The Second Industrial Revolution

During the technology-fueled industrial boom from 1922 to 1929, industrial output doubled, GNP grew 40%, and national per-capita income increased by 30%

- The auto industry became the largest in the US in the 1920s
  - Auto changed pattern of city life: suburbs developed
  - Also led to development in industries supporting autos, such as filling stations
  - Problem: although Americans had an appetite for cars, how many would they actually buy, year over year?
- Electrical industry also grew quickly, as well as film, radio, television
  - Vaudeville (inexpensive variety show) often featured white actors in blackface, perpetuating racial stereotypes of blacks
  - Huge emphasis on advertising and marketing

- Economic weaknesses were present, however: overspeculation and mismanagement in railroads, postwar cutbacks hurt farmers
  - Urban workers did not share in affluence of decade; organized labour could not advance workers’ interests
  - Unequal distribution of wealth; much in income gains went into the stock market
City Life in the Jazz Age

In the 1920 census, urban population passed rural population, and the city became the focal point of American life. The biggest sign of this new urbanization was the skyscraper

- Institution of the family began to break down
  - Worked and voted, but had low-paying jobs
    - Alice Paul’s National Women’s Party tried but failed to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed
  - Women rebelled against Victorian restraints
    - Rejection of traditional values: the flapper, drinking, smoking, increase in divorce rate
    - Also, prolonged adolescence further strained the family
- The “Roaring Twenties:” prohibition, sports, and sex, and emergence of “American heroes”
  - Charles Lindbergh – first person to fly solo across the Atlantic
  - Amelia Earhart – pioneering female aviator
  - George Herman “Babe” Ruth – iconic baseball superstar
  - Jack Dempsey – world championship boxer
City Life, Part II: The Prohibition Era

Although the Eighteenth Amendment banned the manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcohol, there was widespread defiance of the law.

- Result of rural effort by Anti-Saloon League, urban progressive concern over drunkenness
  - Drinking remained fashionable among wealthy
- The Prohibition sharpened the urban-rural divide
  - Era led to emergence of bootleggers and speakeasies
  - Complexity and profit potential of supplying liquor led to organized crime
    - Increase in crime rate in cities
  - Al Capone (pictured) J. Edgar Hoover, Eliot Ness
The Flowering of the Arts

While the rise to prominence of films, radio broadcasting, and mergers and consolidations within the newspaper industry contributed to a distinct national culture, the greatest cultural advance of the decade was in literature

- Literature, especially the “Lost Generation,” reflected a sense of disillusionment with American life
  - T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, H. L. Mencken
- Harlem emerged as an African-American cultural centre – the “Harlem Renaissance”
  - African Americans migrating northward brought a form of jazz music known as “the blues”
- Literature: Zora Neale Hurston – Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Langston Hughes
- Generally, all writers assailed the conformity and materialism of the contemporary scene
  - Isn’t it ironic that the writers saw cracks in the America of the 1920s, but the economists and businessmen didn’t?
The Rural Counterattack

As the United States was industrializing and its population shifting to urban areas, social tensions heightened. Much of this “counterattack” came from rural America, and was further fueled by aggressive nationalism following the First World War

- In the city, rural Americans saw all of the evils of modern life
  - Saloons, whorehouses, ghettos, communist cells, alcoholism, free love
  - **Red scare** (1919) reflected the fear of Marxism and the Russian Revolution
    - Attorney General Mitchell A. Palmer launched **Palmer raids** against foreign-born “radicals”
    - Execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1927) capped decade of bigotry and intolerance
    - **Schenck v. U.S.** (no free speech if “clear and present danger), **Gitlow v. New York** (upheld “criminal anarchy” conviction)
  - Reemergence of the KKK, 1915
    - Fueled by postwar fears, Klan also targeted Italians, Russians, Jews, Catholics
    - Gained control of legislatures, appealed to poor and ignorant
      - Violence began to erode support for Klan nationwide
      - Is there a parallel between the Klan of the 1920s and general xenophobia and intolerance as a result of Islamic terrorism in the world today?
The Rural Counterattack, Part II: Immigration

The most successful outlets of the rural counterattack of the 1920s were immigration restrictions and traditional religious beliefs.

- Immigration in the late 1800s led to an effort to restrict further European immigration.
  - 1917: Congress passed literacy test; war also resulted in decline in immigration.
  - 1921: Congress passed emergency immigration act.
    - Limited European immigration to 150,000 per year.
      - Thanks to technology, large corporations did not need immigrants as much.
      - Growing need for unskilled labour led to Mexican immigration.
  - Fundamentalist challenge: rural Americans, alienated from city life, held onto traditional religious beliefs.
    - **Scopes trial** (1925) pitted Tennessee law against teaching evolution against ACLU.
Politics of the 1920s: The Republican Decade

Political the 1920s was a decade of Republican leadership. Beneath the surface, the embattled Democratic Party began building an electoral coalition that would eventually remain in force until the 1980s

• Warren Harding won the 1920 election — “not heroism but healing, not nostrums but normalcy”
  • Sought return to traditional Republican policies
    • Congress passed emergency tariff increase in 1921
    • Treasury Secretary Mellon pushed for lower corporate, personal income taxes
      • Government collected less tax revenue; wealthy received the biggest relief
    • Farm problem was overproduction; tariffs did not address this
  • **Teapot Dome scandal** (posthumously) ruined Harding’s reputation
    • Oil promoters bribed Interior Secretary for leases on naval oil reserves
Politics of the 1920s, Part II: The Democrats

The pace of industrialization and urbanization split the Democrats into two factions: traditional rural/western — KKK, Prohibition, fundamentalism — vs. “new” Democrats, who tended to be immigrants, Catholic, Jewish, and predominantly urban

- Height of Democratic split was 1924
  - Convention featured competing rural and urban factions
  - Nominated John W. Davis, who lost by a huge margin to Calvin Coolidge
    - However, Democrats began to gain against GOP majority in Congress
    - 1926: also made House and Senate gains
- 1928 election: Democrats nominated Irish-German Catholic Al Smith, from New York City
  - Republicans nominated Protestant, “old-stock” Herbert Hoover, who won support of old-line Democrats
    - Although Hoover won, Smith won majorities in twelve largest cities
      - Much like how writers saw cracks in the America of the 1920s, the Democratic inroads into Republican dominance in the 1920s foreshadowed their electoral success in the 1930s and 1940s