

# The Modern Temper

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- ❖ **Why did reactionary forces emerge in the 1920s?**
- ❖ **What characterized the social ferment of the 1920s?**
- ❖ **How did modernism influence American culture?**
- **Postwar disillusionment challenged old values and spurred modernism**
  - Modernism appeared in Europe first, became pervasive force by 1920
  - Arose recognition of era of change
  - New technology, transportation, communication
  - Artistic movements: impressionism, futurism, Dadaism, surrealism, Freudianism
- **War also stimulated political and social radicalism**
  - Strikes, bombings, anti-Communism
  - Race riots
  - American nationalism and nativism, racism, militant Protestantism

## Reaction in the Twenties

### Nativism

- **Most radicals were foreigners**
  - Many immigrants in the workforce
  - Socialism and anarchism were popular in central and eastern Europe
- **Most famous criminal case was in Sacco and Vanzetti, Italian-born**
  - Arrested for robbery and murder
  - Judge privately referred to them as “anarchist bastards”
  - **People claimed that Sacco and Vanzetti were sentenced for their political and ethnic origins**
  - Cause célèbre of the 1920s, but evidence convicted them
- **New efforts to restrict immigration**
  - Immigration rose after the war
  - Most immigrants from southern and eastern Europe
  - Congress passed **Emergency Immigration Act**: restricted new arrivals
  - New quota laws, permanent limitations
  - Purpose: favor immigrants from north and western Europe
  - Exclusion of Asians
- **Increase in Hispanic Catholic population of the US**
  - Arrivals from Mexico peaked in 1924
  - Mexican government clamped down on outflow
  - Illegal immigrants began flowing in response to southern agriculture’s demand for “stoop” labor
  - Latin Americans were fastest growing minority

### The Klan

- **Nativist tradition manifested in KKK**

- Devoted to 100% Americanism
- Members were restricted to native-born white Protestants
- **William J. Simmons** founded
- **KKK was no longer restricted to the South**
  - Reached Oregon and Maine
  - Bigotry thrived in small northern towns and Midwest
  - Cult aspects brought drama to dreary towns
  - **KKK was a reaction to shifting moral standards**
    - Declining influence of churches
    - Broad-mindedness
  - **Influence evaporated quickly**
    - Decline in nativist excitement after anti-immigration laws
    - Factional quarrels and schisms
    - Willingness to use violence tarnished moral pretensions

## Fundamentalism

- **Adherents of old-time religion saw threats from modernism in the churches**
  - New ideas held that Bible should be studied in light of modern scholarship
  - Theories of evolution led to higher criticism of the Bible
  - **Orthodox Christians took on a militant new fundamentalism**
- **William Jennings Bryan was a rural fundamentalist leader**
  - Sparked state legislation to prohibit teaching of evolution in schools
  - Denounced Darwin
  - Anti-evolution bills only gained victory in the South, Texas
- **Climax came in Tennessee, bill outlawed teaching of evolution**
  - High-school teacher, John T. Scopes, was persuaded to accept an offer from American Civil Liberties Union
  - Monkey trial drew publicity
- **Stars of the show were William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow**
  - Determined to make the trial an exercise in public education
  - Bitter scene
- **At the end of the trial, only issue was whether Scope had taught evolution**
  - **Found guilty**
  - **State's anti-evolution statute was upheld**

## Prohibition

- **Prohibition of alcoholic beverages offered another example of zeal channeled into a drive for moral righteousness**
  - Women's Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League
  - National prohibition law campaign launched
- **Jubilee Convention, league endorsed prohibition amendment to Constitution**
  - 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1919
- **New amendment did not persuade people to stop drinking**
  - Illegal ways used to obtain booze

- Adequate enforcement was not supplied
- Speakeasies, hip flasks, cocktail parties were social innovations
- Increased drinking in women
- **Prohibition supplied criminals with new source of income**
  - Gang leaders exploited loopholes in law
  - Bribed police
- **“Scarface” Al Capone**
  - Chicago-based bootlegging, prostitution, gambling empire
  - Lavish
  - FBI agent Eliot Ness smashed his operations in 1929
  - Treasury agent infiltrated his gang and uncovered evidence of tax evasion

## The Roaring Twenties

- **Temper of 1920s arose as reactions to social and intellectual revolution**
  - Era of excess, Jazz, Roaring Twenties
  - Urban America vs rural America
  - Cultural conflict
- **Urban intellectuals disdained rural values**
  - *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis portrayed life in prairie town
  - Attacks on “booboisie”

## The Jazz Age

- **F. Scott Fitzgerald dubbed the postwar era the Jazz Age because young people were willing to experiment with recreation and sexuality**
  - Blending of African and European tradition
  - Improvisation, blue notes, polyrhythm
  - Popular among rebellious young adults

## The New Morality

- **Change in morals began with college students**
  - *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about the “petting party”
  - Parties, gin, promiscuity, speakeasies, “shimmy dancers”
- **The “new woman” was eager to exercise freedoms**
  - Discarded corsets, wore bobbed hair, heavy makeup, skirts above the ankle
  - Smoked, drank, drove, **defied Victorian expectations of womanly behavior**
- **Sex was discussed with more frankness**
  - Awareness of Freud
- **Fashion reflected rebelliousness and loosening inhibition**
  - 1919 skirts at ankle, 1927 skirts at knees—**flapper was model of new feminism**
  - Flappers seen as a sign of degenerating society

## Margaret Sanger and Birth Control

- **Most controversial issue was birth control**
  - **Margaret Sanger** saw young mothers struggling

- Distributed birth control information to working class women
- **Sanger organized American Birth Control League in 1921**
  - Changed named to **Planned Parenthood**
  - Distributed information
  - Sanger alienated supporters by endorsing sterilization for mentally incompetent
    - Sanger resigned
    - Did not succeed in legalizing distribution of contraceptives by mail, but laid foundations
    - Federal court ruled that physicians could prescribe contraceptives

## The Women's Movement

- **Voting rights for women arrived in 1920**
  - **Suffrage movement sprang back to life**
  - **Alice Paul** became head of **National American Women Suffrage Association's Congressional Committee**
  - Paul instructed activists to picket legislatures, target politicians
  - Deliberately provoked arrests
- **President Woodrow Wilson evaded amendment issue, but supported a plank in the Democratic 1916 platform**
- **House passed "Susan B Anthony amendment" in 1918**
  - Wilson supported
  - Senate fell short of necessary majority
  - **Ratification of 19<sup>th</sup> amendment took 14 more months—suffrage granted in 1920**
- **Alice Paul and the National Woman's party set a new feminist goal: equal rights amendment that would eliminate any legal distinctions between the sexes**
  - Would be adopted in 1972
- **Sharp increase in women in the workforce during WWI was short-lived, but overall increase**
  - Women made up ¼ of nonagricultural workers
  - Concentrated in traditional occupations: domestics, office, teachers, clerks

## The "New Negro"

- **Most significant development in African American life was the Great Migration northward**
  - Began in 1915-1916 when war industries expanded and experienced labor shortage
  - Steady growth of black political influence set in
  - Gained political leverage by concentrating in large cities
- **Along with political activity came spirit of protest—Harlem Renaissance**
  - **Claude McKay:** Jamaican immigrant, first significant writer of the movement
    - *Harlem Shadows* expressed defiance
  - Langston Hughes, Zora, Hurston, Countee Cullen, James Johnson
  - **Jean Toomer's *Cane*:** pictured lives of simple folk in Georgia's black belt and sophisticated African-American middle class in Washington DC
- **"New Negro" found expression in Negro nationalism**
  - Leading spokesman was **Marcus Garvey**
  - **Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)** was brought to New York by Garvey
  - Every white person was a potential Klansman
  - Endorsed social and political separation from whites

- **Separatist message of Garvey appalled W.E.B. Dubois and other leaders**
  - Garvey's message of racial pride appealed to many blacks who arrived in the northern cities during the Great Migration
- **Garvey declared the only lasting hope for blacks was to flee America and build their own republic in Africa**
  - Charged with fraudulent use of mail in fund-raising
  - Sent to prison until President Coolidge pardoned him, deported to Jamaica
  - Died in London, racial nationalism survived
- **Most lasting and influential force was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded by white liberals and black activists**
  - Participants came from supporters of Du Bois, Niagara movement
  - Issued defiant statements
- **NAACP supported idea that solution to social problems begins with informing people**
  - Planned active press bureau
  - Du Bois became director, editorial journal *Crisis*
  - NAACP's main strategy was to focus on legal action
  - **Guinn v. United States**: grandfather clause was struck down in Oregon
  - **Buchanan v. Worley**: invalidated residential segregation in Kentucky
- **NAACP launched campaign against lynching**
  - Anti-lynching law was passed in House but lost in Senate
  - Secretary James Weldon Johnson continued agitation

## The Culture of Modernism

- **Changes in science and thought were dramatic**
  - Faith in progress and reform
  - Prevailing assumptions were challenged

## Science and Social Thought

- **Image of the cosmos was changed**
  - Conventional wisdom held that universe was governed by laws
  - **Albert Einstein**: announced theory of relativity, Newton's law worked well only for relatively slow speeds
- **Certainty dissolved as focus became smaller; the atom**
  - Discovery of radioactivity showed that atoms were not irreducible
  - Mass and energy were interchangeable
- **Max Planck discovered electromagnetic emissions of energy**
  - Bundles called quanta
  - Quantum theory suggested atoms were more complex than believed
  - **Werner Heisenberg** stated uncertainty principle
- **Heisenberg's thesis meant human knowledge had limits**
  - Einstein tried to unify relativity and quantum theories
- **Ideas of relativity and uncertainty led people to deny relevance of absolute values in society**
  - Culture became a term for the whole system of ideas, folkways, institutions within a group of lives
  - Relativity: one culture could not impose value judgment on another

- **Ruth Benedict** and **Margaret Mead** spread anthropologist viewpoint

## Modernist Art and Literature

- **Modernists viewed reality as something to be created rather than copied**
- **Related features appeared in art: abstract painting, atonal music, free verse poetry, stream-of-consciousness writing, interior monologues**
  - Violate expectations and shock audiences
- **Search for the new began in Chicago and New York, especially Greenwich village**
  - **Armory Show** shocked traditionalists
  - Postimpressionists, primitives, cubists, expressionists
  - Successful
- **Chief prophets of modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein**
  - Pound: *Poetry*
  - Eliot: *Wasteland*, founded *Criterion*
- **Stein was an early champion of modern art**
  - Chief proponent of modernist prose style
  - *Three Lives*
  - Sought to capture interior moods
- **Stein was known through her influence on others, like Ernest Hemingway**
  - F. Scott Fitzgerald: *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*
- **Ernest Hemingway's novels *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* depict a search for "real" life**
  - Frenetic, hard-drinking lifestyle portrayed
  - Masculinity

## The Southern Renaissance

- **Southern renaissance in writing emerged from conflict between dying world of tradition and modern commercial world struggling to come to life after WWI**
  - Conflict of values aroused KKK, but also inspired creativity in South's writers
- **Two vital figures emerged: Thomas Wolfe with *Look Homeward, Angel* and William Faulkner with *Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury***
  - Wolfe opposed Bourbon aristocracy of the south in his writing
- **Faulkner's achievement was rooted in social world**
  - *The Sound and the Fury* was a modernist triumph
- **Modernism and southern literary culture, which emerged from WWI and its aftermath, were products of the 1920s**
  - Artists felt alienated
  - Great Depression sparked renewed sense of commitment and affirmation in the arts
  - Alienation gave way to social activism