Two African American Alabama sharecroppers, John and Lizzie Parker, move north during World War I in search of jobs, opportunity, a home of their own, and education for their children. Eventually they reach Detroit, with its promise of wartime jobs in the automotive industry. As the decade of the 1920s develops, the Parkers experience racial hatred; uncertain, part-time work; a half-finished house on an unpaved ghetto street; and a completed high school degree for their daughter Sally.

Postwar Problems
- Red Scare
- The “Red Menace” and the Palmer Raids
- Ku Klux Klan
- The Sacco-Vanzetti Case
- Religious Intolerance

A Prospering Economy
- The Rising Standard of Living
- The Rise of the Modern Corporation
- Electrification
- A Global Automobile Culture
- Henry Ford
- The Exploding Metropolis
- A Communications Revolution

Hopes Raised, Promises Deferred
- Clash of Values
- Religious Fundamentalism
- Immigration and Migration
- Marcus Garvey: Black Messiah
- The Harlem Renaissance and the Lost Generation
- Women Struggle for Equality
- Rural America in the 1920s
- The Workers' Share of Prosperity
(2) SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. The dominant theme of the decade of the 1920s, as the Parkers' story suggests, was the mixed fulfillment of various dreams of suburban comfort and success. In a decade in which general prosperity, quick riches in the stock market, and new technologies held out the promise of success to all, many, like John and Lizzie Parker, found their dreams always just out of reach.

2. The 1920s, neatly packed between the end of World War I and the stock market crash in 1929, was a decade of paradox and contradiction. Conflicting trends persisted throughout the decade: prosperity and poverty, optimism and disillusionment, inventiveness and intolerance, flamboyant heroism and fallen idols, anxiety and affluence. Many Americans, like the Parkers and the New Era decade itself, saw their hopes raised and then deferred or dashed.

3. This chapter illustrates the profound effects that technological developments (the automobile, the radio, the bathroom, for example) have on diverse aspects of people's lives.

4. Interwoven throughout the chapter are the hopes and fears of many different groups--blacks in northern cities, migrant Mexicans and other immigrants, nativist Americans in the Ku Klux Klan, patriotic organizations, women, white suburbanites, factory workers, sports and media heroes, disillusioned writers, temperance crusaders, optimistic investors and advertisers, and many others.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

Familiarity with Basic Knowledge

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the postwar mood in America and the strikes, race riots, and Palmer raids of 1919 and 1920.
2. Name several technological inventions and influential ideas of the New Era and their impact on social and economic life.

3. Outline the development, distribution, and discrepancies of prosperity in the 1920s.

4. Describe the presidential styles and administrations of Harding and Coolidge.

5. Outline the foreign policy currents of the United States during the 1920s.

6. Describe the election of 1928 and the stock market crash.

**Practice in Historical Thinking Skills**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Analyze and evaluate the distribution of the benefits of prosperity during the New Era.

2. Analyze the impact of the automobile and other technological developments on American social and economic life in the 1920s.

3. Explain two major paradoxes and contradictions of the 1920s.

(4) **IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW**

1900 - 1930  Electricity powers the “second industrial revolution”

1917  Race riot in East St. Louis, Illinois

1918  World War I ends (Nov. 11)

1919  Treaty of Versailles
     Strikes in Seattle, Boston, and elsewhere
     Red Scare and Palmer raids
     Race riots in Chicago and other cities
     Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association spreads

1920  Warren G. Harding elected president
     Women in all states vote in national elections
     First commercial radio broadcast
     Sacco and Vanzetti arrested
     Sinclair Lewis writes *Main Street*
1921  Immigration Quota Law
       Naval Disarmament Conference (Washington Conference)
       First birth-control conference
       Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act

1921 - 1922  Postwar depression

1922  Fordney-McCumber Tariff
       Sinclair Lewis writes *Babbitt*

1923  Harding dies; Calvin Coolidge becomes president
       Teapot Dome scandal

1924  Coolidge reelected president
       Peak of Ku Klux Klan activity
       Immigration Quota Law

1925  Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee
       F. Scott Fitzgerald writes *The Great Gatsby*
       Bruce Barton writes *The Man Nobody Knows*
       Alain Locke writes *The New Negro*
       Claude McKay writes *Home to Harlem*
       5 million enameled bathroom fixtures produced

1926  Ernest Hemingway writes *The Sun Also Rises*

1927  National Origins Act
       McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Bill
       Mississippi River flood
       Sacco and Vanzetti executed
       Lindbergh flies solo, New York to Paris
       First talking movie, *The Jazz Singer*
       Henry Ford produces his 15 millionth car

1928  Herbert Hoover elected president
       Kellogg-Briand Treaty
       Stock market soars

1929  27 million registered cars in United States
       10 million households own radios
       100 million people attend movies
       Stock market crash (October)
Other Names to Know

John Reed      A. Mitchell Palmer      Langston Hughes
William J. Simmons  H. L. Mencken      Charles Evans Hughes
Margaret Sanger    Marcus Garvey      Al Smith
John L. Lewis      Al Capone          Andrew Mellon
Babe Ruth      Aimee Semple McPherson  Charles Dawes
John Scopes      Clarence Darrow      Billy Sunday

(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

“second industrial revolution”: the shift in American industry from the production of manufactured goods for other producers (such as coal and steel) to those for consumers (such as synthetic fabrics, chemicals, and petroleum)

(6) ENRICHMENT IDEAS

1. Examine the advertisements in some magazines of the 1920s to see how they reflect the currents of American culture. What do they suggest about attitudes toward blacks, women, and other groups? What do they reveal about American values and priorities? Now look at any contemporary magazine, watch television, and observe current advertisements. What do you learn about today's attitudes, values, and priorities? What has changed? What has not?

2. It would be quite easy to read some newspapers from the 1920s, either the New York Times or a local newspaper (both of which your library probably has on microfilm). You might focus on the coverage of the Teapot Dome scandal, the Scopes trial, Lindbergh's flight, or the election of 1928. Or you might look at advertising, editorials, and various feature articles to capture the mood of the 1920s.

3. One way to experience the currents of social life during the 1920s is through reading the literature of the time. Such novels as F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Tender Is the Night; Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises; Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio; Sinclair Lewis's Main Street, Babbitt, and Elmer Gantry; Claude McKay's Home to Harlem; Jean Toomer's Cane; John Dos Passos's 1919 and The Big Money; William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury; Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy; and many others provide wonderful insights into manners and morals. Select one of these, or another novel written in and about the 1920s, read it, and write an essay about how well it reflects the times.
Multiple choice: Choose the best answer.

1. The postwar mood in America was characterized by all of the following EXCEPT
   a. race riots and strikes
   b. an end to wartime enthusiasm
   c. an increase in immigrants from Russia
   d. the rise of the Ku Klux Klan

2. The steel workers' strike in 1919 was caused primarily by
   a. poor wages and long hours of work
   b. workers' pressures for a cost-of-living clause in their contracts
   c. resentment over hiring black workers
   d. Bolshevik influence in steel unions

3. The Red Scare and Palmer raids
   a. removed a serious Communist threat from the United States
   b. inspired a general strike in Seattle
   c. led to Palmer's death when his house was bombed
   d. represented one of the biggest violations of civil liberties in American history

4. Most members of the Ku Klux Klan opposed all of the following EXCEPT
   a. Catholics
   b. the League of Nations
   c. prohibition
   d. unrestricted immigration

5. The “second industrial revolution” produced goods primarily for
   a. the steel and coal industries
   b. other producers
   c. consumers
   d. war-torn Europeans

6. The automobile led to all of the following EXCEPT
   a. the growth of suburbs
   b. the rise of installment credit plans
   c. an increase in prostitution
   d. the growth of the petroleum industry

7. Henry Ford was
   a. a champion of the unionization of auto workers
   b. the inventor of the assembly line
   c. a ruthless industrialist in pressuring others to abide by his will
   d. a progressive industrialist who introduced labor reforms into his company
8. The immigration quota laws of 1921 and 1924 did all of the following EXCEPT
   a. limit the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe
   b. put a lower quota on immigrants from Germany and Great Britain
   c. open the country to Puerto Rican and Mexican laborers
   d. virtually ban Asian immigrants

9. Religious fundamentalists of the 1920s
   a. were Baptists
   b. did not participate in advances in technology to spread their word
   c. only believed certain parts of the Bible were true
   d. rejected modernism, pluralism, and the social gospel

10. Marcus Garvey headed an organization known as
    a. Universal Negro Improvement Association
    b. the NAACP
    c. Tuskegee Institute
    d. Harlem Renaissance

11. Writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the Lost Generation were disillusioned with
    all of the following EXCEPT
    a. the loss of idealism from World War I
    b. materialistic, business-dominated American society
    c. the conformity and prejudice of American life
    d. new social and lifestyle freedoms

12. Women's lives in the 1920s changed because of
    a. labor-saving devices which reduced the time spent on housework
    b. vast new workplace opportunities
    c. an end to the sexual double standard
    d. some increased sexual freedom

13. Under Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, individual and corporate taxes during the 1920s
    a. were substantially reduced
    b. were increased slightly
    c. remained at wartime levels
    d. none of the above

14. The Washington Conference in 1921
    a. lowered tariffs
    b. dealt with the tangle of war debts
    c. achieved a measure of disarmament
    d. did all of the above
15. The Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act was promoted and supported by
   a. the American Medical Association
   b. the Children's Bureau
   c. the feminist members in Congress
   d. the Right to Life movement

16. Women in the 1920s found that
   a. there were significantly fewer employment opportunities
   b. married women had to stay home; no jobs were offered to them
   c. they were still denied the right to vote
   d. that significant numbers could find jobs although generally at low pay

Essays

1. The 1920s was a decade of contradiction and paradox. Discuss.

2. Do you think the decade of the 1920s was one in which the American people looked more to the past or to the future? Or did they look in both directions at once? Explain.

3. Analyze the impact of the automobile and other technological developments on American social and economic life in the 1920s.

4. Analyze and evaluate who benefited from the prosperity of the 1920s and who did not.