

## A.P. U.S. HISTORY NOTES

# Chapter 34: "American Life in the 'Roaring Twenties'"

~ 1919 – 1929 ~

- I. Insulating America from the Radical Virus
  1. After **World War I**, America turned inward, away from the world, and denounced "radical" foreign ideas and "un-American" lifestyles.
  2. The "red scare" of 1919-20 resulted in Attorney General **A. Mitchell Palmer** ("Fighting Quaker") using a series of raids to round up and arrest about 6000 suspected Communists.
  3. In December of 1919, 249 alleged alien radicals were deported on the *Buford*.
  4. The red scare severely cut back on free speech for a period, since the hysteria caused many people to want to eliminate any Communists.
    - i. Some states made it illegal to merely *advocate* the violent overthrow of government for social change.
    - ii. In 1921, **Nicola Sacco**, a shoe-factory worker, and **Bartolomeo Vanzetti**, a fish peddler, were convicted of murdering a Massachusetts paymaster and his guard; in that case, the jury and judge were prejudiced in some degree because the two were Italians, atheists, anarchists, and draft dodgers.
      - a. In this time period, anti-foreignism was high as well.
      - b. Liberals and radicals rallied around the two men, but they died anyway.
- II. Hooded Hoodlums of the KKK
  1. The new **Ku Klux Klan** was anti-foreign, anti-Catholic, anti-black, anti-Jewish, anti-pacifist, anti-Communist, anti-internationalist, anti-revolutionist, anti-bootlegger, anti-gambling, anti-adultery, and anti-birth control.
  2. At its peak in the 1920s, it claimed 5 million members, mostly from the South, but it also featured a reign of hooded horror.
  3. It was stopped not by the exposure of its horrible intolerance but by its money fraud!
- III. Stemming the Foreign Flood
  1. In 1920-21, some 800,000 Europeans (mostly from the southeastern regions) came to the U.S., and to quell the fears of the "100% Americans," Congress passed the **Emergency Quota Act of 1921**, in which newcomers from Europe were restricted at any year to a quota, which was set at 3% of the people of their nationality who lived in the U.S. in 1910.
    - i. This really favored the Slavs and the southeaster Europeans.
  2. This was then replaced by the **Immigration Act of 1924**, which cut the quota down to 2% and the origins base was shifted to that of 1890, when few southeaster Europeans lived in America.
    - i. This act also slammed the door against Japanese immigrants.
    - ii. By 1931, for the first time in history, more people left America than came here.
  3. The immigrant tide was now cut off, but those that were in America struggled to adapt.
    - i. Labor unions in particular had difficulty in organizing because of the differences in race, culture, and nationality.
- IV. The Prohibition "Experiment"
  1. The **18<sup>th</sup> Amendment** (and later, the **Volstead Act**) prohibited the sale of alcohol, but this law never was effectively enforced because so many people violated it.
  2. Actually, most people thought that **Prohibition** was here to stay, and this was especially popular in the Midwest and the South.

3. Prohibition was particularly supported by women and the **Women's Christian Temperance Union**, but it also posed problems from countries that produced alcohol and tried to ship them to the U.S. (illegally, of course).
  4. In actuality, bank savings did increase, and absenteeism in industry did go down.
- V. The Golden Age of Gangsterism
1. Prohibition led to the rise of gangs that competed to distribute liquor.
  2. In the gang wars of Chicago in the 1920s, about 500 people were murdered, but captured criminals were rare, and convictions even rarer, since gangsters often provided false alibis for each other.
    - i. The most famous of these gangsters was "**Scarface**" **Al Capone**, who was finally caught for (get this) tax evasion.
  3. Gangs moved into other activities as well: prostitution, gambling, and narcotics, and by 1930, their annual profit was \$12 – 18 billion!
    - i. In 1932, gangsters kidnapped the baby son of **Charles Lindbergh**, shocking the nation, and this event led Congress to the so-called **Lindbergh Law**, which allowed the death penalty to certain cases of interstate abduction.
- VI. Monkey Business in Tennessee
1. Education made strides behind the progressive ideas of **John Dewey**, a professor at Columbia University who set forth principles of "learning by doing" and believed that "education for life" should be the primary goal of school.
    - i. Now, schools were no longer prisons.
    - ii. States also increasingly putting minimum ages for teens to stay in school.
  2. A massive health care program launched by the **Rockefeller Foundation** practically eliminated hookworm in the South.
  3. Evolutionists were also clashing against creationists, and the prime example of this was the **Scopes Trial**, where John T. Scopes, a teacher high school teacher of Dayton, Tennessee, was charged with teaching evolution.
    - i. **William Jennings Bryan** was among those who were against him, but the one-time "boy orator" was made to sound foolish and childish by expert attorney **Clarence Darrow**, and five days after the end of the trial, Bryan died.
    - ii. The trial proved to be inconclusive.
  4. Increasing numbers of Christians were starting to reconcile their differences between religion and the findings of modern science, as evidenced in the new **Churches of Christ** (est. 1906).
- VII. The Mass-Consumption Economy
1. Prosperity took off in the "Roaring 20s," despite the recession of 1920-21, and it was helped by the tax policies of Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, which favored the rapid expansion of capital investment.
  2. **Henry Ford** perfected the assembly-line production to where this famous **Rouge River Plant** was producing a finished automobile every ten seconds.
  3. The **automobile** now provided more freedom, more luxury, and more privacy.
  4. A new medium arose as well: advertising, which used persuasion, ploy, seduction, and sex appeal to sell merchandise.
    - i. In 1925, **Bruce Barton**'s bestseller *The Man Nobody Knows* claimed that Jesus Christ was the perfect salesman and that all advertisers should study his techniques.
  5. Sports was buoyed by people like home-run hero **George Herman ("Babe") Ruth** and boxers **Jack Dempsey** and **Georges Carpentier**.
- VIII. Putting America on Rubber Tires
1. Americans adapted, rather than invented, the gasoline engine.
  2. People like Henry Ford and **Ransom E. Olds** (famous for Oldsmobile) developed the infant auto industry.

3. Early cars stalled and weren't too reliable, but eventually, cars like the Ford **Model T** became cheap and easy to own.
    - i. In 1929, when the bull market collapsed, 26 million motor vehicles were registered in the United States, or 1 car per 4.9 Americans.
- IX. The Advent of the Gasoline Age
1. The automobile spurred 6 million people to new jobs and took over the railroad as king of transportation.
    - i. New roads were constructed, the gasoline industry boomed, and America's standard of living rose greatly.
    - ii. Cars were luxuries at first, but they rapidly became necessities.
    - iii. The less-attractive states lost population at an alarming rate .
    - iv. However, accidents killed lots of people, and by 1951, 1,000,000 people had died by the car—more than the total of Americans lost to all its previous wars combined.
  2. Cars brought adventure, excitement, and pleasure.
- X. Humans Develop Wings
1. On December 17, 1903, **Orville** and **Wilbur Wright** flew the first airplane for 12 seconds over a distance of 120 feet.
  2. Aviation slowly got off the ground, and they were used a bit in World War I, but afterwards, they really took off (pun not intended) when they became used for mail and more functions.
    - i. The first transcontinental airmail route was established from New York to San Francisco in 1920.
    - ii. At first, there were many accidents and crashes, but later, safety improved.
  3. Charles Lindbergh became the first person ever to fly across the Atlantic Ocean when he did it in his *Spirit of St. Louis*, going from New York to Paris.
- XI. The Radio Revolution
1. In the 1890s, **Guglielmo Marconi** had already invented wireless telegraphy and his invention was used for long distance communication in the Great War.
  2. Then, in November of 1920, the first voice-carrying radio station began broadcasting when KDKA (in Pittsburgh) told of President **Warren G. Harding**'s landslide victory.
  3. While the automobile lured Americans away from home, the radio lured them back, as millions tuned in to hear favorites like "Amos 'n' Andy" and listen to the "Eveready Hour."
  4. Sports were further stimulated while politicians had to adjust their speaking techniques to support the new medium, and music could finally be heard electronically.
- XII. Hollywood's Filmland Fantasies
1. **Thomas Edison** was one of those who invented the movie, but in 1903, the real birth of the movie came with *The Great Train Robbery*.
    - i. A first full-length feature was **D.W. Griffith**'s *The Birth of a Nation*, which glorified the KKK of the **Reconstruction** era.
  2. **Hollywood**, California, quickly became a hot spot for movie production, due to its favorable climate and landscape.
    - i. The first movies featured nudity and heavy-lidded female vampires called "vamps" until a shocked public forced codes of censorship to be placed on them.
  3. Propaganda movies of **World War II** would really boost the popularity of movies.
  4. Critics, though, did bemoan the vulgarization of popular tastes wrought by radio and movies.
    - i. These new mediums led to the loss of old family traditions, like the telling of an old story by a grandparent.
- XIII. The Dynamic Decade
1. For the first time, most Americans lived in urban areas, not the countryside.
  2. The birth-control movement was led by fiery **Margaret Sanger**, and the **National Women's Party** began in 1923 to campaign for an **Equal Rights Amendment** to the Constitution.

3. The **Fundamentalists** of old religion even lost ground to the new **Modernists**, who liked to think that God was a “good guy” and the universe was a nice place.
4. A new fad that shocked many conservative older folk (who labeled it as full of erotic suggestions and totally inappropriate) arrived, and the youths who practiced it were called “flappers.”
  - i. They danced new dances like the “Charleston” and dressed more provocatively.
  - ii. **Sigmund Freud** said that sexual repression was responsible for most of society’s ills, and that pleasure and health demanded sexual gratification and liberation.
5. Jazz was the music of “flappers,” and Blacks like **Handy**, “**Jelly Roll**” **Morton**, and **Joseph King Oliver** gave birth to it.
6. Black pride spawned such great leaders as **Langston Hughes** (famous for *The Weary Blues*, which appeared in 1926) and **Marcus Garvey** (founder of the **United Negro Improvement Association** and inspiration for the **Nation of Islam**).

#### XIV. Literary Liberation

1. By the dawn of the 1920s, many of the old writers (**Henry James**, **Henry Adams**, and **William Dean Howells**) had died, and those that survived, like **Edith Wharton** and **Willa Cather** were popular (well, some of them were).
2. Many of the new writers, though, hailed from different backgrounds (not Protestant New Englanders).
  - i. **H.L. Mencken**, the “Bad Boy of Baltimore,” found fault in lots of things in America.
    - a. He wrote the monthly *American Mercury*.
  - ii. **F. Scott Fitzgerald** wrote *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*, both of which captured the society of the time as it was.
  - iii. **Theodore Dreiser** wrote *An American Tragedy* and dealt with the same theme of the glamour and cruelty of an achievement-oriented society.
  - iv. **Ernest Hemingway** wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Farewell to Arms*.
  - v. **Sherwood Anderson** wrote *Winesburg, Ohio*, and wrote about small-town life.
  - vi. **Sinclair Lewis** disparaged small-town America in his *Main Street* and *Babbitt*.
  - vii. **William Faulkner’s** *Soldier’s Pay*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *As I Lay Dying* all were very famous.
3. Poetry also was innovative, as **Ezra Pound** and **T.S. Eliot** were two great poets.
4. **Eugene O’Neill** was an actor in plays like *Strange Interlude*, and he came from New York.
5. Other famous writers included **Claude McKay** and **Zora Neale Hurston**.
6. Architecture also made its marks with the designs of **Frank Lloyd Wright**.
  - i. The Empire State Building debuted in 1931.

#### XV. Wall Street’s Big Bull Market

1. There was much overspeculation in the 1920s, especially on Florida home properties (until a hurricane took care of that), and even during times of prosperity, many, many banks failed each year.
  - i. The whole system was built on fragile credit.
  - ii. The stock market made headline news.
2. Secretary of the Treasury Mellon reduced the amount of taxes that rich people had to pay, thus thrusting the burden onto the middle class.
  - i. He reduced the national debt, though, but he has been accused of indirectly encouraging the Bull Market.
3. Whatever the case, the prosperities of the 1920s was setting up the crash that would lead to the poverty and suffering of the 1930s.