

Week 5 DBQ: The Roaring Twenties

Directions: Read and annotate the excerpts below, then answer the questions for each selection by coloring in the correct answer choice on the bubble sheet provided.

Excerpt from *The American YAWP*, Vol. II pp. 173-174

After an era of destruction and doubt brought about by World War I, Americans craved heroes who seemed to defy convention and break boundaries. Dempsey, Grange, and Ruth dominated their respective sports, but only Charles Lindbergh conquered the sky. On May 21, 1927, Lindbergh concluded the first ever nonstop solo flight from New York Paris. Armed with only a few sandwiches, some bottles of water, paper maps, and a flashlight, Lindbergh successfully navigated over the Atlantic Ocean in thirty-three hours. Some historians have dubbed Lindbergh the "hero of the decade," not only for his transatlantic journey but because he helped to restore the faith of many Americans in individual effort and technological advancement. In a world so recently devastated by machine guns, submarines, and chemical weapons, Lindbergh's flight demonstrated that technology could inspire and accomplish great things. *Outlook Magazine* called Lindbergh "the heir of all that we like to think is best in America."

The decade's popular culture seemed to revolve around escape. Coney Island in New York marked new amusements for young and old. Americans drove their sedans to massive theaters to enjoy major motion pictures. Radio towers broadcasted the bold new sound of jazz, the adventures of soap operas, and the feats of amazing athletes. Dempsey and Grange seemed bigger, stronger, and faster than any who dared to challenge them. Babe Ruth smashed home runs out of ball parks across the country. And Lindbergh escaped the earth's gravity and crossed an entire ocean. Neither Dempsey nor Ruth nor Lindbergh made Americans forget the horrors of World War I and the chaos that followed, but they made it seem as if the future would be that much brighter.

1. In the 1920s, the exploits of people like Babe Ruth and Charles Lindbergh fascinated Americans because

- a. we were a nation starved for heroes.
- b. the carnage of World War I made us long for better times
- c. new media like radio and motion pictures brought their exploits into our towns and homes
- d. all of the above

Excerpt from "On the Rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan," in *The American YAWP*, pp. 185-186

Suspicion of immigrants, Catholics, and modernists contributed to a string of reactionary organizations ...[one such was] the reborn Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist organization that expanded beyond its Reconstruction Era anti-black politics to now claim to protect American values and the American way of life from blacks, feminists (and other radicals), immigrants, Catholics, Jews, atheists, bootleggers, and a host of other imagined moral enemies. Two events in 1915 are widely credited with inspiring the rebirth of Klan: the lynching of Leo Frank and the release of *The Birth of a Nation*, a popular and groundbreaking film that valorized the Reconstruction Era Klan as a protector of feminine virtue and white racial purity. Taking advantage of this sudden surge of popularity, Colonel William Joseph Simmons organized what is often called the "second" Ku Klux Klan in Georgia in late 1915.

Partly in response to the migration of southern blacks to northern cities during World War I, the KKK expanded above the Mason-Dixon Line. Membership soared in Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, and Portland, while Klan-endorsed mayoral candidates won in Indianapolis, Denver, and Atlanta. The Klan often recruited through fraternal organizations such as the Freemasons and through various Protestant churches. In many areas, local Klansmen visited churches of which they approved and bestowed a gift of money on the presiding minister, often during services. The Klan also enticed people to join through large picnics, parades, rallies, and ceremonies. The Klan established a women's auxiliary in 1923 headquartered in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Women of the Ku Klux Klan mirrored the KKK in practice and ideology and soon had chapters in all forty-eight states, often attracting women who were already part of the Prohibition movement, the defense of which was a centerpiece of Klan activism. Members of the Klan and affiliated organizations often carried out acts of lynching and "night riding" - the physical harassment of bootleggers, union activists, civil rights workers, or any others deemed "immoral" (such as suspected adulterers) under the cover of darkness or while wearing their hoods and robes... Witnesses testifying before [a] military court disclosed accounts Klan violence ranging from the flogging of clandestine brewers to the disfiguring of a prominent black Tulsan for registering African Americans vote. In Houston, Texas, the Klan maintained an extensive system of surveillance that included tapping telephone lines and putting spies in the post

office in order to root out "undesirables." A mob organized and led by Klan members in Aiken, South Carolina, lynched Bertha Lowman her two brothers in 1926, but no one was ever prosecuted: the sheriff, deputies, city attorney, and state representative all belonged to the Klan.

2. What about the rise of the "new" Klan suggests the influence of nativism?

- a. The bugging of telephone lines in Texas
- b. The Klan's capitalization on the distrust Americans had for anyone who was not white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant.
- c. The lynching of Bertha Lowman and her brothers
- d. The establishment of a Women's Klan Auxiliary

3. What does the author identify as the primary reason for the Klan's expansion into Northern cities?

- a. The migration of Southern blacks to northern cities to escape Jim Crow
- b. Klan-endorsed politicians opening the door for them
- c. Movies like *Birth of a Nation* that demonized blacks
- d. none of the above

Excerpt from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, p. 279

There was some truth to the standard picture of the twenties as a time of prosperity and fun - the Jazz Age, the Roaring Twenties. Unemployment was down, from 4,270,000 in 1921 to a little over 2 million in 1927. The general level of wages for workers rose. Some farmers made a lot of money. The 40 percent of all families who made over \$2,000 a year could buy new gadgets: autos, radios, refrigerators. Millions of people were not doing badly - and they could shut out of the picture the others - the tenant farmers, black and white, the immigrant families in the big cities either without work or not making enough to get the basic necessities.

But prosperity was concentrated at the top. One-tenth of one percent of the families at the top received as much income as 42 percent of the families at the bottom. Every year in the 1920s, about 25,000 workers were killed on the job and 100,000 permanently disabled. Two million people in New York City lived in tenements condemned as firetraps.

Few political figures spoke out for the poor of the twenties. One was Fiorello La Guardia, a congressman from a district of poor immigrants in East Harlem (who ran, oddly, on both Socialist and Republican tickets). Receiving desperate letters from his constituents, La Guardia wrote to the secretary of agriculture about the high price of meat and received a pamphlet on how to use meat economically. La Guardia wrote back: "I asked for help and you send me a bulletin Your bulletins ... are of no use to the tenement dwellers of this great city What we want is the help of your department on the meat profiteers who are keeping the hard-working people of this city from obtaining proper nourishment."

4. Despite being characterized as a time of prosperity, the excerpt points out that _____.

- a. the 1920s saw a relapse in job safety regulations
- b. the 1920s was a time of bureaucratic inertia
- c. not everyone prospered in the 1920s
- d. LaGuardia was the only politician working to help the poor

Excerpt on Prohibition in *Anything Goes* by Lucy Moore

The reformers had also failed to foresee that once alcohol was illegal it would take on an irresistible glamour. Rather than encouraging people to stop drinking, Prohibition made them want drink. Writers like Scott Fitzgerald rhapsodized over forbidden cocktails like "the iridescent exhilaration of absinthe frappe, crystal and pearl in green glasses" or "gin fizzes [the] color of green and silver"; the sparkle of champagne suddenly gave drinkers a delightful new sensation of naughtiness; liveried bell-hops rushed and down hotel staircases bearing soda, buckets of crushed ice and thrillingly discreet brown-paper packages. The popular 1920 song said it all: "You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea."

On a visit to the United States in 1928, the English journalist Beverley Nichols observed that "Prohibition has set a great many dull feet dancing The disappearance of the "speakeasy" would be an infinite loss to all romanticists," Nichols continued. "Who, having slunk down the little flight of stairs into the area, glancing to right and left, in order to make sure that no police are watching, having blinked at the suddenly lighted grille, and assured the proprietor, whose face peers through the bars, of his bona fides-who would willingly forfeit these delicious preliminaries? And who, having taken his seat in the shuttered restaurant, having felt all the thrill of the conspirator,

having jumped at each fresh ring of the bell, having, perhaps, enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of participating in a real raid - who would prefer, to these excitements, a sedate and legal dinner, even if all the wines of the world were at his disposal?" Before Prohibition, alcohol had been a cheap high. In 1914, a highball might cost fifteen cents. Six years later a swanky speakeasy could charge \$3 - twenty times as much - for a glass of top-quality whiskey, and even at the bottom of the market that shot would cost about fifty cents (although it was free for the police). But despite the expense and the criminality associated with alcohol after Prohibition came into effect, people were still drinking...with a frantic desire to get drunk and enjoy themselves." There were fortunes to be made for those who dared to flout the law.

5. How did the writings of authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald influence attitudes about alcohol consumption?

- a. It made people think alcohol was only for the rich
- b. It made laws against alcohol seem silly
- c. It made alcohol consumption seem glamorous
- d. It made teetotalers not buy books

6. What does the drinks in speakeasies being free for the police indicate about Prohibition?

- a. Not even the police were interested in enforcing Prohibition
- b. Many speakeasies operated with the knowledge of law enforcement
- c. Free drinks for the cops was just a cost of doing business for speakeasies
- d. All of the above

The final option for thirsty Americans - and the one that carried the greatest risks, less because drinking it might lead to imprisonment than because it might lead to hospital - was moonshine. Throat-burning Yack Yack Bourbon, made in Capone's Chicago, blended burnt sugar and iodine; Panther whisky contained a high concentration of fusel oil, which was thought to trigger hallucinations, sexual depravity and murderous impulses; Philadelphia's Soda Pop Moon was blended from "rubbing alcohol," also used as a disinfectant and in gasoline; Jackass brandy caused internal bleeding. Other poisonous ingredients included soft soap, camphor, embalming fluid and bichloride of mercury, a highly corrosive form of mercury used to treat syphilis and to preserve biological specimens in museums. Most notorious of all was jake, a fluid extract of Jamaican ginger, which caused paralysis and ultimately death.

7. What dangers to Americans during Prohibition does the excerpt describe?

- a. Bootleg alcohol was easy to get
- b. Moonshine was expensive to make
- c. Moonshiners and bootleggers used often deadly ingredients in their products
- d. Drinkers could handle almost any kind of alcohol people could dream up

Excerpt from *Labor In America: A History* by Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles

Wages were an immediate cause for many of these [labor] disputes. The wartime price rises continued unchecked in 1919 - the cost of living would ultimately reach twice the prewar level - and workers began to feel the pinch despite the high pay they were still able to command. But the basic issue of union security was far less easily settled than wage adjustments. Many employers were willing to grant wage demands or at least compromise on them, but saw in any extension of collective bargaining a threat to their management of their own business. They refused to recognize union spokesmen, and widely withdrew concessions that had been granted under the pressure of war.

While the labor, government, and management conferees met in Washington, workers acted for themselves in the streets and factories of America. Before the year ended, over 4 million workers participated in more than 3,500 strikes. A general strike paralyzed Seattle for four days; Boston police walked off the job, and in the fall steelworkers and coal miners engaged in nationwide strikes. Events in Europe gave the American strikes a foreboding character. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the ensuing Russian civil war, a revolution in Bavaria, street fighting in Berlin, a Communist seizure of power in Hungary, and Italian workers' occupation of factories in Turin seemed to turn the world upside down. Many employers, governmental officials, and worried citizens saw the American strikes as the cutting edge of domestic revolution, not as an expression of justified, if long dormant, workers' grievances...Employers and their governmental allies lost no time in identifying strikers as "Reds"

or in suggesting that the strikes were ordered by Bolsheviks in the Kremlin. The Communist International (Comintern) indeed preached world revolution and had American adherents in the two Communist parties that left-wing rebels from the SPA founded in 1919. But domestic Communists, whether American - or foreign - born, had little influence or visibility in the mainstream labor movement.

8. Despite decent salaries, inflation hurt workers' buying power. Nevertheless, management's attitude towards labor was unsympathetic. Why?

- a. Because they felt that unions posed a threat to running their companies as they saw fit
- b. Because they felt workers wanted too much
- c. Communists were demanding to own the factories
- d. none of the above

Excerpt from *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation* by Judith Mackrell

To the public eye, these changes were sufficiently vivid to inspire the branding of a new breed of woman - the much demonized and much mythologized "flapper." Like Ardita Farnam, one of Scott Fitzgerald's early heroines, the flapper seemed to be motivated by a single aim: "to live as I liked always and to die in my own way." Riding the transforming dynamic of the 1920s she was seen to demand everything that had been denied her mother, from choosing her own sexual relationships and earning her own living, to cutting her hair, shortening her skirts, and smoking cigarettes in public...During the late nineteenth century the term flapper had still carried a suggestion of innocence, evoking the image of gawky, unfledged teenage girls, but even by the end of the war the term was acquiring connotations of brashness and defiance. In October 1919, *The Times* published a column about the new flapper, warning of the restive mood that was brewing among Britain's young female population. Two million of them had taken paid work during the war and a substantial number were determined to remain in employment, despite pressures to relinquish their jobs to returning soldiers. The following year, the same paper went on to question the wisdom of extending voting rights to women under thirty, dismissing them as a single feckless type, the "frivolous scantily-clad, jazzing flapper ... to whom a dance, a new hat or a man with a car is of more importance than fate of nations." Given the terrible decimation of Britain's young men during the war, newspapers also bristled with warnings of the destabilizing effect these flappers might have on the country, as an unprecedented generation of unmarried and independent women appeared to be hell-bent on having their own way.

9. The philosophy of the flapper might be summed up by what phrase?

- a. The old ways are the best ways
- b. Nothing succeeds like success
- c. Live fast, die young, leave a good-looking corpse
- d. It's my life to do with as I please without anyone else's approval

10. What in the excerpt above points to the impact of World War I on women in the post-war era?

- a. Women were happy to relinquish their jobs to men returning from the war.
- b. Women made efforts to be more like characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels
- c. Women embraced their new-found freedoms and refused to return to the domestic roles of before the war.
- d. Women were linked the right to vote to submission to their husbands and fathers

For birth-control campaigners like Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger, the key battle was for sexual freedom. Change was slow: pre-marital sex was still far from the norm for women in the 1920s, but while only 14 percent of American women admitted to it in 1900, by 1925 the number had risen to 39 percent. Contraception for women was drastically enhanced with the invention of the Dutch Cap; divorce was very gradually gaining social acceptance, and much else that had been shadowy in the sexual lives of women was more openly acknowledged. The fashionable chic attached to lesbianism in the 1920s might not have been a true reflection of public opinion, but it saw many more women daring to identify and acknowledge their sexual tastes. One of the most brazen was Mercedes de Acosta, whose tally of lovers was said to include Isadora Duncan, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Tallulah Bankhead. "Say what you will about Mercedes," commented her friend Alice B. Toklas, "she's had the most important women of the twentieth century."

11. The Roaring 20s was a time of sexual liberation for women. What in the excerpt points to this as true?

- a. Pre-marital sex increased
- b. Contraception made sex safer against unwanted pregnancies and disease
- c. Non-traditional sexual tastes became more commonplace and visible
- d. all of the above

On the Scopes Trial from "Among the Believers" by H.L. Mencken, 1925

It was hot weather when they tried the infidel Scopes at Dayton, Tenn., but I went down there very willingly, for I was eager to see something of evangelical Christianity as a going concern. In the big cities of the Republic, despite the endless efforts of consecrated men, it is laid up with a wasting disease. The very Sunday-school superintendents, taking jazz from the stealthy radio, shake their fire-proof legs; their pupils, moving into adolescence, no longer respond to the proliferating hormones by enlisting for missionary service in Africa, but resort to necking instead. Even in Dayton, I found, though the mob was up to do execution upon Scopes, there was a strong smell of antinomianism. The nine churches of the village were all half empty on Sunday, and weeds choked their yards. Only two or three of the resident pastors managed to sustain themselves in their ghostly science; the rest had to take orders for mail-order pantaloons or work in the adjacent strawberry fields; one, I heard, was a barber. On the courthouse green a score of sweating theologians debated the darker passages of Holy Writ day and night, but I soon found that they were all volunteers, and that the local faithful, while interested in their exegesis as an intellectual exercise, did not permit it to impede the indigenous debaucheries. Exactly twelve minutes after I reached the village I was taken in tow by a Christian man and introduced to the favorite tippie of the Cumberland Range: half corn liquor and half Coca-Cola. It seemed a dreadful dose to me, but I found that the Dayton illuminati got it down with gusto, rubbing their tummies and rolling their eyes. I include among them the chief local proponents of the Mosaic cosmogony. They were all hot for Genesis, but their faces were far too florid to belong to teetotalers, and when a pretty girl came tripping down the main street, which was very often, they reached for the places where their neckties should have been with all the amorous enterprise of movie actors. It seemed somehow strange.

12. In this satirical excerpt, H.L. Mencken is being critical of what that he sees in the people of Dayton, Tennessee?

- a. Their love of corn liquor and Coca-Cola
- b. The hypocrisy of their stand against John Scopes versus their own less than Christian conduct
- c. The way they reacted to pretty girls
- d. The way their ministers had to work second jobs in most cases

"The Flapper" by Samuel Crowther, 1926

The real flapper is what used to be known as the poor working girl, who, if the accounts are true, dragged herself off day by day to work until someone came along and married her. Sometimes she was a Cinderella, but more often she graduated a household drudge.

The flapper of today is a very different person. In dress she is as standardized as a chain hotel... Barring size, flappers at a hundred feet are as standardized as Ford cars. As far as dress goes, they are a simplified national product There is no distinction between the town flapper and the farm flapper - the automobile has wiped them out. There is no distinction in the cut of clothing between the rich flapper and the poor flapper - national advertising has attended to that. The rich flapper has better clothing than the poor one, but a block away they are all flappers.

The outstanding characteristic of the flapper is not her uniform but her independence and her will to be prosperous.

She is no clinging vine. I was in the office of the president of a good-sized bank on the Pacific Coast when his daughter and several of her high-school friends burst in - flappers all. We got to talking and I found these girls, not one of whom had any need to work, all intended to find jobs during the summer, and they thought that most of the girls in school would do the same. They all wanted to know how to make a living - and to have a good time doing it. That seems to be common everywhere.

Girls will no longer marry men who can merely support them - they can support themselves better than can many of the men of their own age. They have awakened to the fact that the 'superior sex stuff is all bunk. They will not meekly bow their heads to the valiant man who roars, "Where is that dress I bought you three years ago?"

The flapper wants to look well, and she is willing to provide for herself - employers everywhere told me that the women were doing better work than the men, and they do seem to be mentally more alert. All of which means that the man who marries the modern flapper has got to provide for her - she will not be merely an unpaid

servant. And this in turn means that the men have got to work - than which nothing better could happen for the country. The flapper is today our most important national institution.

13. Crowther observes that flappers of the 1920s were very often _____.

- a. uniform in their conformity
- b. poor working girls
- c. all very different from each other
- d. wealthy girls who come from good families

14. According to Crowther, the thing that distinguishes flappers from girls who came before them is _____.

- a. her independence and her will to prosper
- b. her need to have a man look after her
- c. her willingness to take advice from her elders
- d. her desire to be a kept woman.

A Letter to Margaret Sanger Pleading for Birth Control Advice, 1928

In the first place, my husband and I started all wrong. We got married before we had enough money to keep house. We went to live with his folks where we still are and thought we could soon save enough to go by ourselves. Thirteen months after we were married our first baby was born, and in fifteen and a half months after our second baby came.

We love our baby girls dearly, but are so afraid of having more that we have had no intercourse since before the birth of the second child, three and one-half years ago tomorrow.

Although my husband says he is still faithful to me (and I have seen no indication that he isn't) naturally we are not very happy; we have a good many quarrels and he has told me a good many times that he could divorce me because of my refusing him. It is not that the sexual union is revolting to me, for it is not and has not been in a single instance, but I dread the expense of rearing more children and I am not very strong and everything worries me so. I cannot sleep nights through worrying about losing my husband and it makes me so cross and irritable and naturally I feel tired all the time. Can't you possibly help me?

15. Does the writer want birth control advice in order to enable promiscuity?

- a. yes
- b. no