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GREER, Haskell H., Jr., 1945-
STEREOTYPES OF THE 1920S AND INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

Middle Tennessee State University, D.A., 1977
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STEREOTYPES OF THE 1920s
AND INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN HISTORY

by

Haskell H. Greer, Jr.

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Arts

May, 1977

STEREOTYPES OF THE 1920s

AND INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN HISTORY

APPROVED:

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Second Reader

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ABSTRACT

STEREOTYPES OF THE 1920s AND INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN HISTORY

by Haskell H. Greer, Jr.

This dissertation investigates the problem of historical generalization as applied to selected concepts in American history in the 1920s. Since the decade ended several broad generalizations--even stereotypes--have been accepted widely. There is evidence to support these generalizations, but there is also evidence to question them and to justify re-examination before imposing them on students as truth.

The study focuses on four stereotypes or generally held concepts:

1. that the writers of the twenties were a "lost generation;"

2. that "Silent Cal" Coolidge was an inconsequential cypher;

3. that there was a "revolution" in the manners and morals of America; and

4. that the population rolled in wealth in the "Prosperity Decade."

After an effort to assess the bases of each concept, there is an examination of evidence to indicate that the stereotypes have only limited value for the teacher who wishes

to present a soundly based picture of the whole of the twenties and not just of the bizarre. This study does not argue against the value and use of generalizations; it does try to recognize the limitations on their effective use. It also includes some discussion of the problems in formulating well-grounded historical generalizations.

Several textbooks used in college survey courses in American history have been examined. It appears that the initial views of the decade have survived unscathed for nearly fifty years. A survey has also been made of monographic and general studies of the decade to see whether the specialists still accept these concepts as reasonably valid. The sources included are: memoirs, press conferences, personal recollections, contemporary accounts, journal articles, etc.

Calling American writers of the 1920s a "lost generation" is an incomplete generalization on several scores. Even the writers properly included in the term were basically optimistic and were critical of the short-comings of society without despairing of it. In addition, these writers produced only a fraction of what Americans were reading in the decade; many distinguished authors and hundreds of others celebrated the conventional virtues and standards and sold widely.

Calvin Coolidge's silence and inactivity were deliberate policy and were very effective in the situation

in which he found himself. Fuller investigation reveals him as shrewd, witty, and at times quite talkative. He may appear as a non-entity to some historians, but he appears to have been and to have done what the voters wanted, which is close to the essence of democracy.

Bizarre and sensational behavior was displayed during the twenties. This was the exception, however, and not the common practice. Historians have concentrated their efforts on this exceptional behavior and have labeled the decade the "Roaring Twenties." Historians have failed to give substantial consideration to the desires of millions of Americans for the conventional and traditional values and beliefs. As one historian aptly put it, "The twenties have been given little chance, except to roar."

This dissertation challenges the survey textbook's treatment of the twenties as the "Prosperity Decade." The decade did witness abundant material gains for millions of Americans. There was a considerable degree of prosperity. The economy of the decade, however, was fundamentally unsound. For millions of Americans the twenties was a time of unemployment, labor strife, or loss of income. Millions of Americans did not share in the prosperity of the decade. A more in-depth consideration of the decade's economic weaknesses and flaws is essential if students are to understand how a stock market crash could trigger a severe economic depression.

Haskell H. Greer, Jr.

The problem of generalization is central to both teaching and interpretation of the past. The decade of the twenties is rich in materials for studying the processes of generalizing and of revising the generalizations. Also, enough time has elapsed since the end of the decade to enable historians to study the decade calmly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The merits, if any, of this work are attributable to the inspiration I received from the patience and understanding of my wife and mother, the wisdom of my professors, and the memory of my late father.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine some initial generalizations historians have made about United States history in the 1920s and to compare them with later and sometimes contradictory generalizations. The study does not expect to provide final and definitive answers on what the twenties were like, but to survey the range of interpretations. An effort will be made to examine the implications of these changing interpretations for teaching the survey course in United States history.

The historian's last chance to help most students understand how they came to be who, where, and what they are is the college-level survey of American history. If students are to realize that history can enlarge understanding and raise humane goals, the survey course is crucial because it is the only course that many students will take. "Good teaching" may make the difference in the student's attitude toward history. There are, as Michael V. Belok has noted, "as many ways to teach history as there

are teachers of history."[1] No matter what methods and techniques are utilized by the teacher, he will use many general statements. By selecting his material and arranging it into a series of narratives, the history teacher creates generalizations. The act of organizing research notes into an understandable and comprehensible story is one creative aspect of the teacher's work. In the book Generalizations in Historical Writing, Alexander V. Riasanovsky and Barnes Riznik submit that the "total worth of a historian is judged most frequently by the value of his generalizations."[2] Frequently, however, generalizing is an unconscious and unreflective act.

The uninitiated sophomore may learn several broad general statements about a given period of American history, e.g., the 1920s. He may accept as historical facts such concepts as "Roaring Twenties," "Silent Cal," "Revolution in Manners and Morals," and "A Lost Generation of American Writers." Such concepts certainly convey definite meanings. The curious student may pose questions to a grandparent who lived in the decade. The responses are likely to raise doubts about some of the "glittering generalities"

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[1]Michael V. Belok, "American History At the College Level," in The Teaching of History, ed. Joseph S. Roucek (New York: Philosophical Library, 1967), p. 138.

[2]Alexander V. Riasanovsky and Barnes Riznik, eds., Generalizations in Historical Writing (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 11.

presented in a history survey textbook. A problem may be raised for the teacher: "Our textbook (or your lecture) says . . ., but my grandmother said. . . ." This situation could put the teacher on the spot, or it could provide an excellent opportunity for him to bring out one of the dynamic aspects of history, that is, the constant revision and reconstruction of our view of the past. The unsophisticated student of history may view this aspect as confusing or as proof that history is not "true." However, this is one of the most challenging and intriguing aspects of any historical study. Students may be surprised to discover that some of the most significant issues and popular concepts in American history are also the most debated, for example: the American Constitution, the causes of the Civil War, the nature of Reconstruction, and the causes of American intervention into World War I. A teacher may feel some success when a student realizes that generalizations are useful tools for understanding rather than universal statements of fact. This will help the student to understand that he, too, must generalize but must do so with caution.

If the history teacher is to be effective he must first consider the nature of his task. Is he to be a chronicler or a historian? Once the decision is made to be a historian, then some goals or priorities must be established. The historian and the history teacher should

realize early in his career that his primary function is "to explain." This function involves various combinations of inquiry, description, interpretation, and criticism. For the person who teaches survey courses at the college or university level, this is a very serious responsibility. To pursue a historical narrative necessitates familiarity with, and acceptance of, several historical generalizations. A critical question that the pedagogue must consider is: Do generalizations in a historical narrative provide a satisfactory explanation? Other primary considerations are: Will a generalization lead to stereotyped notions? Will research substantiate the generalization? One of the main problems with many generalizations is that they tend to distort or oversimplify what they intend to clarify.

The problem of generalization is not unique to history; it is involved in most disciplines and in life itself. The history teacher should not try to evade the problem by restricting his presentation to a series of verifiable facts, leaving generalizations to the student. He has an obligation to provide facts to enable the student to understand how the generalization was induced. At the same time, he has a responsibility to show the student that the generalization is not "the whole truth" in a legal sense. And when there are a number of generalizations vying for acceptance, the teacher has an obligation to recognize this, even as he may make a case for one or

another of them. History teachers and textbook authors use and abuse generalizations. Historians use generalizations with various levels of conscious intention to do so.

Generalizations as they usually appear in history textbooks are stated in comprehensive and sweeping terms, and frequently little or no evidence is presented in their behalf. To cover the mass of material in a survey text, writers and teachers sometimes generalize from the generalizations of specialists.[3] A scrupulously honest historian faces serious hazards in generalizing, and he must be especially wary of two. In the first place, he can never have all the facts from which to establish his generalization inductively, and the most striking facts are likely to be the unexpected and bizarre sorts. The historian must dig to discover whether the unremarked ordinary facts outweigh the bizarre. This will not produce such startling generalizations, but they may be closer to reality. In the second place, the historian must remember that he is limited by his own frame of reference, with whatever bias and provinciality that may include. He must consciously and conscientiously try to examine the facts from other frames of reference as well: certainly from that of the generalization being studied and from those of various groups involved.

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[3]Lester D. Stephens, Probing the Past: A Guide to the Study and Teaching of History (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974), p. 71.

Although the teacher-historian cannot go through this process in detail with every generalization he introduces, a few case-studies deriving generalizations from the facts or contrasting contradictory generalizations derived from the same facts may be useful in helping students think critically and rise above their own provinciality. The decade of the 1920s provides a number of contrasting generalizations to serve as such case studies. Because the earliest writers have seized upon the bizarre and startling aspects, historians are only now beginning to see the duller more "usual" side of the decade.

The problem of generalization is not an exclusively historical problem; it is a methodological problem as well. The problem of generalization is directly related to the way teachers go about their work. Generalizations are a vital part of the historian's work. M. I. Finley concludes that a "historian cannot do his work at all without assumptions and judgements--without generalizations, in other words."[4] However, the historian who is not willing to reflect upon his generalizations runs serious risks. It would be a practical impossibility to require the history teacher to make a detailed analysis of every generalization, concept, or interrelation that he uses.

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[4]M. I. Finley, "Generalizations in Ancient History," in Generalization in the Writing of History, ed. Louis Gottschalk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 20.

When, however, the teacher is keenly aware of the difference between his generalization and the facts from which it is derived, he can use both more effectively.

The formulation of historical generalizations is a cumulative procedure. Frequently such formulations are unstable and subject to modification. Due to the tentative nature of all historical generalizations, they should not be considered as historical "laws." The search for generalizations useful for understanding what happened is never completed. Historians continue to re-examine older generalizations in the light of newly discovered facts and new perspectives. Also, no definitive proof can be given to any general statement due to the complexity of historical events, the limitations on the amount of source material that can be digested, and the ever present bias imposed either by the historian's own prejudices or by the assumptions of the society in which he lives.[5] This is not to say, however, that the historian should refrain from making general statements. William O. Aydelotte concludes that, "Historians must generalize if they are to say anything worth saying."[6] A teacher may well utilize such labels as "the Age of Reason," "the Dark Ages," "the Gilded Age,"

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[5]William O. Aydelotte, "Notes on the Problems of Historical Generalization," in Gottschalk, ed., Generalization, p. 146.

[6]Ibid., p. 151.

or "the Roaring Twenties." Such terms suggest the flavor of a given period of history without claiming factual precision.

The use of generalizations, according to Patrick Gardiner, is an integral part of the historian's craft. The use of such statements should not be criticized "provided that they are not expected to do more than they are fitted for."[7] Gardiner suggests that generalizations are important because they function often as "guides to understanding." There appears to be a considerable degree of irony in the teacher's use of many generalizations. Frequently it appears there are exceptions to given generalizations, yet the teacher may persist in using them. Any thoughtful teacher knows that few generalizations approach complete accuracy, but he also knows how useful a simple direct generalization may be in helping a student grasp the meaning of masses of facts. In any historical study the researcher or the teacher encounters an interesting situation regarding facts. Henry Steele Commager has stated the problem succinctly in a paradox: "There are too few facts, and there are too many."[8] The teacher must be very cautious about generalizations when there are "too few"

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[7]Patrick Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 61.

[8]Henry Steele Commager, The Nature and the Study of History (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1956), p. 48.

facts, but he may legitimately help the student by selecting a few facts to illustrate a valid generalization. Also, as Commager has noted, the situation is rare in which historians are able to attain complete factual accuracy about the past.

Facts are the raw material of history; however, as Lester D. Stephens submits, "the facts without interpretation do not constitute history."[9] The bare facts alone mean very little until the history teacher begins to work with them. The instant that the teacher begins to select and arrange facts into some order or pattern, he has begun to interpret and develop general statements. The revision of interpretations is a difficult task, however, as Stephens suggests, the historian has an "intellectual and perhaps a moral, obligation to revise history in keeping with the freshly uncovered facts."[10] The ongoing process of historical reconstruction and revision indicates the viability of history.

Historians and the Twenties

The 1920s is indeed a challenge for those who teach American history. It is no longer acceptable to place convenient labels on the decade and dismiss it with such sweeping expressions as the "Roaring Twenties" and the

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[9]Stephens, p. 62.

[10]Ibid., p. 63.

"Prosperity Decade." In the past the twenties has been considered as an aberration. If this is true, then are we to consider what preceded the twenties and what came after as "normal?" Are we to consider war and depression as being normal conditions in the United States? Too frequently the decade has been insulated from the rest of United States history and studied as being separate and apart.

The 1920s in American history has been subjected to considerable stereotyping by historians. There has been an inclination to assign the most readily available definitions to the decade's character. It is relatively easy to get a distorted view of the decade because most of the superficial evidence leads to easy generalization. Frederick J. Hoffman is correct when he concludes, "For the most part, the story of the decade [1920s] has been told with an improper emphasis on the most sensational of its effects."[11] The time has come for historians to accept the decade on its own terms and interpret it in its own light.

The history of any given decade implies a kind of historical unity that probably does not exist. Historical periodization does, however, serve a useful purpose. To concentrate on a particular period allows the historian

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[11]Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. ix.

to improve his insight and perspective, however, a major thesis of this study is that historians and teachers should examine the basis for generalizations to discover how well grounded they are before passing them off on students as history. A class of vulnerable sophomores may provide the teacher with a convenient opportunity to over-generalize certain topics, and thus leave students with erroneous concepts.

The 1920s was full of apparent inconsistencies which are not readily describable or conveniently explained. Arthur Link described the political situation in this way:

> . . . the political development of the period 1920-8 refuses to accommodate itself to sweeping generalizations or pat theories. . . . there were numerous conflicts, crosscurrents, and elements of confusion; . . .[12]

There were many contradictions during the decade: prosperity and poverty, isolationism and internationalism, religious fundamentalism and orthodoxy, legal prohibition and heavy drinking, and alienation and conformity.

Roderick Nash has put the situation vividly in his conclusion that historians have given the twenties little opportunity "except to roar."[13] While there is abundant

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[12]Arthur S. Link, American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1890's (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 314.

[13]Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970), p. 4.

evidence for generalizing about the decade, it is also available for contrasting generalizations. This dissertation will suggest new insights into the decade and encourage a somewhat modified view of selected topics that relate to the period. This study also suggests that historians of the twenties have, in the past, failed to examine as many of the facts as possible. This inadequate sampling has led, in some instances, to a preoccupation with the bizarre characteristics of the decade. Those who teach the twenties must bear in mind this caution provided by Paul Carter: "Every generalization one makes about the period [1920s] has a disconcerting way of turning into its opposite."[14]

How should teachers deal with generalizations? First, these loose general statements should be converted into accurate specifics. Second, careful comparisons of generalizations should be made. Third, the nature of source material, both primary and secondary, should be carefully examined. Without these procedures, Paul Ward has concluded, the student of history cannot confidently "trust his own thinking and the correctness of his resulting judgements."[15]

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[14]Paul Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), p. 5.

[15]Paul L. Ward, Elements of Historical Thinking (Washington: American Historical Association, 1971), p. 11.

During the 1950s many historians came to the conclusion that a correct perspective of the 1920s would require seeing it on its own terms, and not primarily in relation to the periods preceding or following it.[16] However, in the mid-1970s survey textbooks still contain many stereotypes of the decade. Henry F. May, James A. Nuechterlein, Roderick Nash, John D. Hicks, Burl Noggle, and Paul Carter are among those scholars who strongly suggest that the American twenties have been unsatisfactorily evaluated by historians. One reason for this, according to Nuechterlein, is that the decade has not been seen "in its own terms."[17]

Some Particular Stereotypes

This study will consider four topics relevant to the twenties and some typical textbook generalizations concerning them:

1. the alleged "lost generation" of American writers;
2. President Calvin Coolidge--the image and the reality;
3. the alleged "Prosperity Decade" concept; and
4. the alleged "revolution" in manners and morals.

The source of each of these stereotyped images will be considered. Some possible restrictions and qualifications

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[16] James A. Nuechterlein, "American Historians and the 1920s: An Analysis and Interpretation," Queen's Quarterly 80 (Winter 1973):521.

[17] Ibid.

will also be offered. New generalizations will be suggested which take into account the evidence that has been presented in this study. It should be emphasized that all the facts are seldom available and those the historian selects to establish his inductive proposition may not be representative. This study should not be construed as an argument against the teacher's use of historical generalizations. Generalizations are meaningful, however, only to the degree that the instructor can buttress them with appropriate facts. Students should learn the difference between facts and generalizations and the need for both.

Facts and Generalizations

Historical generalizations are interpretations of historical facts. As simply put as possible a fact is a thing, an event, a deed, i.e., a concrete reality. A generalization is an attempt to establish as accurately as possible what a mass of facts mean. Historians, generally, have little difficulty in agreeing that a given event can or cannot be verified as a fact. There is, generally, considerable disagreement over what a mass of facts means. There is virtually no disagreement over the facts that German submarines damaged or sank five American ships and three Allied ships carrying American citizens before April 1917, but there is substantial disagreement over the generalization that the United States declared war on Germany because she sank United States ships.

We all have to make generalizations based upon incomplete facts sometimes, and historians should not leave us in ignorance indefinitely waiting for enough facts for a definitive answer. They should, however, make it clear that their initial generalizations are tentative and should welcome further investigations and the refining of the generalizations. When the historian or history teacher considers the nature of his facts carefully, he realizes that they have to be established in the course of historical inquiry. Historical inquiry is not possible except on the assumption that the historian already possesses some facts obtained by earlier investigation.

In a democratic society it is the function of the historian to collect raw data, or facts, and formulate interpretations or general statements that can be substantiated with the data. On the basis of his knowledge the historian seeks to provide the most credible explanations of past events. The historian formulates generalizations that have limited validity. These general statements are useful until their modification is called for by new evidence. This practice is "indeed essential," according to the Social Science Research Council, "if historical work is to rise above a merely empirical level. . . ."[18]

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[18]Social Science Research Council, _Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography_ (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), p. 138.

The historian H. Stuart Hughes suggests there are several distinct planes of historical generalizations.[19] They include semantic aspects, groupings of statements, and schematizations. The semantic aspects are the easiest and most common form of generalization. Such generalizations are simply built into historical phraseology in the form of nouns or verbs, such as, "nation," or "revolutionize." It would be impossible, as Hughes suggests, to write history without "implying generalizations and abstractions from reality by using grouping words of this sort."[20] Some historical generalizations are groupings of statements. This is a definite part of historical interpretation, as Hughes suggests.

A third type of historical generalization, the schematization, is a fitting of the pieces of historical data into a pattern in terms of process or structure, such as "industrialization" or "urbanization." For the historian or teacher who utilizes this type, the generalization serves as a principle of organization to be applied to the particular series of events with which he is studying.

The history teacher should strive to construct verifiable generalizations. Such general statements should be inclusive, and at the same time be as explicit and

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[19] H. Stuart Hughes, "The Historian and the Social Scientist," in Riasanovsky and Riznik, eds., p. 26.

[20] Ibid., p. 27.

precise as possible. There are few, if any, absolute historical generalizations. Generalizations are interpretations of the raw material of history, facts. Because the history teacher is confronted with massive quantities of facts, he must be selective. He must select those which appear to be based on sound historical scholarship. The history teacher must constantly remain aware that generalizations are subject to scrutiny by others. This should be welcomed. Such a challenge may reinforce the generalization, or influence the teacher to revise his interpretation.

This study will assume that a historical interpretation is an explanatory scheme. It is a pattern or a framework from which the history teacher can introduce, explain, or conclude a narrative. It is not a law. The teacher who uses such an explanatory scheme does so because the available facts tend to verify it. The teacher realizes that the scheme may not be an absolute or a scientific principle. In sum, this study will assume that a historical generalization is a "statement of relationships--one not possessing the exactness of laws in the physical sciences, but still having tentative validity and meaningfulness."[21] Historians and history teachers do not assert that all generalizations are equally valid. The teacher should realize that the issue

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[21] Social Science Research Council, Theory and Practice, p. 140.

of generalization is central to the problem of meaning, and as Belok points out, "the central aim of historical instruction . . . is to make the political and social world intelligible."[22]

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[22]Belok, in Roucek, ed., Teaching, p. 136.

CHAPTER II

THE "LOST GENERATION:" A MISTAKEN IMAGE?

In their efforts to characterize the writing and the intellectual attitudes of the 1920s many historians have found it convenient to use a few colorful and highly publicized writers as a symbol for the entire decade. Interesting and picturesque characteristics of some writers have tempted historians to consider them as typical and thus to stereotype the entire generation. The phrase "lost generation" is frequently used to characterize this literary generation. It has been both tempting and convenient for historians to lump the majority of the writers of the twenties into this same phrase, "lost generation;" however, this practice has resulted in an incomplete, if not false, view. Many members of the alleged "lost generation" were born at the turn of the century and fought in World War I. A part of their lostness and rebelliousness was manifested in a period of temporary "exile" from the United States. Those who did not seek exile lived and worked in New York and several Midwestern and Southern cities. Many members of this generation felt "lost" as a result of World War I and the nature of the contemporary life in America. In addition to being lost, this alleged group is characterized as being alienated, discontented,

cynical, and disillusioned. With few exceptions the general public and scholars alike have been confronted with this image.

In order to arrive at a reasonably accurate account of the writings of the 1920s several questions must be considered:

> What writers and writings were most widely read and influential in the 1920s?
>
> Did the members of the so-called "lost generation" consider themselves to be lost?
>
> What generalizations seem reasonable about the work of the other writers?
>
> Is it accurate to label this literary generation as being "lost?"

Miss Stein and the "Lost Generation"

Since the purpose is to examine the relevancy and accuracy of the "lost generation" stereotype, a further note on the source of the phrase is appropriate. This phrase was originally used by Gertrude Stein in reference to some of her young, American writer friends in Paris. Actually Miss Stein borrowed the phrase from her garageman's evaluation of his untrained, poorly motivated and confused mechanic. Ernest Hemingway used Miss Stein's remark, "You are all a lost generation!" as the epigraph for his novel, The Sun Also Rises. This novel was generally accepted as a portrayal of a group of unhappy young men and women in the years after World War I. The Sun Also Rises was a popular novel, and therefore Miss Stein's phrase became the symbol

of a group of young people who were living and writing in Paris. When the novel was published in 1926, Hemingway stated that it was not intended to characterize an entire generation. "Gertrude Stein's mot," according to Hemingway, "should not have been taken too seriously." In her memoirs Miss Stein states that her much quoted words had been uttered in a context that was very different from that which was generally attributed to them. "Out of that chance remark ["You are all a lost generation"]," concludes Matthew Josephson, "made in a moment of petulance, came the monumental misnomer of the Lost Generation."[1]

Ernest Hemingway regarded Miss Stein as a dear friend. In 1964 he remarked, "I would do my best to serve her [Miss Stein] and see that she gets justice for the good work she has done. But to hell with her lost generation talk and all the dirty easy labels."[2] He later said to his wife, "You know, Gertrude is nice, anyway. . . . But she does talk a lot of rot sometimes."[3] After the publication of The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway regretted the connotations that came to be associated with the epigraph. He made

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[1]Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists: A Memoir by Matthew Josephson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 9.

[2]Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 31.

[3]Ibid.

serious efforts to correct the over-publicized meaning. His young generation was bitter because of World War I, but, said Hemingway, ". . . damned if we were lost except for deads, gueules cassées, and certified crazies. . . . Lost, no. We were a very solid generation. . . ."[4] Several members of this group expressed a conventional youthful dissatisfaction with convention and the status quo. Also a number of older writers, as well as some younger ones, stayed in the United States and continued to criticize conventions and the gap between the American ideal and reality.

Textbooks and the "Lost Generation"

Analysis of several widely used textbooks yields references and inferences not only to the existence of a "lost generation," but also to its preponderance in the intellectual life of the decade. Textbook authors usually include within this generation such prominent writers as: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and Sinclair Lewis.[5] The "lost generation" refers to American writers who formed a group reacting against American society during the twenties. A major problem in the typical

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[4]John Malcolm Brinnin, The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), p. 233.

[5]Others occasionally included are: James Branch Cabell, Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, Ezra Pound, Henry L. Mencken, Malcolm Cowley, Zona Gale, Hart Crane, Theodore Dreiser, James Farrell, Robinson Jeffers, Louis Bromfield, E. E. Cummings, Thornton Wilder, Thomas Wolfe, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Robert McAlmon. The list, as John A. Garraty suggests, contains hundreds of men and women.

textbook treatment of the literature of the decade is that of overemphasis. There were many important writers during the twenties who were not considered within the membership of the "lost generation."[6] In many instances these individuals do not receive adequate treatment and consideration.

According to some textbooks the literature of the decade was dominated by or characterized by the ideas of the "lost generation." If a "generation" is defined as all the people born at about the same time or living in the same period of time, then it is quite evident that textbook authors have misused the word when they refer to a "lost generation." Rebecca Brooks Gruver makes this all-inclusive statement: "Among American writers this was a decade of bitter discontent. They were critical of the narrowness and intolerance of rural life and of the materialism and emptiness of popular urban culture." In their text Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William Leuchtenburg comment: "The most significant and widely read writers of this period were those who confessed that theirs was a 'lost generation.'" John D. Hicks and George E. Mowry conclude that "few generations of writers have been so out of sympathy with the ideas and practices of their own society as the so-called 'lost generation.'" John Garraty concludes, "The literature of the twenties perfectly reflects the

[6]Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Edgar Lee Masters, Willa Cather, Stephen Vincent Benét, to name a few.

disillusionment of the intellectuals." They desired to "escape what seemed to them the conspiracy against the individual" that was common in the United States. John Blum and his co-authors see this generation as one which "turned its back on progress, on economics, on Main Street, and on Wall Street." Its members attacked the civilization they hated. Their works reveal their alienation and protest. In this textbook, as in the previously cited works, the reader is told that "many of them fled to Paris, others to Greenwich Village."[7]

This literary generation has been subjected to image-making and stereotyping by historians. One reason for this is that the decade has a very special place in twentieth century United States history. It is sandwiched between a world war and a world-wide depression. As a result of this, the decade has taken on a somewhat isolated position in American cultural and intellectual history.

Most Intellectuals Were Not "Lost"

Many intellectuals felt "lost" and pessimistic about the present and the future, however there was a prevailing

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[7]Rebecca Brooks Gruver, An American History, 2 vols. (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Co., 1976), 2:819. Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, The Growth of the American Republic, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2:459. John D. Hicks and George E. Mowry, A Short History of American Democracy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 713. John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 810. John M. Blum et al. The National Experience: A

optimism during the decade. It is true that after World War I there was a period of anxiety on the part of American intellectuals. However, it is also true that these intellectuals were by no means unanimous in professing this alienation and disillusionment. Roderick Nash contends that only a small minority of the American intellectual community were really alienated and disillusioned. This minority rejected the traditional American values, but they would not accept the new relativism and scientism either. Nevertheless, even this minority had some values. They started the American exploration of a view later called "existentialism." "Axiomatic to this position was confrontation with human futility and the absurdity of life. For this reason," Nash maintains, "these intellectuals' conception of themselves as a lost generation was essential."[8] This attitude held by some intellectuals was part of a conscious artistic attempt not to reject value, but instead to create from their lives existential circumstances in which thoroughly new values could be realized. These writers sought to accent the despair and disillusionment that followed from confronting reality. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Joseph Wood Krutch, and the "malcontented minority" they represented were "lost" only by traditional standards. In their own way, and on

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History of the United States (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), p. 606.

[8]Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970), p. 3.

their own terms, they were discovering new ways of defining and keeping a new faith. This new faith was not so revolutionary and bizarre as it has sometimes been presented. Within this faith was a central theme: to be able to face inevitable human failure with dignity.

Even though some intellectuals were disappointed with the United States, they were at the same time encouraged by the fact that the weaknesses of the old order had been exposed. With this accomplished, they maintained, a rebuilding could begin. The critic John K. Hutchens has concluded: "If his [the American writer's] post-World War I disillusion was bitter, it was so to speak a creative disillusion, . . ."[9] One relatively early example of this view was contained in a collection of essays edited by Harold Stearns, Civilization in the United States (1922). A careful examination of these essays reveals that the dominant view of the contributors was one of optimism and faith. In his essay on Americans, Stearns called on Americans to re-evaluate and to cherish the heterogeneous elements which made up life in America.[10] Until this was accomplished, he

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[9]John K. Hutchens, ed. The American Twenties: A Literary Panorama (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 11.

[10]Harold E. Stearns, ed. Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry By Thirty Americans (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971. Originally published in 1922 by Harcourt, Brace, and Company, New York), "The Intellectual Life," pp. 135-150.

warned, Americans would not approach true unity. Stearns attacked the emotional and aesthetic sterility of American society. He noted that Americans "have no heritages or traditions to which to cling except those that have already withered in our hands and turned to dust." Even with this grey picture of the national culture, Stearns was drawn back to the idea that the United States had "rich" as well as "disastrous" potentialities. Stearns believed a value of Civilization would be the promotion of a self-understanding among the American people.

He believed that hope for American culture lay with the young intellectuals. Stearns felt that these individuals "believed it possible to sublimate the vitality and nervous alertness" of American life into cultural greatness. His essay contains a movingly patriotic tribute to the United States. It is evident from this essay that Stearns' ideas do not fit the stereotyped notion of intellectuals in the twenties. An examination of Stearns' contribution to Civilization yields evidence that contradicts the stereotype of the "lost generation." It is evident that he does care about the United States: that he is not disgusted with and alienated from his country.[11] As Nash has concluded, "A man [Stearns] so basically in love with his country is hardly a fitting representative of the lost generation."[12] There was,

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Nash, p. 45.

to be sure, a degree of disillusionment among American intellectuals in the twenties. It was not of the intensity that is usually described.

The Expatriate Image

The issue of the so-called "expatriates" has also been distorted. It is true that as a result of the postwar disillusionment some American intellectuals sought physical separation from the United States. The word "expatriate," however, is probably too strong for the actual situation. Malcolm Cowley has suggested "exile" as being more appropriate in referring to these intellectuals. Cowley was one of the intellectuals who fled to Europe. He noted the homesick attitude of the exiles, and "their hunger for childhood certainties." In his *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's*, Cowley notes that their early books were for the most part "nostalgic, full of the wish to recapture some remembered thing." In Paris or elsewhere they continued to wish for "a Kentucky hill cabin, a farmhouse in Iowa or Wisconsin, the Michigan woods . . . a country they had 'lost, ah lost,' as Thomas Wolfe kept saying; a home to which they couldn't go back."[13] Ultimately, most of the exiles did go back to the United States which, as Cowley implies, they had never really left.

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[13]Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 9.

This exile was defiant to a degree, but it was generally short-lived. It was during this period of exile that the principal writers of the twenties learned to regard themselves as the lost generation. In their study of the backgrounds of American literary thought, Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards have concluded: "In no sense a movement in itself, the 'lost generation' attitude nevertheless acted as a common denominator of the writing of the times."[14] While in European exile many of these artists did write sad and caustic attacks on the United States. Most of them returned to the United States within a few years. "For actually," as Horton and Edwards have stated, "the 'lost generation' was never lost. It was shocked, uprooted for a time, bitter, critical, rebellious, iconoclastic, experimental, often absurd, more often misdirected--but never 'lost.'"[15]

The typical textbook account of the expatriated or exiled members of the "lost generation" does not necessarily fit into the accounts given by literary critics or the personal recollections of the exiles themselves. Gertrude Stein once remarked that writers have two countries--the one where they belong and the one in which they really live. The second country is romantic in nature. Most of the

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[14]Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 329.

[15]Ibid.

expatriates selected France as their second country. They had read of the Paris tradition in novels and in histories of contemporary art. These writers came from the United States to write--they could not do that at home. The critic Frederick Hoffman contends, "They could be dentists at home, because that was practical, and America was above all practical."[16] The American artists discovered Paris to be a friendly place to develop their talents. Hoffman gives two major reasons for the migration to Paris. First, the French attitude toward art was frequently more impressive than the art itself. Second, the migration was a part of the general strategic retreat from puritanism.[17] Richard P. Blackmur, a poet and critic of the twenties, explained expatriation as the result of a separation of cultural and political powers from economic and scientific powers. The expatriates, explains Blackmur, were reacting against a system of values in a democratic, industrial society. In his After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars, John W. Aldridge contends that the

> . . . idea of exile grew out of their needs to sustain the emotions which the war had aroused in them, to keep up the incessant movement, the incessant search for excitement, and to find another faith to replace the one they had lost in the war.[18]

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[16]Frederick J. Hoffman, The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 44.

[17]Ibid., p. 52.

[18]John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), p. 12.

Were the "lost generation" writers opposed to all aspects of American life? Did they renounce their citizenship? Were they frustrated with America in general? One of them, Laurence J. Thomson, wrote in 1925, ". . . the great majority of the exiles, while less clamorous patriots than the Babbitts at home, were probably better citizens [of the United States] in the long run."[19] If this were not true, argued Thomson, the exiles would have long since become citizens of other countries. He stated that the exile, who after years of living in Europe, still keeps his American citizenship, has provided ipso facto the strongest evidence of his patriotism. "We stay abroad, I believe, primarily because we have found liberty in the Old World. . . ."[20] There appeared to be a greater degree of this "liberty" in Europe than in the United States. There was also a more complete and satisfying intellectual life in Europe. There was less intrusion into the private lives of individuals--intrusion by the press, the churches, the uplifters, the Americanizers, and the neighbors. Thomson felt that in Europe there was a greater respect for personality and the dignity of man. If the exiles returned to live in America they would be continuously indignant about the corruption in public and private life, the incompetence

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[19] Laurence J. Thomson, "Why I Live Abroad," American Mercury 5 (May 1925):110.

[20] Ibid., p. 111.

and crookedness of the courts, and the "hundred and one other indecencies of daily life. . . ." Thomson noted it would be impossible to be indignant and happy at the same time.

Both Thomson and novelist Louis Bromfield felt that living in Europe made them more patriotic Americans. Writing in the Saturday Review of Literature in 1927, Bromfield stated that after two years in Europe he "feels more American than I ever felt before, even in those days when I dwelt in the sacred Middle West. . . ." He believed that, except for a "few ghosts left from an older generation," there was not any such thing as an American expatriate.[21]

Bromfield suggested the economic motive as the reason for the migration to Europe. In Europe the writer could find suitable living conditions, friendly people, music, good plays, good pictures, and intellectual companionship. Bromfield offered this interesting conclusion:

> In these days an American abroad tends only toward becoming more American: he is a fascinating spectacle, more sharply defined, more definite in color by his very background, than his brother at home.[22]

Another American writer who chose Paris in the 1920s was Edward Fisher. Fisher contends that the expatriates had good reasons for their migration; "Everybody was doing

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[21]Louis Bromfield, "Expatriate--Vintage, 1927," Saturday Review of Literature 3 (19 March 1927), p. 657.

[22]Ibid., p. 659.

it."[23] Among these reasons he lists: the enforcement of prohibition in the United States; high prices in the United States, low prices in Paris; "stuffy conformity" in the United States, in religion, politics, education, and sex; censorship of books; too much repression in the family--children were supposed to be seen, not heard--"the lid of middle-class niceness holding us down in homes, schools, and colleges;" and most important, the "sovereign power of geography" to separate us from our inhibitions and our inhibitors. "We weren't the Lost Generation that Gertrude Stein invented and Hemingway borrowed for six weeks to write about a bunch of drunks. . . . We weren't lost. . . . We were just living it up."[24] Fisher's logic appears to be rather absurd. He complained about the "stuffy conformity" in the United States, yet he traveled to Paris because "everybody was doing it."

Malcolm Cowley traces their interest in Europe back to their early adult years. Most of them became interested in foreign life and letters while they were still in college. This interest was a part of their reaction against the provincial dullness of their own backgrounds. When World War I began in 1914 many of them served in foreign armies. In general they liked what they saw in their early European

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[23]Edward Fisher, "Lost Generations, Then and Now," Connecticut Review 6 (October 1972):13.

[24]Ibid., p. 22.

experiences. Various writers gave different reasons for seeking exile. Journalist Frank Ward O'Malley announced he was leaving because of prohibition, gangsterism, the machinations of the Rotary Club, the overpaid servants, and an unsatisfactory climate. Konrad Bercovici liked Paris because Parisians knew how to play, and most Americans did not. After he completed This Side of Paradise, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald left for Paris, gave parties, were partied, and "were altogether much gayer and less nostalgic than the undergraduates of whom Scott wrote."[25]

Why the "Lostness"

What were the factors responsible for the alienation, disillusionment, and "lostness"? There are several which must be considered. One of these is what might be called a loss of faith. World War I made it difficult to maintain an optimistic faith in the future. As a result of the war, some individuals analyzed for the first time their suspicions and fears. This loss of faith was not restricted to Americans, however. The critic Joseph Wood Krutch was one of several who maintained that this fundamental reason for intellectual unrest was world-wide.[26] One of the most frequently cited factors is World War I itself. It is clear

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[25]Irene Cleaton and Allen Cleaton, Books and Battles: American Literature, 1920-1930 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 36.

[26]Henry May, ed., The Discontent of the Intellectuals: A Problem of the Twenties (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963), p. 58.

that the 1914-1920 crisis period was directly related to the uneasiness of the decade. Many Americans were frustrated with the failure of the war to achieve lasting objectives. But, a study of the pre-war period also yields evidence of intellectual dissent.[27] Russell Blankenship maintains that there would have been a lost generation "without the titanic losses and horror incident to world conflict. . . ." The lost generation would have been just as lost, but not so well publicized. He concludes that, "The Sun Also Rises is more than a vivid record of an incident in the life of the Lost Generation. It literally is the Lost Generation."[28] World War I was a disastrous episode, but it is not sufficient to explain the intellectual disillusionment of the 1920s.

A second factor is that these Americans were misled and deceived. They were naive; they accepted European criticisms that they did not really understand. They evaluated the entire society by one-sided standards. Vernon Lewis Parrington and Bernard DeVoto are among those who

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[27]Evidence of this can be found in Walter Lippman's Preface to Politics (1913) and H. G. Wells' "The Contemporary Novel," in Atlantic Monthly, CIX, January 1912. In 1913 Max Eastman and Floyd Dell took over the magazine The Masses, and made it into a strong advocate of new art and literature. In 1912 Harriet Monroe founded the magazine Poetry which reflected the rebellious atmosphere.

[28]Russell Blankenship, American Literature As An Expression of the National Mind (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949), p. 736.

defend this thesis. A problem with this argument is that it is too simple. The adherents assume that in such a judgement, all of the dissenting intellectuals can be grouped together.[29]

A third explanation of the disillusionment is that these intellectuals were correct in their judgement. There were indeed many unattractive characteristics of American society in the twenties. However, such factors as increased economic prosperity, freedom to dissent, world peace, and disarmament could not be ignored.

Part of the distorted view of the twenties is the concept that intellectuals of the decade were very disappointed and disgusted with their homeland and its past. Many intellectuals of the decade were patriotic. One of the strongest themes in their writing is nationalism. It is fundamental to note that the great majority of American intellectuals did not discard democratic ideas in general. Most of them believed democracy could be made to work. Joseph Wood Krutch is usually included in an expanded list of the "lost generation" membership.[30] Krutch was an American critic and journalist, born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1893. He was educated at the University of Tennessee and

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[29] May, ed., p. 56.

[30] In his The Modern Temper (1929) Krutch explains his negative attitudes. However, in the later edition of this work (1956) he revised his earlier pessimism.

Columbia. While on the staff of The Nation, he served as drama editor (1924-1932) and associate editor (1932-1937). In 1962 Krutch wrote of his generation: "We were at bottom fundamentally optimistic, and we were gay crusaders. . . . The future was bright, and the present was good fun at least."[31]

Some Arguments Against the Stereotype

One of the strongest attacks on the "lost generation" stereotype comes from a contemporary of the period, biographer Matthew Josephson. In his memoirs he states emphatically that "We must dispose of the fallacy of the Lost Generation once and for all."[32] Josephson concedes that "we looked for 'a change of skies.' But this did not mean we were 'lost.'" He explains that it was not "we [who] lost the flower of our youth" in World War I, but the Western Allies and the Central Powers. Josephson argues that it is nonsense to maintain that a generation of American youth were "lost" or driven to despair as a result of such a brief war. He concedes that there was some relaxation from social constraints during the war. However, this was not a new phenomenon. "Where," asks Josephson, "is there any evidence that the young man of 1919-1929 was more libidinous than l'homme moyen sensual of other times?" The "ridiculous tag," lost generation, has

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[31]Paul Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 6.

[32]Josephson, p. 6.

hung on, Josephson suggests in his memoirs, because the people to whom it was applied accepted it in a "perverse or boastful spirit."[33]

Literary critic W. M. Frohock has concluded that a certain amount of exhibitionism characterized the lost generation, as it does most Bohemian attitudes. The lost generation knew, as did the Beats of the 1960s, that it had the public's attention and "offered no more objection than the Beats did."[34] The critic John K. Hutchens has concluded that the younger literary generation took advantage of the romance of disillusion and "had a fine, fevered time with it . . . whether they were really lost or not, they enjoyed enormously the drama of thinking so."[35]

In his Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's, Malcolm Cowley states that the phrase "lost generation" is as useful as any half-accurate tag can be. The phrase was useful for the older generation because they were looking for words to express their feelings of apprehension that the postwar youth had a perspective on life that was different from their own. In addition to this, Cowley explains, the phrase was useful to the younger generation.

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[33]Ibid.

[34]W. M. Frohock, Strangers to This Ground: Cultural Diversity in Contemporary American Writing (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1961), p. 141.

[35]Hutchens, ed., p. 13.

The phrase expressed their feelings of separation from older writers and of kinship with one another.

> In the slogan the noun was more important than the adjective. They might or might not be lost, the future would decide that point; but they had already had the common adventures that made it possible to describe them as a generation.[36]

Cowley submits that his generation was never united as a single group or school. Cowley's generation felt a keen sense of difference in regard to writers older than themselves. In a sense they formed a literary generation. These writers were not a lost generation in the sense of being unhappy or frustrated. "The truth was that they had an easy time of it, even as compared to the writers who immediately preceded them."[37]

To a degree Cowley finds Miss Stein's phrase an appropriate description. He maintains that the generation was lost because it was uprooted, schooled away and almost wrenched away from its attachment to any region or tradition. The generation was lost because its training had prepared it for a different world from that which existed after World War I. It was lost because it would not accept the traditional guides to conduct and because it formed a false image of society and the writer's place in it. Cowley asserts that this was a lucky generation. World War I served as a watershed that the young writers crossed in

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[36]Cowley, p. 4.

[37]Ibid., p. 8.

their training, and it gave them a sense of having lived in two different eras. The war made these writers a generation because it changed their world and gave them "shares in a rich fund of common emotions," Cowley suggests.

In his After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars, John W. Aldridge suggests that there was a lost generation, "but not in the traditional sense." World War I made a significant impact on these young writers. It

> . . . made their loss more of a loss of inhibition and gave a desperate sadness to everything they did. The war wrenched them away from the land of their childhood. It carried them forward in the long process of disinheritance which began in school, . . . and continued through their college years when they each took on the stamp of fragile aestheticism that eventually made them more at home in Gertrude Stein's salon than on Main Street.[38]

Arthur Mizener writes that the "lost generation" is a misleading name for them (Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and others), as perhaps a name that "reflects the judgement of an age on itself always is."[39] Mizener maintains that the phrase is useful to the degree that it describes the generation's own feelings "that there was nothing in the tradition they inherited, nothing in the conventional moral attitudes or political assumptions current in America in their time, that they could accept."

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[38] Aldridge, p. 10.

[39] Arthur Mizener, "The Lost Generation," in A Time of Harvest: American Literature, 1910-1960, ed. Robert E. Spiller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 73.

These writers believed they had to begin again to work out a code of personal behavior that they could honor, and to create an idea of the purposes of American society they could respect. "All I wanted to know," says Jacob Barnes, the hero in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, "was how to live in [the world]. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about."[40]

However, the generation was not lost in the sense that it felt hopeless with its situation. F. Scott Fitzgerald's biographer, Arthur Mizener, has concluded, "On the contrary, though it was fashionable in the twenties to talk about being disillusioned, these writers were filled with a typically American kind of energy and optimism."[41] Fitzgerald said of his hero, Jay Gatsby, "He had a heightened sensitivity to the promises of life." "If they [the Lost Generation writers] were lost," Mizener contends, "they were lost as explorers are, not as the damned are."[42]

Some who defend the notion of a lost generation argue that the literature of the twenties reflects the culture of the decade. This argument is the target of Bernard DeVoto's The Literary Fallacy. This author defines "literary fallacy" as essentially "the belief that literature

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[40]Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 148.

[41]Mizener, "The Lost Generation," in Spiller, ed., Harvest, p. 74.

[42]Ibid., p. 75.

is the measure of culture." DeVoto examines ideas, dogmas, and conclusions which appear and reappear in much of the literature of the twenties. The central thrust of DeVoto's argument is that "the work of the leading and characteristic writers of the 1920s [H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, and Thomas Wolfe] does not correspond to American life in the twenties."[43] He maintains that these authors have created myths about life in the twenties. The reason for this is that these authors are guilty of a common error: they failed to report objectively the nature of life. Their work does not describe American life in the twenties. It does not serve as a valid guide for historians who hope to explain the 1920s to future generations. The "literary fallacy" strongly suggests that a culture may be understood and evaluated solely by means of its literature,

> . . . that literature embodies truly and completely both the values and the content of a culture, that literature is the highest expression of a culture and that literature is the measure of life, and finally that life is subordinate to literature.[44]

Carlos Baker, Hemingway's biographer, maintains that Hemingway was not so completely involved in the "lost generation" concept as some textbook accounts suggest.[45]

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[43]Bernard DeVoto, The Literary Fallacy (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1969), p. 22.

[44]Ibid., p. 43.

[45]The texts cited in note 7 associate Hemingway with the "lost generation."

Paul Romaine, a Midwestern booksalesman, asked Hemingway to stop writing about lost generations and bulls. Hemingway replied that he had once spent six weeks writing a book about a few drunks, but had not since been preoccupied with this so-called (but not by him) lost generation. Baker concludes that Hemingway "was neither maladjusted nor apologetic, he counted himself a part of the world he lived in."[46]

Several convenient labels have been used to describe and characterize the writers of the 1920s. Among the best known are the lost generation, the nervous generation, the World War I generation, and the anxious generation.[47] Any one of these would probably apply if historians were quite precise in their selection of members. However, historians cannot, as has been done in the past, equate all of the writers of the decade with a "lost generation." Whatever label is applied, it is basic to remember that these authors were distinguished by an uncommon degree of creativeness, artistic, as well as intellectual. This generation applied itself to achieve high artistic ends. Its members were convinced that the forms and practice of their art must be taken seriously. As critic Wallace Stegner has concluded, "Their spokesmen par excellence were Hemingway and

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[46]Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 226.

[47]These labels are used by Alfred Kazin, Roderick Nash, Malcolm Cowley, and Wallace Stegner, respectively.

Fitzgerald, and these in spite of their limitations were spokesmen and artists of formidable stature."[48]

These artists were not lost. They knew where they were going. In an essay on the Lost Generation, critic Arthur Mizener has concluded

> . . . these writers were filled with a typically American kind of energy and optimism. Their scorn of what seemed to them the provincialism of American manners and the narrow hypocrisy of American public life in their times is the scorn of people confident in their idealism.[49]

Even in his college days F. Scott Fitzgerald had remarked to Edmund Wilson: "I want to be one of the greatest writers who ever lived, don't you?"[50]

Substantial evidence points to the fact that the writers and artists of this intellectual generation created the mood of the generation. This mood of the elite writers and their audience was created by such books as <u>The Sun Also Rises</u>. The idea of being "lost" was convenient to these writers. "There was nothing lost," as Roderick Nash has written, "about a generation of creative intellectuals like those who shaped American culture in the 1920's." The quantity and quality of their work was remarkable. These writers were shocked and dismayed by World War I, but they discovered the artistic implications of being lost. In some

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[48]Wallace Stegner, "The Anxious Generation," <u>English Journal</u> 38 (1949):1.

[49]Mizener, p. 74.

[50]Arthur Mizener, "The Novel in America: 1920-1949," <u>Perspectives USA</u> No. 15 (Spring 1956):136.

instances they utilized their postwar disillusionment to fashion their literary outpouring.

For years historians have not made clear the relationship between World War I and the American intellectuals. It is clear that there was a degree of disillusionment with the war, but this disillusionment was not with all American culture, thought, and tradition. However, in the past it has been convenient to draw unsubstantiated relationships and conclusions relating the war and the intellectual climate of the twenties. In one sense it is fair to refer to some of these writers as a generation. They had more experiences in common than other generations of writers in America. They had been shocked by World War I; many had fought in it. As a result of this war experience they were given a new perspective on their native backgrounds. They were writing at a time when it was easy for authors to be published and easy to earn a living from their works.

Writing in 1944, the critic Malcolm Cowley suggested six adjectives to characterize the "interwar generation:"

> . . . international in their interests; technically expert, lyrical rather than naturalistic, rebellious but not revolutionary, progressively disillusioned, and passive rather than active in their mood.[51]

When serious consideration is given to their literary merits and achievements, it seems unreasonable to continue writing

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[51]Malcolm Cowley, "The Generation That Wasn't Lost," College English 5 (February 1944):234.

of the American writers of the 1920s as a "lost generation." It is very misleading to conclude that most intellectuals were completely disillusioned with life in the United States during the twenties. There is a distinct conflict between textbook generalizations concerning the American intellectuals and the reality of the matter. During the decade the greater number of American intellectuals were reluctant to abandon their faith in the individual and in self-government which had been the case of American liberals for so long.

If historians do concede that there was a "lost generation," they must realize that its membership cannot be quantitatively described as "many" or "most." They must realize that they were dealing with a minority.

It is evident that there was a migration of Americans to Paris and other European cities in the twenties. "But the alienated artist, the fledgling writer, or the rebellious painter was in a distinct minority."[52] Warren Susman has estimated that of the Americans who settled in Paris at any given time in the decade, no more than ten to twenty percent were associated with the expatriates of the "lost generation."[53]

The period of "exile" or "expatriation" was generally short-lived. It was not a movement in itself. As

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[52]Burl Noggle, "Configurations of the Twenties," in _The Reinterpretation of American History and Culture_, eds. William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson, Jr. (Washington: National Council for the Social Studies, 1973), p. 480.

[53]Ibid.

Horton and Edwards conclude, ". . . almost to a man they drifted back within a few years out of sheer homesickness."[54] If American intellectuals were disillusioned, they were not alone. One of them, Malcolm Cowley has stated that while in Paris he and his followers found European intellectuals to be even more disillusioned than those at home.

It would appear that there were about as many reasons for expatriation (or self-imposed exile) as there were expatriates. It is not valid to conclude that all or most of the American writers who lived in Europe in the twenties had lost all faith in the United States. They were young, excitable, experimental, and creative. They were seeking release of their literary talents in various avenues. The lure of Paris offered an invitation and these writers welcomed the invitation. Writing in 1933, Matthew Josephson suggested that they were "merely swimming on the post-war currents of unrest, folly, and violent transition."[55]

The works of the "lost generation" were not the most widely read books of the 1920s. An analysis of the best selling fiction works of the decade yields substantial evidence to support this contention.[56] A year-by-year

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[54]Horton and Edwards, p. 329.

[55]Matthew Josephson, "The Younger Generation: Its Young Novelists," Virginia Quarterly Review 9 (1933):249.

[56]Alice Payne Hackett defines "best seller" as a book that has sold one million copies or more. See her 60 Years of Best Sellers: 1895-1955 (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1956), p. 11.

survey of the decade reveals that there were many other works which were more widely read than those of the so-called "lost generation." The list of the top ten best sellers of 1920 does not contain any works by the "lost generation." The lists for 1921-1924 do contain Sinclair Lewis's Main Street (1921), Babbitt (1922, 1923), and Arrowsmith (1924). Lewis's Elmer Gantry is listed in 1927, as well as his Dodsworth in 1929.[57]

It is evident then that Americans were not as totally involved with works by or about the "lost generation" as one might be led to believe. The question arises: What were Americans reading in the 1920s? They were reading action-packed adventures by Zane Grey and S. S. Van Dine, James Oliver Curwood's adventures, the Reader's Digest, as well as novels by the English writer A. S. M. Hutchinson. The Red Lamp (1925), a mystery by Mary Roberts Rhinehart, sold over a million copies in one year.[58] Those readers of non-fiction were reading John Maynard Keynes's The Economic Consequences of the Peace. Keynes's work was one of the most popular books in 1920. For aesthetic reasons many were also reading Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray.

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[57]James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 224-245 passim.

[58]Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Modern America: A Social and Intellectual History of the American People From 1865 (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), p. 476.

Thoughts of the general reader were also affected by Leaves of Grass and The Rubaiyat. Ethel Dell's romance, The Lamp in the Desert was also widely read in 1920. Edith Wharton's nostalgic The Age of Innocence, an account of New York society in the 1870s, also claimed a large reading audience. Black Oxen, by Gertrude Atherton, claimed the largest reading audience in 1923.[59] American readers were excited by Mrs. Atherton's account of a fifty-eight-year-old woman who resumed her youthful attractiveness as a result of glandular surgery, and was so attractive that she attracted proposals from the United States and abroad. A. S. M. Hutchinson's If Winter Comes sold more copies in 1922 than any other new novel.

Book sales in the early twenties indicate a popular desire to gain an understanding of the past in order to cope with the present. In 1921 and 1922 H. G. Wells's Outline of History led all non-fiction sales. Hendrick Van Loon's Story of Mankind was a best seller in 1922. The Mind in the Making, by James Harvey Robinson, was among the best sellers in 1923. Intellectual Americans were reading Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West, while more optimistic readers were turning to Charles and Mary Beards' Rise of American Civilization.[60]

There was, also, an increased interest and concern with science. It was thought that explanations of recent

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[59] Hart, p. 333. [60] Ibid., p. 238.

changes could be found in history, science, and philosophy. Among the most widely purchased works in these areas were: J. Arthur Thompson's four volume Outline of Science, Paul De Kruif's Microbe Hunters, Will Durant's The Story of Philosophy and The Mansions of Philosophy, and George A. Dorsey's best seller, Why We Behave Like Human Beings.

Listed among the ten most popular nonfiction books in 1923, 1924, and 1925 was Giovanni Papinni's Life of Christ. Bruce Barton's account of Christ's life, The Man Nobody Knows, was even more widely read. Other books that attracted a large reading audience were Irving Bacheller's A Man For the Ages, an account of Lincoln's youth; Cornelia Stratton Parker's An American Idyll; and the patriotic The Americanization of Edward Bok by Bok. Edna Ferber's So Big was the most widely read novel of 1924.[61] In this decade when the newest values and standards were considered by some to be the best, there was still a large reading public who honored the simple but proven values of honesty, decency, morality, and heroism.

Whatever phrase is used to describe this literary generation historians should be constantly aware of the fact that twentieth century American literature was greatly enriched by their contributions. In this sense their contribution assumes much more importance than whether they are mistakenly called lost. The critic Ihab Hassan has

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[61] Ibid., p. 242.

noted that it is the prerogative of each generation to consider its predicament unique.[62] This is particularly true for the generation under consideration. As has been previously noted these writers had several experiences in common. Possibly the most significant aspect of this generation is that it was responsible for a rennaissance in American literature. These authors are responsible for creating a rich and lasting literature of the twenties. Arthur Mizener is quite correct when he concludes

> The most significant thing about these writers then, was their independently achieved but shared conviction that it was possible for an American, writing directly out of American experience, to produce major novels.[63]

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[62] Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 3.

[63] Mizener, "The Lost Generation," p. 75.

CHAPTER III

CALVIN COOLIDGE: THE MAN AND THE IMAGE

"We never paid any attention to what the books said about Harding and Coolidge," a former coed once recalled, "because we knew the professors were in a hurry to get to Roosevelt, and the term paper was going to be on the New Deal."[1] The administrations of Presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge are only two topics of the 1920s that have been somewhat oversimplified. A review of the professional literature on the first three decades of twentieth century United States history reveals that significant aspects of the period have been neglected or distorted by historians.[2] For many years it was taken for granted that President Coolidge was basically a passive observer during the American twenties, rather than a participant. In many textbook accounts the student is confronted with incomplete and inaccurate analyses of the Coolidge administration; often lectures leave students with similar treatment of Coolidge. In some instances the characterization is almost

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[1]Paul A. Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 38.

[2]John D. Hicks, "Research Opportunities in the 1920's," Historian 25 (November 1962):1.

unbelievable. Often this twenty-fifth president is explained as being convenient for the period. The purpose of this study is not a full evaluation of Calvin Coolidge but an examination of some aspects of the man and his presidency which may lead a teacher to pause before settling for glib, even snide, generalizations.

The Textbook Image

Before an attempt is made at the stated purpose, an inquiry into selected textbook accounts is in order. Rembert Patrick and his co-authors use such expressions as "complacency" and "do-nothingism" in their account of Coolidge's administration. Oscar Handlin submits that Coolidge was a Yankee who "believed in minding his own business." He is also described as being "moody, secretive, and stingy." John A. Garraty refers to Coolidge as "the darling of the conservatives." He is also characterized as being "antedeluvian and inert." In a summary statement Garraty concludes, "He [Coolidge] preferred to follow public opinion and hope for the best." John M. Blum and his co-authors contend that the accession of Coolidge to the White House was a great asset to the Republicans because it "gave them a new President who cloaked normalcy with respectability." These authors conclude, "Silence, inactivity, gentility, complacency--those were the sum and the substance of the Coolidge calculus." Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager maintain that Coolidge was the most "negative"

chief executive the United States had had. This account would have the reader believe that Coolidge was "dour, . . ., and unimaginative."[3]

"And We Created A Character"

Research into detailed secondary accounts, as well as in primary sources, reveals considerable evidence to challenge some of these descriptions. Coolidge was a complex individual, not easily understood. As recently as 1973 Burl Noggle noted that in spite of his limited capabilities Coolidge was in several ways a man of

> . . . perseverance, ability, and complexity, and any history of the Twenties should not, as is often done, merely dismiss him with a joke or view him solely as a symbol for a jaded nation's search for simple, bucolic, virtue in the presidency following the departure of the Harding crowd.[4]

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[3]Rembert W. Patrick et al., The American People: A History Since 1865, 2 vols. (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1962), 2:412. Oscar Handlin, The History of the United States, 2 vols. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 2:394. John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of The United States (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 816. John M. Blum et al., The National Experience: A History of the United States (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), pp. 589, 590. Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 2:520. In an article in the Journal of American History, Robert H. Zeigler cites Morison as describing Coolidge in these terms: "a mean, calculating Yankee, full of petty shrewdness, but small." Coolidge was "not a bad man--just nobody." See Robert H. Zeigler, "Pinchot and Coolidge: The Politics of the 1923 Anthracite Crisis," Journal of American History 52 (December 1965):570.

[4]Burl Noggle, "Configurations of the Twenties," in The Reinterpretation of American History and Culture, eds. William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: National Council For the Social Studies, 1973), p. 466.

Warren Harding's sudden death in 1923 sent the news reporters running to identify and categorize the new president, Calvin Coolidge. According to one reporter, Thomas Stokes,

> It was one of the greatest feats of newspaper propaganda that the modern world has ever seen. It was really a miracle. He [Coolidge] said nothing. Newspapers must have copy. So we grasped little incidents to build up human interest stories and we created a character.[5]

There were certain authentic Coolidge traits that fitted the desired image, such as honesty, good judgement, and decency.

The myth that grew up around Coolidge has made it difficult to gain any real understanding of the man and the President. Too many times Coolidge has been presented in verbal caricature. Edward Connery Lathem maintains that this myth and this verbal caricature developed because writers used simplification, subordination, magnification, and distortion to explain the nature of Coolidge.[6] As a result of this, students have been confronted with a mythical representation of Coolidge. Among the elements of the myth, Lathem lists dramatic over-statements of fundamental truths, such as Coolidge's taciturnity. Also,

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[5]Thomas L. Stokes, Chip Off My Shoulder (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 139.

[6]Edward Connery Lathem, ed., Meet Calvin Coolidge: The Man Behind the Myth (Brattleboro: Stephen Greene Press, 1960), p. 5. The use of such techniques, according to Lathem, is "selective concentration."

Coolidge was a man of quite serious disposition, but the myth has made him stolid and morose.[7]

A New Look At President Coolidge

In an attempt to re-evaluate certain aspects of the "Coolidge myth" it is important to note the various observations and comments of Coolidge's contemporaries. Herbert Hoover recalled that when Coolidge was among his associates there was little taciturnity. After Hoover was elected president in 1928, Coolidge gave some suggestions on how to handle the numerous visitors to the White House. This comment is an excellent example of Coolidge's fine, dry wit. Coolidge advised:

> You have to stand every day three or four visitors. Nine-tenths of them want something they ought not to have. If you keep dead-still they will run down in three or four minutes. If you even cough or smile they will start up all over again.[8]

Congressman Bertrand H. Snell, from New York, observed that Coolidge had a very keen political mind.[9] Chief Justice William Howard Taft wrote of Coolidge in the summer of 1925, "He is nearly as good a politician as Lincoln."[10] Economic adviser Bernard Baruch was impressed with Coolidge's loquacity. One evening after a dinner at the White House, Baruch told the President, "Everybody said you never say

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[7]Ibid., p. 7. [8]Ibid., p. 59. [9]Ibid., p. 110.

[10]Claude M. Fuess, Calvin Coolidge: The Man From Vermont (Hamden: Archon Books, 1965), p. 480.

anything." "Well, Baruch," replied Coolidge, "many times I say only 'yes' or 'no' to people. Even that is too much. It winds them up for twenty minutes more."[11] Cordell Hull, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, found Coolidge "talked freely and easily from the beginning to the end of a conversation, and was as affable as I could have wished."[12]

Upon the death of Harding, President Coolidge found himself in an uncertain position within the Republican party. He did not possess the trust of the dominant conservative faction. Coolidge's nomination for the vice-presidency was part of a revolt by the 1920 Republican Convention against the method in which Harding's candidacy had been pushed through. Nor could Coolidge expect help from the more liberal wing of the party; progressives were not impressed with his qualifications. Coolidge, nevertheless, sought to please certain elements of the progressives. He was convinced that if he could win such liberals as William E. Borah and Raymond Robins to his aid, then he would have the advantage. Borah was a powerful senator from Idaho. Coolidge desired Borah's support because he knew that the senator fully supported his fiscal policy. Robins was an influential liberal in Washington--supporting

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[11] Lathem, ed., p. 133.

[12] Cordell Hull, _Memoirs of Cordell Hull_, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 1:127.

such ideas as diplomatic recognition of Russia and the "Outlawry of War" movement. Borah responded to the Coolidge overtures. The senator was convinced that Coolidge was merely a timid progressive. In the fall of 1923 several cordial meetings were held in which Robins and Borah were significantly impressed with Coolidge's apparently receptive tone. Among the goals espoused by Robins and Borah were: liberalizing the Republican Party and eliminating what they referred to as "international-banker control" of foreign policy.[13] The President gave no definite assurances, but he seemed to agree with their ideas on domestic affairs, while accepting "in principle" their ideas regarding foreign policy.[14] The Coolidge political tact was evident during these crucial months. He did not want to alienate the Old Guard, and he could not make bold commitments to the progressives. Robert James Maddox has concluded, "He [Coolidge] tried to elude this dilemma through a policy of what might be called creative equivocation."[15] One wedge between improved relations between Coolidge and the progressives was the issue of Attorney General Harry Daugherty. Coolidge assured Borah and Robins that he would get rid of Daugherty as soon as he could. Coolidge was convinced that if he

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[13]Robert James Maddox, "Keeping Cool With Coolidge," Journal of American History 50 (June 1966):774.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 777.

could stall them until such time, then he might gain their support at no real cost to himself.

Borah played into Coolidge's hands when he verbally attacked the party regulars for their slowness to act on the scandals. This served Coolidge's interests because it forced the regulars to defend Coolidge's decisions. According to Maddox, ". . . Coolidge sat back and watched the opposing factions batter away at each other while he garnered the public's respect."[16] Even this was not enough to satisfy Coolidge. There was still the possibility that a significant number of unhappy progressives might vote for Robert LaFollette, or the Democratic candidate, or even not vote at all in November 1924. To counter these possibilities, Coolidge offered the vice-presidency to Borah; Borah refused the offer. Maddox concludes that the 1924 election was a proper tribute to Coolidge's political shrewdness. As a result of the Coolidge sagacity, along with the ineffective Democratic campaign, "He [Coolidge] sat astride the party as he did his self-exercise mechanical horse, riding in no direction but firmly in the saddle."[17]

In his biography of Coolidge, Donald R. McCoy contends that there were many aspects of the Coolidge administration that were worthy of admiration. McCoy is successful in his efforts to dismiss the well-known stereotype of Coolidge as a stingy, bucolic Yankee.

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[16]Ibid., p. 779. [17]Ibid., p. 780.

Coolidge glorified unity, stability, and harmony. After the many ups and downs of the two previous administrations, "most Americans were ready for the genius of the average."[18] Coolidge offered a responsible, stable alternative, and the American electorate was ready for this kind of leadership. Most important, President Coolidge was instrumental in the revival of public confidence in the Presidency.

Yet, an evaluation of the Coolidge administration must be based on more than his characteristics. What he actually accomplished by particular action, or the lack thereof, is equally significant. A survey of textbooks reveals that Coolidge is noted more for his personality and character than for his accomplishments. This is unfair to any chief executive. Probably the most significant accomplishment was to restore public confidence in the presidency. Senator Henry F. Ashurst, a Democrat from Arizona, wrote in his diary, as Coolidge left office,

> Time's perspective will appraise Calvin Coolidge, but with certainty it may today be said that he restored the White House as a symbol of dignified and moderate living.[19]

It has been suggested that Coolidge was the tool of big business, that he was not his own man. This stereotype is challenged in Claude Fuess' biography, Calvin Coolidge:

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[18] Donald R. McCoy, Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 413.

[19] George F. Sparks, ed., A Many-Colored Toga: The Diary of Henry Fountain Ashurst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1962), p. 267, as cited in McCoy, p. 414.

The Man From Vermont. Fuess maintains that the President was an uncommon judge of men and their motives. Coolidge was aware of those who attempted to take advantage of him. Most of the time Coolidge listened to such persons, and then he made up his own mind. Fuess concludes, "He [Coolidge] was never in any sense the tool of business corporations or of financial groups or of organized politicians. . . ."[20] Fuess also concludes that Coolidge was not "controlled" by such financial giants as Andrew Mellon and Thomas Cochran.[21] Many of Coolidge's decisions did please business interests; however, ". . . no President has been more free from domination by pressure groups or more quietly, but decisively his own master."[22] Fuess is also convinced that Coolidge was a shrewd politician. Paul Carter agrees with Fuess that it is unfair and inaccurate to describe Coolidge's presidency as simply serving the needs of big business interests. There is considerable evidence to indicate that Coolidge's political style was compatible with the desires of the general public.[23] President Coolidge believed in promoting business. This was not necessarily because he worshipped big business. Coolidge viewed business as the device most likely to foster prosperity for the masses in the United States. This concept is what led him in January 1924 to say that "the chief business of the American people is business."[24]

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[20]Fuess, p. 414. [21]Ibid., p. 366.

[22]Ibid., p. 480. [23]Carter, p. 35. [24]McCoy, p. 156.

A Competent and Adroit Chief Executive

Calvin Coolidge was a capable administrator. He asked for and received competent and frugal accomplishments from his staff. He utilized the Bureau of the Budget to a great extent. He enlarged the scope of the civil service merit system. Coolidge also deserves praise for the release of political prisoners from federal prisons. It was during the Coolidge administration that the level of proficiency among career Foreign Service officers and federal judges was raised.[25] That Coolidge was interested in such a proposal is evident in his first message to Congress. In this message he asked Congress to improve the consular service along civil service lines. Donald McCoy concludes, "His [Coolidge's] Administration fostered the real beginning of a professional American foreign service."[26] Government under Coolidge did not attempt all that it could have, but what it did undertake, it accomplished with substantial success and efficiency. One of the most important projects was that of his fiscal program. Coolidge wanted to hold down congressional appropriations and use the surplus funds to reduce taxes and cut the national debt.

In foreign policy Coolidge was instrumental in laying the foundation of the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s.

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[25]The Rogers Act of 1924 classified consular officials and provided for merit procedures in their selection, promotion, and retention.

[26]McCoy, p. 340.

He was determined to improve United States-Latin American relations. It was Latin America that presented Coolidge with his most serious diplomatic problems. In 1925 the Mexican Congress, at President Plutarco Calles's request, had passed two laws that alarmed Americans.[27] Coolidge endeavored to ease hostile American reaction by affirming that the United States and Mexico were on friendly terms. Tensions increased, however, in 1926 when the Mexican government began to persecute Catholics. Coolidge's response was calm, to say the least. But this kind of reaction was characteristic of the Coolidge manner. By being somewhat calm and vague, he hoped to reduce anti-Mexican tension and at the same time emphasize the soundness of negotiating and remaining calm.

In 1927, Coolidge announced the appointment of a new ambassador to Mexico to replace James R. Sheffield, who had resigned. The selection of Dwight Morrow was an excellent move. This new ambassador was successful in helping to avert the possible movement toward war with Mexico. In his negotiations Morrow proved that cooperation and genuine friendship could be obtained between the United States and Mexico. Morrow's attitude toward his assignment was evident

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[27]One of these laws permitted foreigners to own land if they gave up any right of protection by their homelands. The other law limited to fifteen years any oil rights acquired in Mexico prior to 1927 and required application for renewal rights by 1927 or loss of those rights to the state.

in a statement he made before arriving in Mexico: "I know what I can do for the Mexicans. I can like them."[28] Morrow was very successful; he negotiated settlements between the church and the state and between the capitalists and the state officials.

The crisis-ridden country of Nicaragua was also a subject of Coolidge diplomacy. Nicaragua was plagued with civil war, dictatorship, and financial instability. Coolidge and Secretary of State Frank Kellogg decided in December 1926 to send Marines into Nicaragua.[29] He did not, however, obtain full backing from the American people. Finally Coolidge asked Henry L. Stimson to undertake the task of improving relations with Nicaragua. In 1927 Stimson arrived in Nicaragua. Within one month he had secured the agreement of practically all military and political leaders to support immediate peace, amnesty, free press, and more Liberal participation in government. In addition to this, it was agreed that new elections would be held in 1928 under American supervision. As a result of these actions most American military forces were pulled out of Nicaragua in 1931, and in 1933 they were completely withdrawn.

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[28] Harold Nicolson, Dwight Morrow (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 289, as cited in McCoy, p. 355.

[29] Secretary of State Frank Kellogg made an effort to back Coolidge by explaining to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that United States intervention in Nicaragua was prompted by the need to counter Communist influences there.

It is evident, therefore, that the Coolidge judgement and wisdom in the selection of American diplomats paid off in Latin America. Coolidge was more personally involved in improving United States-Cuban relations. In the summer of 1927 Cuban President Gerado Machado extended an invitation to the American president to address the opening ceremony of the Sixth Conference of American States in Havana. No other United States president had ever attended such a conference. Coolidge decided to accept the invitation for at least two major considerations. First, Coolidge had been informed that a number of American nations were contemplating a switch of their prime concern from the Pan American Union to the League of Nations. Second, Secretary Kellogg persuaded the President to visit Havana as a good will gesture that might possibly counteract Latin American criticism of United States intervention in Nicaragua and of the retention of United States armed forces in Haiti.

The Coolidge speech of January 16 was received with a cordial response. This was indeed a welcome reaction in view of the widespread disapproval of other United States actions in Latin America. McCoy suggests that this visit and speech created a favorable impression among the delegates. He concludes:

> The President's appearance helped the American delegates at the conference to prevent adoption of an anti-intervention resolution and to make progress toward a hemispheric agreement to

> submit inter-American disputes to conciliation and arbitration.[30]

President Coolidge was responsible for significant contributions to the improvement of United States-Latin American relations. It was an integral part of the Coolidge manner to minimize tensions. Stimson's successful mission to Nicaragua, Morrow's ambassadorship to Mexico, Coolidge's visit and address to the Pan American Conference at Havana, as well as his endorsement of President-elect Herbert Hoover's tour of Latin America, were initial steps in the direction of better relations among the American republics. McCoy concludes, "Coolidge's role in the conduct of inter-American relations was well played. Indeed, it represented him at his best."[31]

The Personable Coolidge

Coolidge was both a warm human being and a shrewd politician. There are at least two relatively recent works that illustrate these characteristics, Meet Calvin Coolidge: The Man Behind the Myth, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, and The Talkative President: The Off-the-Record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge, edited by Howard H. Quint and Robert H. Ferrell. As Quint and Ferrell have brilliantly shown, Coolidge's press conferences were "a forum for sly, wry humor." The President did not appear to be a verbose man, however, when "he let his guard down, when

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[30] McCoy, p. 357. [31] Ibid., p. 358.

he felt that what he said would not be subject to misinterpretation or used against him, he could be so talkative as to appear almost garrulous."[32] During his press conferences Coolidge would frequently offer information that had not been specifically requested. It was only after he became President and discovered that he had an attentive audience in his press conferences that he revealed a "talkative streak," according to Quint and Ferrell. During most of his press conferences it was obvious that Coolidge enjoyed himself with the reporters. Face to face with the reporters, he was "disarmingly friendly." During his press conferences the President was quizzed on a variety of topics. His detailed responses to many of the questions surprised reporters who had accepted the "Silent Cal" stereotype of the President. Quint and Ferrell are convinced that Coolidge was indeed a shrewd chief executive who "demonstrated a surprisingly wide comprehension of public issues."[33] Furthermore, their research led them to conclude that, "if nothing else, [Coolidge] was a highly successful politician."[34] McCoy concluded that Coolidge used the press conference more skillfully than it used him.

The "Silent Cal" image of President Coolidge is one of the most common. However, this characteristic was under

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[32]Howard H. Quint and Robert H. Ferrell, eds., _The Talkative President: The Off-the-Record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge_ (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964), p. 1.

[33]Ibid., p. 4. [34]Ibid., p. 54.

attack as early as 1926. In that year Charles Merz completed a statistical study of the President's alleged taciturnity. The results of this study appeared in the June 2, 1926, edition of the New Republic. Merz concluded that in his public life in Washington, Coolidge "is not a silent man, but a very noisy man. He is by no means economical with words. He squanders words."[35] Charles and Mary Beard made an attempt to destroy the Coolidge myth in his own lifetime. According to the Beards, Coolidge was in truth a capable and fluent speaker and writer.[36]

A threatened Pennsylvania coal strike in August 1923 provided opportunity for Coolidge to demonstrate his political shrewdness. He knew that if he was to get the 1924 Republican nomination, he would have to give evidence to the party and its leaders that he could serve effectively as chief executive. The situation in Pennsylvania gave Coolidge this opportunity. After the failure of the United States Coal Commission to settle the miners' dispute, the people looked to Coolidge for leadership.

Gifford Pinchot, the Progressive Republican Governor of Pennsylvania, had emerged as a possible contender for the 1924 Republican presidential nomination. This factor was of great concern to Coolidge, the politician. During

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[35]Charles Merz, "The Silent Mr. Coolidge," New Republic: A Journal of Opinion 47 (2 June 1926):51.

[36]Carter, p. 38.

the threatened coal strike Coolidge wanted to emerge as the leader of a settlement, but he did not want to risk seizing the mines or calling a special session of Congress. Pinchot was actively involved in the settlement of the dispute. On September 7, 1923, he announced that an agreement had been reached along the lines that he had supported. Governor Pinchot had worked diligently to prevent a strike. President Coolidge did very little. Pinchot had repeatedly emphasized that he had led the settlement talks and that the White House had very little to do with the results.[37]

However, even as the miners voted on the settlement, the political implications of the dispute became more and more evident. Some political observers were commenting that the successful settlement of the mine dispute might pave the way for Pinchot's nomination as vice-president or president. The New York Times on August 26, 1923, reported that important politicians felt that President Coolidge had "made a tactical political error in turning over the settlement" to Pinchot.[38] If the miners approved a Pinchot sponsored settlement, then Coolidge quite possibly might have a serious opponent for the 1924 nomination.

When the strike was settled the question was: Did Pinchot act alone in negotiating the mine settlement or did he simply act as Coolidge's agent? Coolidge supporters

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[37]Zeigler, p. 574.

[38]New York Times, 26 August 1923.

maintained that the governor had been Coolidge's agent; Pinchot's supporters denied this. On September 7, 1923, Coolidge sent a congratulatory telegram to Pinchot. In the message, Coolidge praised the governor for his successful efforts in the "very difficult situation in which I invited your cooperation."[39] Pinchot privately resented the suggestion that he had acted as Coolidge's agent in the matter. Governor Pinchot had been encouraged by his brother, Amos, to use the coal strike situation and the perceptible vacuum in the Republican party leadership to arrive at a "dignified position of liberal leadership."[40] By late 1923, however, it was evident that the governor could not take command of this opportunity. By the time of the Republican National Convention of 1924, Coolidge was in undisputed control of the party.

Coolidge and The Harding Legacy

Coolidge's political skill was probably best illustrated by the way he managed the Harding legacy. Coolidge did not challenge the right of Congress to investigate the scandals of the previous administration. Early in 1924 there were pressures on Coolidge to get rid of Attorney General Harry Daugherty. Coolidge summoned Senator William Borah and Daugherty to his office to settle the dispute. Borah told Coolidge that he should rid his administration

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[39]Zeigler, p. 574. [40]Ibid., p. 579.

of Daugherty. Daugherty argued that his political enemies were trying to remove him from office. As the President sat quietly the Senator and the Attorney General argued the issue.[41]

The next day the President was informed that if he fired Daugherty, Ohio's electoral votes would go to the Democrats in the 1924 election. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes suggested that he could possibly arrange to have all of Coolidge's cabinet resign, and then the President could reappoint those he wished to save. Coolidge exclaimed, "No, don't do that. It might leave me alone with Daugherty."[42]

The arguments to dismiss Daugherty were substantial, however, the President refused to take action until there was clear reason to do so. Among those who put the greatest pressure on Coolidge to fire Daugherty were Senators Burton Wheeler, Henry Cabot Lodge, George W. Pepper, William Borah, and Secretaries Hughes and Hoover. Coolidge was also under pressure to retain Daugherty. This pressure came from Republican National Committee Chairman John T. Adams, and national committeeman C. A. Reynolds. Chief Justice William Howard Taft suggested to Daugherty that he

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[41] Marian C. McKenna, Borah (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 202.

[42] Merlo J. Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 2:565.

resign, Daugherty refused.[43] In March 1924, Daugherty rejected requests from the Senate to open the Justice Department's files to scrutiny. Coolidge refused to back the Attorney General and the President asked for and received Daugherty's resignation. Coolidge remained calm through the Daugherty episode, and McCoy has concluded, "Coolidge had kept his head and self-respect: he had not acted until he had unquestionable reason to do so."[44] Quint and Ferrell conclude,

> It was masterly political work. . . . In handling the Harding heritage the President managed, in short, to put himself above the ruckus and to emerge untouched, untarnished, and in full armor for the 1924 presidential campaign.[45]

The Talkative President

One reason that Calvin Coolidge has remained a mystery to many observers is that ". . . he is a pure Yankee, and that pure Yankee is an expiring and unfamiliar race."[46] This thesis was submitted by political analyst Willis Thompson, in 1929. Thompson presents an interesting picture of the Massachusetts Yankee. The "Yankee language,"

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[43] William Allen White, A Puritan in Babylon: The Story of Calvin Coolidge (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 252.

[44] McCoy, p. 217.

[45] Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 54.

[46] Charles Willis Thompson, Presidents I've Known and Two Near Presidents (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1929), p. 345.

according to Thompson, is different from the "American language." Yankee language is based on understatement, not overstatement. The Yankee is characterized as shrewd, grave, witty, farsighted, and efficient. "He [the Yankee] . . . just like Calvin Coolidge does not assume the role. He was born with it." It has been argued that the Coolidge popularity was due in part to the popularity of the Republican Party. The popularity of Coolidge was, however, separate from that of his party. Evidence of this can be seen from Coolidge's early political career in Massachusetts. When he became active in local Northampton politics, there was a group of voters who were distinguishable as "Coolidge Democrats." Coolidge was elected to the Massachusetts legislature from a Democratic district. When he became a state-wide political figure, it was obvious that "Coolidge Democrats ranged from Cape Cod to the New York border," concludes Thompson.[47] He also concludes that the secret of Coolidge's success was his "simple words and straightforward acts."

Coolidge was provincial in many ways. To many Americans, Coolidge, the President, was the fulfillment of the American dream--he had gone from a Vermont farm to the White House. This reality helped to promote the myth of Coolidge. George H. Mayer concludes that "Americans vigorously applauded when a man with old Yankee virtues

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[47]Ibid., p. 352.

entered the White House."[48] It did not take President Coolidge long to discover that his provincial habits could be turned to political advantage. Mayer submits that Coolidge purposely nurtured the public image of "Silent Cal." "In a country accustomed to garrulous politicians," observed Mayer, "people were inclined to equate taciturnity with wisdom."[49] Thomas Bailey refers to Coolidge as "a subtle master of self-advertising."[50] James David Barber maintains that a president's style is a reflection of the ways of performing which bring him success at a particular time.[51] Writing in 1930, Gamaliel Bradford suggested that the "Silent Cal" myth suggested "mystery and vast uncomprehended intellectual depths, . . ." Bradford maintains that the "Coolidge silence" exemplified the remark of the French dramatist: "The charm of your conversation consists not only in what you say, but still more and above all in what you don't say."[52]

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[48] George H. Mayer, The Republican Party, 1854-1966 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 390.

[49] Ibid., p. 391.

[50] Thomas A. Bailey, Presidential Greatness: The Image and the Man From George Washington to the Present (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), p. 315.

[51] James David Barber, The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 52.

[52] Gamaliel Bradford, The Quick and the Dead (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), p. 224.

One aspect of the Coolidge character that has been overlooked is that the mind of this President had a "naturally humorous bent which could not be repressed."[53] Any attempt to review Coolidge should include this aspect since most of his amusing statements were really the literal truth; Coolidge realized the worth of commonsense. The masses of Americans knew this and appreciated it. A considerable degree of the Coolidge popularity was due to the fact that to millions he was a common man, installed for the present in a position of considerable influence and power. Coolidge symbolized stability and safety. Many Americans, in the wake of a world war, were very receptive to these conditions.

It is accurate to conclude that many, if not most, serious writers have not been entirely fair in their judgements of President Calvin Coolidge. This is not to say, however, that Coolidge should be placed on a pedestal, for he was not a giant among the American presidents. He was a shrewd politician and a tactful diplomat. He was not as tight-lipped or unsociable as students have been led to believe. He did like to talk, he did like attention, and he was, as Quint and Ferrell have observed, "an efficient writer of letters, . . ."[54] He demonstrated to his

[53]Fuess, p. 475.

[54]Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 3.

associates and to the press an unexpectedly wide understanding of public issues. Examination of the record of Coolidge's press conferences indicates that he used them as an instrument for molding public opinion, "fully as consciously as Franklin Roosevelt or John Kennedy used theirs."[55]

The Coolidge press conference signified a new approach to relations between the president and the press. Quint and Ferrell submit that the Coolidge press conferences "marked the beginning of serious presidential meetings with the press."[56] Earlier presidential press conferences had been intermittent and somewhat ineffective. Coolidge was the first president to establish and maintain press conferences on a regular schedule.[57] Most of the time Coolidge asked for and received support from the press. He was amiable and considerate with the press. Early in his administration he made it clear that he welcomed questions from the press.[58]

Coolidge used the press conferences to draw attention to the various accomplishments of his administration. In 1926 he discussed with the press several of these

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[55]Carter, p. 39.

[56]Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 20.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid., p. 25. On April 10, 1925, Coolidge advised the press: "I am glad to have any questions asked about anything."

achievements. Among the foreign problems that "had been taken care of," Coolidge listed the German reparations problem and the French occupation of the Ruhr. The domestic questions that have been "met very successfully" included the war debt, high taxes, and low government expenditures. The President noted also the decline in commodity prices, as well as a small increase in wages. Among the diplomatic achievements which had "left the country in a flourishing and prosperous condition" Coolidge listed the new immigration law, the ratification of a "good many treaties," and the affirmative vote of the Senate to adhere to the protocol of the Court of International Justice. The United States did not join the Court, however. The President referred to the settlement of the war debts issue as "a very outstanding feature of the last three years."[59]

Flood relief and flood control were two serious issues faced by Coolidge. In the spring of 1927, these issues were made evident to the nation in a series of floods on the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers. These floods were, according to McCoy, "the worst natural catastrophe that the midlands had ever suffered."[60] More than two hundred people died as a result of this disaster. A million and a half persons were driven from their homes and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage was inflicted

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[59] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[60] McCoy, p. 329.

on property. Industrial productivity was severely curtailed. President Coolidge was quick to react to this situation. He placed Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover in charge of a massive coordinated project by local, state, federal, and private agencies to calm the flood waters, aid the stranded, control disease, provide shelter and food for the homeless, and make provisions for loans. The President responded in a similar manner when the New England region was hit by a disastrous flood in November 1927. Because of these two disasters, considerable pressure was placed on the Coolidge administration to take steps to prevent serious floods in the future.

On May 15, 1928, Coolidge signed the Flood Control Act. This act appropriated $325 million for levee work in the Mississippi Valley over a ten-year period. There were several disagreements regarding the nature and purposes of this bill. President Coolidge, through his press conferences, displayed a considerable degree of leadership potential in this matter. One of the major issues was who should pay for the relief. Coolidge maintained that the property owners in the areas should share some portion of the expense. Some of the property owners were unable to bear any of the expense, others could bear some of it, and some were able to bear all of it. In a press conference on February 28, 1928, Coolidge reiterated his suggestion that the local property owners should bear 20 percent of

the then proposed amount of approximately $180 million for flood relief. The local property owners would be able to pay their share over a ten-year period, according to the President. This 20 percent could amount to approximately three cents per acre, per year, for the local property owners. The President was definitely opposed to establishing a precedent of 100 percent Federal financing of flood relief. He also warned that if the Federal Government decided to pay all the costs, then the demands would be greatly enlarged.

By April 1928, it was apparent that Congress would be reluctant to accept the idea of partial local financing of flood relief. Coolidge feared that if the Federal Government assumed the full financial obligation for Mississippi Valley flood control, then other sections of the country would expect such "favors."[61] The Senate version of the bill obligated the Federal Government to pay for flood damages. The President was not opposed to this idea if the people of the area would benefit. However, the President feared that the Senate bill would result in a "scramble to take care of the railroads, and the banks, and the individuals that may have invested in levee bonds, and the great lumber concerns. . . ."[62]

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[61] Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 81.

[62] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

Coolidge feared that the Federal Government would risk having to pay large sums in damages which were not necessary. He thought that the main problem in getting a suitable flood control bill originated not from those who lived in the Mississippi Valley area, but from those who owned property there and wished to sell it to the Government. Coolidge signed the Act on May 15.

From his replies to press inquiries it is evident that Coolidge had a sincere interest in disarmament. He discussed the issue in a speech before the Associated Press in April 1924 and in his acceptance speech for the presidential nomination. Coolidge wanted to call a disarmament conference as soon as practicable, however he did not think it would be practical until the European countries "reached a somewhat stable condition."[63] In 1924 and 1925, Coolidge was questioned on his attitude toward increasing American military capabilities. The questions specifically related to the increase in size of guns on United States battleships. Coolidge opposed such a change.[64] He theorized that if the United States made such a move, then Britain would do the same, and this would impede the payment of war debts to the United States. In June 1927, a naval limitation conference opened in Geneva. The United States, Britain, and Japan sent representatives. France and Italy sent observers. Coolidge and Secretary of State Frank

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[63]Ibid., p. 151. [64]Ibid., p. 157.

Kellogg hoped to negotiate an agreement to limit construction of cruisers. Unfortunately, the conference broke up in complete disagreement.[65]

The President also used his press conferences to encourage United States membership in the World Court. He attacked the argument that adherence to the protocol that established the Court would lead to adherence to the League of Nations Covenant. He maintained that the Court and the League were very separate and distinct organizations. That the United States desired membership in the Court was "no indication at all" that it wanted to belong to the League.[66] According to Coolidge, United States membership in the Court would signify a helpful attitude and a desire to cooperate. Coolidge worked for Senate ratification of the World Court protocol. The protocol was approved on January 26, 1926, by a vote of 76 to 17.[67] Coolidge, however, did not actively encourage agreement of the member Court nations to the American adherence and the five American reservations, and the matter became a dead issue.

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[65]Jules Abels suggests that the conference failed because "the United States and Britain had a fundamental difference of outlook." Jules Abels, In the Time of Silent Cal (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), p. 244. Quint and Ferrell support this contention. Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 165. McCoy agrees, also. McCoy, p. 366.

[66]Quint and Ferrell, eds., p. 209.

[67]McCoy, p. 361.

The reservations were not accepted and so the United States did not become a member.

Conclusions

Coolidge was a popular president during his five years in the White House. He was a symbol for the American public. He represented stability, honesty, and confidence. Possibly the greatest accomplishment was the restoration of public confidence in the presidency after the Harding debacle. He was not a dynamic leader, but he was in command of his administration. His uncommon manner is one of the major reasons that he has been so misrepresented. Walter Lippmann, writing in 1927, observed,

> Mr. Coolidge's genius for inactivity is developed to a very high point. It is far from being an indolent activity. It is a grim, determined, alert inactivity which keeps Mr. Coolidge occupied constantly. . . .[68]

Coolidge's biographer, Claude Fuess, has likewise observed, "Whatever he [Coolidge] did was calculated, direct, safe, and sure, and such a type is not understood in Hollywood or Greenwich Village."[69] One criticism of the Coolidge administration was that the President did not have a political philosophy. There is no evidence to indicate that he had a sophisticated philosophy, but he did have one. It was difficult to pinpoint because of its very nature.

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[68]Walter Lippmann, Men of Destiny (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1927), pp. 12-13.

[69]Fuess, p. 468.

Coolidge's political philosophy was based on the concept that citizens had obligations to serve society and to make constructive contributions.[70] He felt that politics had to be democratic to provide the most opportunities for individual initiative and service. He saw the function of legislators as a service function. They should strive to put the will of the majority into legislative acts. The president's function was to carry out the will of the majority as stated in the laws.

After the highs and lows of the Wilson and Harding administrations, many Americans were ready for the stability, unity, and harmony that Coolidge seemed to represent. He was not a Lincoln or a Grant. He was reliable, sincere, decent, and honest. In addition to the restoration of public confidence, he had other major successes. He proved that he could resist political pressures when he twice vetoed the McNary-Haugen bill. Coolidge was also an able administrator. He asked for and received capable and efficient performance from his staff. He persuaded Congress to limit appropriations, to promote tax reductions, and to pay off the national debt. In foreign affairs, he was instrumental in launching the Good Neighbor policy.

Writing in 1930, Preston W. Slosson concluded that we will never know all the qualities of Coolidge. His potentials as a strong statesman were never really

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[70]McCoy, p. 154.

challenged. Nevertheless, Slosson submits that ". . . he [Coolidge] was the most successful politician of his time, and if part of his success must be attributed to the times in which he lived some part also was the . . . need of a cool, steady brain that was rarely inspired but rarely fell into serious error."[71] In the final analysis, biographer Claude Fuess maintains that Coolidge was "essentially a moral force" on the United States.

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[71]Preston W. Slosson, "Calvin Coolidge: His Place in History," Current History 33 (October 1930):6.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1920s: A PROSPERITY DECADE?

Historians seeking to describe the economic character of the 1920s have found it hard to resist the spiraling statistics which seem to demonstrate fantastic prosperity. The statistics are real: the gross national product increased amazingly, per capita productivity grew, real wages went up, and business balance sheets ballooned. Historians, who know that their shorthand does not tell the whole truth, have dubbed the period "Prosperity Decade," "Long Boom," "Dollar Decade," "Republican Prosperity," and "Coolidge Prosperity." These make far more striking images than the drab analysis of the foundations of this prosperity. Then, the historian is confronted with the depression, and some have succumbed to an easy explanation: the stock market crashed. From riches to rags is a dramatic contrast, but it is not the whole story and probably not the most important part of the story.

This chapter does not charge that responsible historians ignore the weaknesses of the 1920s economy; it does suggest that the emphasis on the tinsel of prosperity blurs the understanding of some vital flaws that continue to be problems into the 1970s. A survey course cannot

presume to give students great competence in economic policy, but it can point up some fairly simple trends which students may see when they recur.

The decade of the twenties was indeed a prosperous era. That the United States was wealthy does not in itself demonstrate prosperity. Basic arithmetic tells us that averages may be unduly raised by a few large fortunes. This appears to have been the case in the United States. A banker's estimate in 1926 placed the number of millionaires at eleven thousand, compared with four thousand five hundred in 1914.[1] The twenties was a busy period; there was much production, but the frequently mentioned "prosperity" was concentrated. "Throughout the twenties," as Joseph A. Schumpeter suggests, ". . . prosperity as well as recession was essentially 'spotty'. . . . Conditions always differed in different industrial and geographic sectors. . . ."[2] Elementary economic theory demands that if increasing productivity is to be sustained, it must be accompanied by comparable increases in buying power. Since mass purchasing must come from the masses, this increased purchasing power

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[1]Preston William Slosson, The Great Crusade and After: 1919-1928 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 169. Slosson also cites a study made of more than 43,000 estates probated in thirteen states over a decade. This study concluded that there were "wide variations in the wealth of individuals and a rather high degree of concentration. . . ."

[2]Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The American Economy in the Interwar Period: The Decade of the Twenties," American Economic Review 36 (May 1946):5.

must come from reduced prices or increased wages or a combination of the two. In the 1920s a disproportionate share of the profits from increased productivity went to the stockholders in increased dividends or in reinvestment in the company. Either method led to "oversaving" and more production without comparable increases in markets for consumer goods. In short, big business, big management, and big finance did not share a significant amount of their profits with the working masses. There was a degree of harmony between labor and management in this era, but there was also a significant degree of labor tension and violence. This was especially true with the coal miners and textile workers. Harold Underwood Faulkner concludes that coal mining, textiles, shipbuilding, the shoe and leather business, and agriculture were "stagnant, or even declining."[3]

It is indeed one of the ironies of recent United States history that the decade of the Great Depression, the thirties, was preceded by a decade of unprecedented wealth, savings, and productivity. Many times students are confronted with these characteristics, and then without adequate preparation they suddenly find the United States has experienced a stock market crash and is headed into a depression. One of the basic factors that students should be made aware of is that the Great Depression was caused,

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[3]Harold Underwood Faulkner, American Economic History (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960), p. 609.

in part, by the lack of buying power. They should seriously consider the question: Are the causes of the Great Depression to be found in the prosperity of the 1920s? It is anticipated that this study will shed some light on the answer to this inquiry. Certainly, a part of the thesis of this study is that the prosperity of the so-called "Prosperity Decade" did not apply to all Americans. William E. Leuchtenburg maintains that without the wave of stock market speculation, the "prosperity" of the twenties might have ended much earlier than it did.[4] The effect of such speculation was to spark the economy by new money, and this "boom" continued and a depression was temporarily avoided.

Agriculture

It is probably true that American farmers benefited least from the prosperity of the 1920s. After World War I farm incomes failed to share the general rise in the national incomes.[5] Farmers continued, however, to increase acreage and production, and as a result they went into greater debt. The amount of wheat acreage was greater in 1929 than in any previous year, except for those at the end of World War I. After the unusually high yields of 1925 and 1926, cotton prices mounted to an average of 20.19 cents

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[4]William E. Leuchtenburg, Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 242.

[5]Jim Potter, American Economy Between the World Wars (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), p. 59.

in 1927, then drifted to 16.78 in 1929, and fell to 9.46 in 1930.[6] The decline in farm prices generally was very serious in the twenties. In 1919 America's farmers had 16 percent of the national income; however, by 1929, they had only 9 percent.[7] There were also wide regional differences in farm income. In 1929 the per capita income for farmers in the Middle Atlantic states was $1,107, compared with $344 in the East South Central states.[8] The average per capita income of all American farmers was only $273 in 1929, compared with $908 for the non-farm population.[9] Irving Bernstein concludes that the impact of migration from the farms can hardly be exaggerated.[10] The large labor pool that resulted in the urban areas meant that pressure to increase wages in the cities would be relieved. To the employers in the cities, the agricultural migration was a blessing. The resulting labor surplus gave them little reason to fear employee-turnover; wages were stable, and unionism was weakened.

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[6]George Brown Tindall, Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 355.

[7]Leuchtenburg, p. 101.

[8]Charles H. Hession and Hyman Sardy, Ascent to Affluence: A History of American Economic Development (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1969), p. 618.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Irving Bernstein, A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933: The Lean Years (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 48.

The actual money value of farm products increased but slightly in the decade. The farmers actually experienced a significant loss of buying power when the effect of inflation is considered.[11] The economic status of the farmer was also greatly affected by the declining value of livestock. The purchasing power of America's farmers, as well as factory workers, was not great enough to maintain the "prosperity." This weakness was partially hidden by the fact that American consumers were buying merchandise on the popular installment plan at a rate faster than their income was increasing. It was inevitable, as Leuchtenburg concludes, that a time would come when consumers would have to reduce purchases, and this reduction in buying power would "sap the whole economy."[12] Stuart Chase, in his _Prosperity, Fact or Myth_ (1930), was one of the early contemporaries to see the dubious aspects of the so-called "New Economic Era."

The failure of the American farmer to share in the prosperity of the 1920s may be explained by two crucial factors. First, there was substantial overproduction in the world markets. This was due to the previous war demands and the technological improvements. During the war farmers were encouraged to utilize the one-crop system and to expand their production, often on credit. Both of

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[11]Slosson, p. 166.

[12]Leuchtenburg, p. 246.

these practices proved ruinous in the twenties. Second, there was a world-wide decline in demand and the post-war prices were deflated. Not only did the American farmer's income decline in the twenties, but his taxes increased. The rapid rise in state and local debt, which persisted after World War I, raised the total to approximately 3½ times the pre-war level and thus greatly increased the farmers' tax burden.[13] Freight rates and handling costs remained high, also. American farmers endured increased bankruptcy rates, increased mortgage debts, and a staggering decline in agricultural land values. One result of these conditions was an increase in farm tenancy.

Labor

Organized labor suffered a severe setback in the twenties. In spite of steady employment and some increases in wages, the decade witnessed a constant decline in the numbers and influence of organized labor. For this unusual decline during an apparently prosperious era, both union leadership and employers were responsible. Rapid demobilization and the return of four million jobless soldiers created labor problems. There was a wide variation in industrial wages in the twenties. For example, in 1923, 170,000 industrial wage-earners in North Carolina averaged

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[13]Chester Whitney Wright, Economic History of the United States (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1949), p. 774.

$734 per annum, about half of the average income of the 250,000 wage-earners in California with $1435.[14] As the decade progressed, there was a tendency for wages to increase more in the high-wage states than in the low-wage states. There was also a migration of industrial workers from high-wage to low-wage geographic regions of the country. The number of industrial workers declined in the New England and Middle Atlantic states, while increasing in the South Atlantic states. The four main New England cotton-manufacturing states (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut) had 74,000 fewer wage-earners in the industry in 1929 than in 1919. At the same time the four leading Southern states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama) increased their work force by 75,000. The New England workers earned almost $1000 annually, while the Southern workers earned approximately $700. The number of cotton workers with annual wages approaching $1000 fell, while the number with annual wages of around $700 increased.[15]

Laborers were exploited by management in the South, during the twenties. Since the textile industry was highly competitive, management made drastic attempts to cut the cost of labor, in order to increase profits. In the mid-1920s "efficiency experts" were hired to conduct time-motion studies of southern workers. As a result of the findings

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[14]Potter, p. 62. [15]Ibid., p. 64.

of these experts, work loads were increased, and the work force was decreased.[16]

The general idea that the purchasing power of workers should be increased because productivity was rising was underscored in many wage disputes during the decade. Although the theory of the economy of high wages became part of the creed of many business spokesmen, there are several reasons to question whether it was actually practiced by many individual employers.[17] Economic statistics indicate that the big increase in employee earnings took place between 1920 and 1923. Most of this increase was due to the drop in the cost of living. It was 1926 before a further wage increase could be noted. George Soule concludes that the rise in real earnings in the 1920-1923 period was 13 percent, compared with a rise of 11 percent for the 1923-1928 period. It is important to note that the greatest increase in actual earnings came at the same time that the greatest gain in productivity was realized, that is the 1919-1923 period.[18]

The power of organized labor was undermied by strong manufacturers' associations, anti-labor propaganda, and court decisions.[19] During the decade courts nullified

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[16]Tindall, p. 340.

[17]Soule, p. 220. [18]Ibid., p. 222.

[19]Dorchy v. Kansas, 1926; Duplex Printing Press Co. v. Deering, 1921; Bedford Cut Stone Co. v. Journeymen Stone Cutters, 1927; Truax v. Corrigan, 1921, cited by Bernstein, pp. 191-194.

child labor laws, as well as minimum wage laws. The decade also witnessed an increase in the use of injunctions to settle labor disputes. In addition, there was also a decline in public sympathy for unions. Devices such as "company unions," employee stock ownership, and "welfare capitalism" were used to lessen the power of labor. As a result of these techniques, unions went into decline and collective bargaining had little impact.

Income Distribution

One of the ironies of the "Prosperity Decade" is the great maldistribution of income. As of 1929, the Brookings Institution calculated there were 27,474,000 families of two or more persons. Of this total, approximately six million received less than $1000 per annum; about twelve million had incomes under $1500; and nearly twenty million took in less than $2500.[20] The aggregate total incomes of 0.1 percent of the families at the top of the scale were as great as those of the 42 percent at the bottom.[21]

It is evident that the 1920s witnessed a significant redistribution of wealth in favor of the rich. The top 5 percent of the nation's population received 23 percent of the total incomes in 1923, and 27 percent in 1928.[22] Of all

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[20] Bernstein, p. 63.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Potter, p. 65.

income from stock dividends, 82 percent went to the top 5 percent, and 71 percent of the dividends went to the top 1 percent.[23] A study by the Brookings Institution resulted in this analysis:

> It appears . . . that the income was being distributed with increasing inequality, particularly in the latter years of the period [1920s]. While the proportion of high incomes was increasing, . . . there is evidence that the incomes of those at the very top were increasing more rapidly.[24]

Possibly the real crux of the issue was not whether income distribution became less equitable during the period, but whether the gains in productivity were being distributed in such a way to sustain demand at the required level. A major problem of the decade was to create new methods of mass consumption to consume the products of mass production. What the situation required, and what leadership failed to provide, was an adequate income distribution in favor of the poorer sections of the society. It was, however, an increasingly common practice of big business to reinvest corporate profits. So much of this occurred that many of the large corporations became self-financing. The British economist John Maynard Keynes diagnosed the situation as "over-saving." The issue of income distribution is related to the weakness of organized labor. The unions were not

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Maurice Leven, Harold G. Moulton, and Clark Warburton, America's Capacity to Consume (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1934), p. 104.

strong enough to bring about the needed redistribution of income.

Directly related to the wealth distribution issue was the issue of "over-saving." The savings policy of the American people was also influenced by the federal tax policies. Leuchtenburg concludes that the tax policies made the unequal distribution of income and over-saving by the wealthy even more serious problems.[25] The result of this over-saving was the accumulation of surplus funds by the wealthy.

Unemployment

On December 17, 1928, President Daniel Willard of the Baltimore and Ohio testified before a Senate Committee on unemployment:

> It is a dangerous thing to have a large number of unemployed men and women. . . . When men who are willing and able to work and want to work are unable to obtain work, we need not be surprised if they steal before they starve.[26]

At first glance it would not seem reasonable that unemployment should be a critical concern in a "Prosperity Decade." Yet, in the most prosperous years of the twenties there was considerable unemployment. John D. Hicks submits that the share in the prosperity of the unemployed was nil.[27] The technological innovations in industry and agriculture

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[25]Leuchtenburg, p. 246. [26]Bernstein, p. 60.

[27]John D. Hicks, Republican Ascendancy, 1921-1933 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 127.

resulted in hardships on the part of workers who were dislocated within the process. A study in three industrial cities in 1928 disclosed that of the men who had been discharged within the preceding year, 45 percent were still unemployed.[28] Thirty-three hundred bituminous coal mines were forced to close between 1923 and 1929. As a result, approximately 250,000 men lost their jobs. Those who remained on the job had their wages cut. In the woolen and cotton textiles field, production per workers grew more rapidly than did the demand for the product.

Although there are no government statistics relative to unemployment in this period, there is substantial evidence that the problem was severe. A Brookings Institution study, America's Capacity to Produce, estimated that the economy of 1929 operated at only 80 percent of its effective capacity.[29] Other statistics compiled by David Weintraub estimate the unemployed made up 13 percent of the labor force in 1924 and 1925, 11 percent in 1926, 12 percent in 1927, 13 percent in 1928, and 10 percent in 1929.[30] Other statistics compiled by Woodlief Thomas and the University of Pennsylvania indicate substantial unemployment.

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[28] Soule, p. 216.

[29] Edwin G. Nourse et al., America's Capacity to Produce (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1934), p. 416.

[30] Bernstein, p. 59.

The degree of unemployment was so severe that American social workers were quite concerned. The National Federation of Settlements meeting in Boston in 1928 stated that unemployment was the major enemy of the American family. During the 1929 "boom," Wesley Mitchell wrote that technological unemployment "is a matter of the gravest concern in view of the millions of families affected or threatened . . . and in view of their slender resources."[31]

Consolidation

The final aspect of the economy to be considered in this study is consolidation. The nature and degree of consolidation is linked either directly or indirectly to the factors which have been previously discussed. There is economic theory to argue that a significant measure of economic competition must exist in order to promote the survival of the more efficient, and as a foundation for the maintenance of a balance among supply, demand, and price. This favorable condition, however, did not exist during the "Prosperity Decade." In a 1929 decision the United States Supreme Court set what would become a precedent in defense of consolidation. The United States Steel Corporation, although it had been formed by a merger and controlled at least 50 percent of the country's steel production, was held by the Court not to involve any unreasonable restraint

[31]Ibid., p. 60.

of trade.[32] According to the Court, the test was not whether restraint was exercised, but whether it was "reasonable." Still another factor of the economy that reflected the consolidation was the degree of price rigidity.

During the twenties an industry dominated by a few large companies, although they might have been nominally competitive, was likely to follow the price policy established by its leaders. It was relatively easy for industry leaders to agree as to what their price policy would be. Efforts by "competing industries" were made to protect themselves against price competition without violating the anti-trust laws. The "open-price system" was one such technique. In this system members of a trade association were required to file with a central office the prices they were charging. Harold Underwood Faulkner concludes that, "Human ingenuity appears to have been strained to the limit to circumvent the antimonopoly laws. . . ."[33] Soule submits that the concentration of industrial control proceeded virtually unchecked during the decade.[34] In several instances small business interests proved that they could be as efficient as larger ones and still be part of a corporate combination. The rapid proliferation and success of the chain store is a good example of this rationale.

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[32]Soule, p. 131.

[33]Faulkner, p. 613. [34]Soule, p. 141.

One study of consolidation revealed a steadily increasing number of mergers in manufacturing and mining, from 89 in 1919 to 221 in 1928, with the number of merged or acquired concerns increasing correspondingly from 438 to 1038.[35] Mergers in iron, steel, and machinery accounted for approximately 20 percent of the total. A great many mergers were also made in public utility concerns. From the mid-1920s until the depression, consolidation of public utilities mainly through holding companies went on at a considerable rate. By 1930, ten groups of holding companies controlled 72 percent of the electric power. By the same year, 20 percent of the railway mileage was under holding company control.[36] In general industry, out of the ninety-seven largest corporations at the beginning of 1929, 22 percent (21) were purely holding companies.[37] This tendency was finally curbed by the depression and the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935. The consolidation of big business quite naturally involved the consolidation of capital. Faulkner estimates that by 1930 the 200 largest corporations controlled nearly 38 percent of all business wealth, and were controlled by approximately 2000 individuals.[38]

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[35]Fred Albert Shannon, America's Economic Growth (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 609.

[36]Soule, p. 142.

[37]Ibid., p. 143.

[38]Faulkner, p. 613.

Summary Statement

Although the majority of Americans lived better than ever before, considerable evidence indicates that the economic gains had been unevenly distributed. The twenties produced more rather than less inequality in the distribution of income. Unemployment remained persistent. Because there was no unemployment insurance in the decade, many of the unemployed became destitute. America's economy was characterized by imbalances in the productive system, widespread poverty amid abundance, and numerous "sick" industries.

CHAPTER V

A "REVOLUTION" IN MANNERS AND MORALS?

One of the most popular aspects of the American twenties is the social life. Frederick Lewis Allen's description of "The Revolution in Manners and Morals," in his Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties (1931), provides both information and entertainment on this topic.[1] More recent accounts of the topic provide such labels as: "Flaming Youth," "Age of the Flapper," "Era of Wonderful Nonsense," "Gin and Jazz Age," "Delirious Decade," and "Fantastic Interim." In virtually all of these interpretations the reader is confronted with certain stereotyped ideas. He is told that there was a revolution in manners and morals during the decade. The younger generation was obsessed with sex, the automobile, lurid movies and magazines, alcohol, and "petting parties." At least part of this "revolution" is supposed to be a reaction to World War I and its disappointing consequences. Part of this may be true; however, it may also be argued that these rebellious actions involved a minority of the youth. It

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[1]Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), pp. 73-101.

appears that most of the younger generation did not rebel, but the minority that did has received a disproportionate amount of attention from those who have written about the era.[2]

One of the results of the increased affluence of the twenties was that many new life-styles emerged. There were considerable changes in family life, interpersonal relations, leisure, and cultural aspirations. In consequence of this, many traditional beliefs and institutions were being challenged. The decade witnessed the emergence of a "youth culture," whose life-styles clashed with those of the older generation. It is, however, inaccurate to label this emergence as a revolt or a rebellion.

Burl Noggle is among those historians who question the so-called revolution in manners and morals of the twenties. It is his contention that there is "little reliable documentation" for the generalization.[3] David A. Shannon maintains that the hedonistic image of the twenties is "shallow and exaggerated once one thinks about it critically and looks into the epoch more searchingly,

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[2]Paul Goodman and Frank Otto Gatell, America in the Twenties: The Beginnings of Contemporary America (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 92.

[3]Burl Noggle, "Configurations of the Twenties," in The Reinterpretation of American History and Culture, eds. William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: National Council For the Social Studies, 1973), p. 485.

. . ."[4] Abba Hillel Silver, an American rabbi, stated in 1931 that the rebellious image of the youth had been "overplayed by middle-aged moralists and lecturers."[5] Silver contended that in reality there was "no more conservative, stand-pat young man in the world than the raccoon coated 'homo sapiens' on the American campus;" and that "in matters that really count, . . . in questions of social justice, war and peace," young Americans were "as orthodox, as unimaginative, and as submissive as the most hidebound Babbitts of their day."[6]

That many Americans wanted to display socially acceptable manners and morals is evident in their reading habits. One of the early popular books dealing with etiquette and manners was Lilian Eichler's The Book of Etiquette (1921). The more accepted work was Emily Post's Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage, published in 1922.[7] Within a few years Mrs. Post's name was synonymous with correct manners.

There was, according to Roderick Nash, a "strong current of old-fashioned morality" that ran through "the

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[4]David A. Shannon, Between the Wars: America, 1919-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 84.

[5]Paul A. Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 12.

[6]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[7]James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 235.

roaring twenties."[8] The rapid rise of the Reader's Digest is an indication that many American readers still valued conventional moral standards. DeWitt Wallace first published Reader's Digest in 1922. The first issue consisted of "thirty-one boiled down 'Articles of Lasting Interest.'"[9] The central thrust of the magazine included wholesomeness, civic responsibility, grass-roots goodwill, practical application of religious principles, science or hygiene to previously neglected situations. Indicating articles the Digest did not want to publish, one editor said, "We don't scoff."[10] Literary historian James D. Hart observed that the format of the Digest was conformity, with terse, simply stated optimism.[11] Also, Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet was first published in 1923. Historian Paul Carter has noted the difficulty in accounting for a book of this nature as an integral part of the Jazz Age culture.[12]

Conventional morality was also evident in the efforts to ban books and censor movies. State officials established boards to censor movies in four states: Pennsylvania (1911), Ohio (1913), Maryland (1916), and Kansas (1917). In a reaction to broad public pressure, the

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[8]Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970), p. 146.

[9]J. C. Furnas, Great Times: An Informal Social History of the United States (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), p. 483.

[10]Ibid. [11]Hart, p. 256. [12]Carter, p. 13.

movie industry created the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, headed by William H. Hays.[13] The purpose of this agency was to codify and enforce a new movie morality. The so-called Hays Office created the famous Hays Code. The purpose of the code was to regulate the content of the movies. It is significant to remember that this was a self-imposed censorship. The code for production imposed rather rigid and very conventional standards for what was exhibited. For the ministers, who were uneasy about the movies, the code stated: "Ministers of religion . . . should not be used as comic characters or villains." For those who were particularly conscious of nationality and/or ethnic background: "The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly." As a sop for the prohibitionists and a gesture to obedience to the law: "The use of liquor . . . when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown." For those sophisticates who considered movies vulgar: "The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant though not necessarily evil subjects, should be subject always to the dictates of good taste and regard for the sensibilities of the audience."[14]

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[13]Hays had been a Republican Congressman, the national chairman of the Republican Party in 1920, and Postmaster General in President Harding's Cabinet.

[14]Furnas, p. 426.

Other objectionable topics that were either heavily restricted or prohibited were: illegal drug traffic, adultery, scenes of passion, seduction or rape, sex perversion, white slavery, miscegenation, sex hygiene and venereal disease, complete nudity, and obscenity.[15] It must be pointed out, however, that these restrictions were not followed "to the letter." There were several major violations.

Traditional accounts of the twenties leave the impression that religious faith declined during the decade. On the popular level, religion was a powerful force on the thought of the decade. Roderick Nash concludes that, "Sincere religiosity in the decade [1920s] has been persistently misrepresented."[16] Bruce Barton's three best-sellers, The Man Nobody Knows (1924), The Book Nobody Knows (1926), and What Can a Man Believe? (1927), were actually illuminations of Christianity. In the past Barton's books have been noted as being efforts of a businessman-writer to uplift the virtues of business and salesmanship. Barton was the son of a minister and an adult with deep religious convictions. When he likened Christ to a successful business executive, in The Man Nobody Knows, he was using a simile that he thought would be meaningful to the public. Nash concludes that, "Barton,

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[15]Ibid., pp. 425, 426.

[16]Nash, p. 147.

. . . provides better evidence for the rise of interest in religion in the 1920s than for its decline."[17]

Henry L. Mencken's quip, "Heave an egg out of a Pullman and you will hit a Fundamentalist almost everywhere in the United States," implies the predominance of religious fundamentalism in the twenties. The Bible served as a satisfying, absolute authority for a sizeable number of Americans. Efforts by cosmopolitan religious liberals failed to shake the religious fundamentalism for a large number of Americans. Among the list of popular religious leaders of the decade were: William Jennings Bryan, Billy Sunday, and Aimee Semple McPherson. In addition, many of the challengers of fundamentalism were, themselves, deeply religious people. The struggle of modernists with fundamentalists is an indication of the depth of feelings on both sides--not of a decline of interest. There may have been some decline, but membership figures do not indicate it.[18]

A negative aspect of the popularity of conventional attitudes is the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The second edition of the Klan rose to nationwide power in the twenties. The Klan opposed Jews, Catholics, blacks, immigrants, urban dwellers, anti-prohibitionists, and liberals. Except for

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[17]Ibid., p. 148.

[18]U. S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, 1:392.

his flouting of the law, the klansman was the antithesis of the "Roaring Twenties" stereotype. The Klan, with its approximately five million members by 1924, voiced the attitude of a considerable and otherwise silent section of American society. Nash concludes that the Klan response "reflected the hold of traditional ethics on the popular mind of the twenties."[19]

Writing in the North American Review in 1926, the Klan's Imperial Wizard and Emperor, Hiram Wesley Evans, summed up the Klan's greatest achievements. This account, although clearly biased, is a good statement of the Klan's public goals and beliefs. Evans stated that the Klan's

> . . . greatest achievement . . . has been to formulate, focus, and gain recognition for an idea--the idea of preserving and developing America first and chiefly for the benefit of the children of the pioneers who made America, . . .[20]

Other achievements listed were: winning leadership in the movement for Americanism; the education of millions of members in citizenship; the suppression of much lawlessness and increase of good government wherever the Klan was strong; the restriction of immigration; and the defeat of the Catholic attempt to seize the Democratic party.[21]

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[19]Ibid., p. 144.

[20]Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan's Fight For Americanism," North American Review 223 (March, April, May 1926):34.

[21]Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Evans also boasted of the Klan's leadership in increasing the sentiment against radicalism, cosmopolitanism, and alienation of all kinds. In short, Evans argued that the Klan had "the right to make America American for Americans."[22] He stated and defended the Klan's emotional basis for defending such beliefs as the restoration of the Bible to the schools, racial integrity, and patriotism. Emotions and instincts were to be valued more than "ratiocination," because they "have been bred in to us for thousands of years; far longer than reason has had a place in the human brain."[23]

In his City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s, Don S. Kirschner states that the motivation of Klan members originated from anxiety and anger felt by a long-dominant group toward the threat posed by throngs of demanding outsiders who refused to adjust to their scheme of things.[24] At its "operational level" the Klan's intense cultural animosity was most common and most effective in the rural areas, "where there was virtually no counterbalance to the upsurge of feeling among old Americans."[25] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., argues that, in its adherence to Klan objectives, rural America sought to

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[22]Ibid., p. 50. [23]Ibid., p. 51.

[24]Don S. Kirschner, City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1970), p. 126.

[25]Ibid., p. 127.

preserve racial purity against urban immigrants.[26] Kirschner states that on the surface, the Klan shared the goals of rural America, that is, opposition to liquor, immigrants, gambling, and sexual novelty. In his estimation, the Klan was most attractive because it offered its own unique, extra-legal, or even illegal methods of action to compensate for the slow legal processes in stopping the forces of the "new America."

Some Americans may have felt that all gods were dead in the twenties, but many others were still looking for something to uphold and respect. This is evident in the American reaction to Charles Lindbergh's famous trans-Atlantic flight in 1927. In his account of this reaction, Furnas states, "In the narcissistically morbid Jazz Age his [Lindbergh's] diffident wholesomeness and hygienic good looks pushed gangsters and love nests off the front page."[27]

John W. Ward submits that in their adulation of Lindbergh, the American people were trying to grasp the meaning of his accomplishment, and "through it, perhaps, to grasp the meaning of their own experience."[28] The time of Lindbergh's achievement is of prime importance. His

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[26]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 98.

[27]Furnas, p. 524.

[28]John W. Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," American Quarterly 10 (Spring 1958), p. 3.

flight came near the end of a decade that had been characterized by social and political corruption and by a feeling of moral loss. There was a degree of cynicism as to the real purposes of the world war. There was mass disregard for the law. A philosophy of relativism had seemed to weaken the traditional moral absolutes. Ward concludes, as did the newspapers of the time, that "Lindbergh's chief worth was his spiritual and moral value."[29] Lindbergh gave many Americans a brief look at what they would like to be. This identification with a genuine hero was like "a breath of fresh air" in a seemingly polluted environment. "The grubbiness of the twenties," states Ward, "had a good deal to do with the shining quality of Lindbergh's success."[30] The great spontaneous public approval of Lindbergh's flight was actually a rebirth in which Americans "momentarily rededicated themselves to something, the loss of which was keenly felt."[31] A popular statement of the period was that "Lindy" taught America "to lift its eyes up to heaven." There were many efforts to identify Lindbergh with the "pioneer spirit," and thereby link him with the traditional value of individualism in the American experience. Lindbergh was singled out as a pioneer of the American frontier. In doing so, Americans were projecting their sense that the basis of American strength lay in the past and that

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[29]Ibid., p. 6. [30]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[31]Ibid., p. 7.

Lindbergh's achievement somehow signified that Americans must look to the past to rediscover some lost goodness.

The irony of the pioneering spirit of Lindbergh is that it was made possible by an elaborate technology. Lindbergh was a pioneer who had conquered a new frontier, the sky. But this success was dependent upon the product of a highly industrialized and mechanized society. The celebration that followed his landing in Paris was to celebrate a victory of man and machine. Lindbergh acknowledged this when he told Paris reporters, "You fellows have not said enough about that wonderful motor."[32]

Gilman M. Ostrander and James R. McGovern are among those historians who challenge the contention of a revolution in manners and morals in the twenties. Both submit that there was a "revolt," but it was well under way before the twenties. Ostrander states that by 1920, "the revolution in morals was already virtually complete so far as many American intellectuals were concerned."[33] Among those responsible for the revolution Ostrander includes Charles Darwin, Thomas Beer, and Sigmund Freud. He maintains that many young people in the twenties did not rebel against their elders.

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[32]Ibid.

[33]Gilman M. Ostrander, "The Revolution in Morals," in _Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America: The 1920's_, eds. John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner, and David Brody (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 336.

We have seen that there were significant challenges to convention, even though the challenges came from a minority. It is fair, also, to point out that the challenges did not burst forth in the twenties unheralded. Many of the changes had been evolving for twenty years or more. In the opening years of the twentieth century, a quiet dissent from well-established religious beliefs was taking place. Meanwhile, American intellectuals were attacking openly and rudely the most revered American moral assumptions. A group of literary naturalists, including Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London were drawn together by a common assumption: The universe was a mindless movement of forces, providing no objective basis for a fixed moral law.[34]

The revolt in morals was apparent in the prewar "dance craze." This craze may be dated from Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band," written in 1911. Some of the dances of the era were the Fox Trot, Horse Trot, Grizzly Bear, and Bunny Hug. The Bunny Hug, according to Ostrander, was singled out by critics for "special censure."[35] Ragtime music was a definite form of revolt. It involved a revolution against traditional music, but it also jeered other cherished symbols, such as the Rosary, the "mother

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[34] Ibid., p. 333.

[35] One girl, according to a popular song of 1912, declared, "Mother said I shouldn't dare/ to try and do the Grizzly Bear."

image," and Christian hymns. "Nearer My God to Thee" became "Nero, my dog, has fleas."[36]

The automobile, according to Allen, and others, was a key factor in the alleged revolution. However, the emphasis on the automobile's influence on courtship patterns "tends to underestimate the ingenuity of young people of the pre-automobile age." David Shannon concludes that there were "lovers' lanes" in the pre-automobile period occupied by horse-drawn carriages, and since the horse was more intelligent than the automobile, "a buggy driver could pay less attention to his driving than could a car driver."[37]

James R. McGovern presents abundant and convincing evidence to refute the generalization that the twenties launched a revolution in manners and morals. He approaches this task by questioning whether the American woman's "emancipation" in manners and morals occurred even earlier than World War I. The popular literature of the Progressive era contains significant evidence to support McGovern's contention. Writing in the Atlantic Monthly in 1914, Agnes Repplier voiced strong opposition to the lack of self-control by Americans. She concludes that "The lack of restraint, the lack of balance, the lack of soberness and common sense, were never more apparent than in the obsession

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[36]Mark Sullivan, Our Times: 1900-1925, vol. 4: The War Begins: 1909-1914 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 251.

[37]Shannon, p. 92.

with sex which has set us all a-babbling about matters once excluded from the amenities of conversation."[38] In a 1918 novel, The Restless Sex, the heroine observed, "What was all wrong in our Victorian mothers' days is all right now."[39]

McGovern believes that historians have not carefully examined the possibility that the real beginnings of America's new freedom in morals occurred before the twenties. It is his contention that during the Progressive era American women had become very active and socially independent "to prefigure the emancipation of the 1920s." Before the twenties there was a significant decline of external controls over morality. One factor related to this was the working and living conditions in the urban areas. According to McGovern, the traditional "straight and narrow" could not serve the choices and opportunities of urban life. That the traditional concept of the home was in peril was evident in sociological literature as early as 1904.[40] The automobile and the telephone were already sufficient in number to influence dating and pre-marital patterns.[41]

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[38]Agnes Repplier, "The Repeal of Reticence," Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics 113 (March 1914):298.

[39]James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," Journal of American History 55 (September 1968):316.

[40]Ibid., p. 319.

[41]In 1931, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, "As far back as 1915 the unchaperoned young people of the smaller cities

Traditional accounts of the revolution in manners and morals cite the growing independence of women as a key factor. There is evidence to indicate that the alleged job and kitchen revolutions were already in advanced phases by 1910.[42] As McGovern concludes, "The great leap forward in women's participation in economic life came between 1900 and 1910, . . ."[43] One of the most popular social images of the twenties is that of the so-called "flapper." The image of the flapper was present at least as early as 1915. Mencken coined the phrase in 1915. Distinctive traits such as the use of cosmetics, lack of undergarments, rolled down hose, public smoking, public drinking, and knowledge of birth control techniques were becoming common, especially after 1910.[44]

Although the "noble experiment" was a failure, the fact that such a bold change was envisioned is evidence that there was a desire to rid American society of the "evils of alcohol." The fundamentalist churches took the lead in the prohibition effort. The fundamentalist clergy argued that liquor damned millions of souls and caused the spread of worldliness. For the native-stock, Protestant

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had discovered the mobile privacy of that automobile given to young Bill at sixteen to make him 'self-reliant.'" F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," Scribner's Magazine 90 (November 1931):460.

[42]McGovern, p. 320. [43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., pp. 326-329.

fundamentalists, prohibition also became a means of imposing their standards on immigrants. Paul Goodman and Frank O. Gatell state that, "Prohibition, . . ., represented a desperate effort to resist changes that were turning America into a pluralistic and secular society, . . ."[45]

Phrases such as Jazz Age or the Roaring Twenties may summarize part of the flavor of the decade and tell us about a part. Historians must always remember the story of the blind men and the elephant and not think they know the elephant because they described his interesting trunk. The use of such terms or labels is not the whole truth. J. C. Furnas has concluded that the 1920s were "Roaring" and "Flaming;" however, "they were so much more, . . ."[46]

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[45]Goodman and Gatell, p. 144.

[46]Furnas, p. 367.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The teacher-historian is one of the guardians of the cultural legacy of mankind. He also functions as an interpreter of the emergence of mankind. In order to accomplish these functions the history teacher attempts to transmit correct accounts and analyses of selected segments of the past. It is from these accounts and analyses that he attempts to formulate generalizations that appear to be well-grounded. Based on his knowledge of the past, the teacher-historian also attempts to furnish valid explanations of the development of the past.

The scope of the survey course in American history places certain limitations on how it may be taught. What ever method is selected, the teacher will utilize historical generalizations. The generalization is a useful tool in explaining complex ideas. The instructor should, however, be constantly aware of the limitations of generalizations. Generalizations are not historical laws. They are guides to understanding. The teacher-historian formulates explanatory schemes, or generalizations of limited validity. These generalizations are useful until their revision is called for by new evidence.

In American history the decade of the 1920s has not, until recently, been examined on its own terms. This failure by historians has resulted in several distorted, if not incorrect, generalizations of the decade's history. These generalizations have resulted in certain stereotypes of the decade. This dissertation has considered four such stereotypes: the "lost generation" of American writers, "silent" Calvin Coolidge, the "revolution" in manners and morals, and the "Prosperity Decade." This dissertation suggests that historians have failed in their attempts to present accurate narratives and descriptions of these four concepts. There is substantial evidence, in both primary and secondary sources, to question or even to refute the four stereotypes.

The American writers of the twenties should not be remembered as a "lost generation." They were not lost. They were imaginative and creative artists who sought to write from their own experiences. Many were disillusioned as a result of World War I, and its aftermath. But, this disillusionment was not limited to American writers. The writers of the decade had an optimistic view of the future; they had matured as a result of the past. Hemingway's use of Gertrude Stein's exclamation, "You are all a lost generation!" probably did more to perpetuate the "lost generation" stereotype than any other single item or event. Also, sales figures do not indicate that the so-called "lost generation"

writers were as widely read as some other writers who defended conventional standards and values.

In its analysis of President Calvin Coolidge, this dissertation does not assume that he was a great President, or that he possessed great leadership potential. This study does conclude that Coolidge was not the silent, taciturn individual that survey accounts would have us believe. Coolidge was a colorful, witty, and at times a very talkative Chief Executive. He was a tactful, shrewd politician who gained the respect of many contemporary politicians and statesmen.

Many surveys of the social history of the twenties dwell on the alleged "revolution" in manners and morals. The decade did have its "flappers," lurid magazines and movies, automobiles, and petting parties. These are indeed some of the sensational and bizarre items related to the twenties. They are a part of the decade's history, but they have been overemphasized by historians. Historians have failed to give substantial consideration to the belief of millions of Americans in the conventional and the traditional values. It is worth repeating here that the twenties have been given little chance, except to roar.

The Great Depression was triggered by the stock market crash of 1929. This statement, or a similar one, is frequently found in many survey accounts. This dissertation does not challenge its validity. However, this dissertation

does challenge the survey text's treatment of the twenties as the "Prosperity Decade." The decade did witness abundant material gains for millions of Americans. There was a considerable degree of prosperity. The economy of the decade, however, was fundamentally unsound. For millions of Americans the twenties was a time of unemployment, labor strife, or loss of income. Millions of Americans did not share in the prosperity of the twenties. The income of the decade was not distributed equitably among the population. Many industries, as well as agriculture, were characterized by mass production. However, the maldistribution of income did not allow for the mass consumption that was necessary if the economy was to thrive. A more in-depth consideration of the decade's economic weaknesses and flaws is essential if students are to understand how a stock market crash could trigger a severe economic depression that lasted more than a decade.

It has been almost half a century since the Great Depression put a calm to the so-called "Roaring Twenties." This passing of time has allowed historians to realize that they should make a more careful analysis of the 1920s. This time should allow students and teachers to be less emotional and more objective as they study the decade. If students are allowed to see how historical interpretations may change as more evidence is discovered, then perhaps they can develop a degree of critical thinking. They may, for

example, be able to recognize the flaws in the society of the twenties that ultimately contributed to the coming of the Great Depression. It is also anticipated that the history teacher may recognize the usefulness of teaching changing interpretations. The teacher-historian has an obligation to his students to demonstrate the value of the effects of research and of inspiring continued interest in knowledge.

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