The Modern Temper

- 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**
  - 18th 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 19th 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
  - Langson 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
  o 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
  o Charged with fraudulent use of mail in fund-raising
  o Sent to prison until President Coolidge pardoned him, deported to Jamaica
  o 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
  o Participants came from supporters of Du Bois, Niagara movement
  o Issued defiant statements
• NAACP supported idea that solution to social problems begins with informing people
  o Planned active press bureau
  o Du Bois became director, editorial journal *Crisis*
  o NAACP’s main strategy was to focus on legal action
  o *Guinn v. United States*: grandfather clause was struck down in Oregon
  o *Buchannan v. Worley*: invalidated residential segregation in Kentucky
• NAACP launched campaign against lynching
  o Anti-lynching law was passed in House but lost in Senate
  o Secretary James Weldon Johnson continued agitation

**The Culture of Modernism**

• Changes in science and thought were dramatic
  o Faith in progress and reform
  o Prevailing assumptions were challenged

**Science and Social Thought**

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