

The Politics of Prosperity AND Frustration (?)

1920s, Government, Economy, and Culture

Conflict in Society

- o What do these events/concepts suggest about society?
 - Red Scare
 - Prohibition
 - Resurgence of KKK
 - Scopes Trial
- o Validity?
 - Anglo-Saxon Protestant Establishment and control?
 - Cultural Fundamentalists?
 - Religious Fundamentalists?

Focus Questions and Ideas:

- o **What role did new technology play in shaping the economy of the 1920s? The culture of the 1920s?**
- o **Compare the relationship between big business and government during the 1920s to that of the Gilded Age.**
- o **How did the nation's lasting love affair with the automobile affect American society? The American economy?**

On the Political Side

- Warren G. Harding
 - A “return to normalcy”
- Calvin Coolidge
 - High tariffs and tax cuts popular
- Herbert Hoover
- **Keep in mind the “Conservative Ascendancy” and its popularity.**
- **Keep in mind the question of WHY conservatism is popular!**

“Cultural Fundamentalism”

- CF:
 - Attempted to ensure that all Americans followed the right patterns of thought
 - Quest for certainty and predictability in social relationships
 - An order in human affairs that was familiar, comfortable, and non-threatening
 - Nostalgia for the non-industrial society of their parents
 - Fear of ANYTHING foreign
 - H.L. Mencken—Criticized This

The “First Red Scare”

- Fear of Bolsheviks
 - “The unrestrained mob”
 - Bolshevik Revolution—Nov. 1917 brought Communism to Russia
 - To be first of many workers’ revolutions
 - Americans made link:
 - “Bolshevik menace” related to domestic labor unrest and mob violence
 - Could Communism come to America?
 - Strikes in 1919 reinforced those fears
 - Participants were immigrants from S. and E. Europe

Religious Fundamentalism

- A movement of "Religious Fundamentalism"
 - Essentials in conservative Christian Doctrine:
 - The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
 - Jesus' physical resurrection
 - Second coming imminent and physical
 - Literal interpretation of the Bible
 - No allegories and not open to interpretation
- What does this reveal?

After Demobilization

- Huge business boom
 - Three Factors:
 - Machines
 - Factories
 - Standardized mass production

Production Cycle

- A self-perpetuating cycle
 - standardized mass production led to
 - better machinery in factories, which led to
 - higher production and higher wages, which led to
 - more demand for consumer goods
 - which led back to more standardized mass production.

Another Factor of Prosperity:

- **“Conspicuous Consumption”**
 - Theory by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*
 - Conspicuous consumption or **pathological purchasing** is a symptom observed in individuals in any society where over-consumption has become a social norm or expectation.
 - The Goal:
 - to identify oneself **to others as having superior wealth and social standing**

Consider, Also:

- Development of the Radio:
 - 1922: 3 million households had one
- Motion Pictures
 - 1922: 40 million tickets per week
 - 1929: 100 million
- New electric appliances
 - Vacuum, toasters, washing machines, refrigerators
- Automobile Industry

Why all the Prosperity?

- High tariff policies.
 - The Fordney-McCumber Act (1922) and the Hawley-Smoot Act (1930)
 - created the highest-ever schedule of tariffs for foreign-made goods.
- Congress repealed the excess profits tax
- Created tax loopholes
- Cutbacks in the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).
 - created to regulate big business and to look into unfair trade practices.
- Herbert Hoover.
 - encouraged price-fixing
 - believed that the government was responsible for helping businesses profit.
