernized under their leadership? How does it still resemble the original Klan? What issues signaled its failure by the end of the 1920s?

2. Choose an author or a poet from the Harlem Renaissance and read a sample of his or her work. Then, place the author's literature within its historical context. Point out universal themes in the work, but also look at it in terms of the times in which it was written, particularly within the context of the Great Migration. Does the author's work make reference to southern rural African American poverty? Does it refer to African American urban poverty? Does it make statements about the status of African Americans during the early twentieth century? Does it offer hope or reflect hopelessness?

**Resources for Lectures and Research Projects**


**Audio-Visual Resources**

*Brewed in America*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
This video examines the history of the brewing industry before and after Prohibition.

*In Search of History: The Monkey Trial*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
This video examines the battle between Darwinism and Creationism that took place in 1920s Dayton, Tennessee.

*In Search of History: The True Story of Sacco and Vanzetti*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
A new look at a trial that still inspires debate today.
The Prohibition Era, A&E Video, 150 minutes.
This series is an excellent treatment of the Prohibition era with illuminating footage from the times.