Activity: The class will be divided into 2 opposing groups that will be representative of the arguments, debates, and differences of the 1920s. Using the below thesis as our guide, we will have a series of historical debates which address the conflict of attitudes throughout American society.

The 1920's were a period of tension between new and changing attitudes on the one hand and traditional values and nostalgia on the other. What led to the tension between old and new AND in what ways was the tension manifested?

Introduction

The speakeasy. The flapper. Al Capone. Boosterism. Prohibition. Cars and consumer culture. The roaring twenties. Through these popular images, the colorful decade of the 1920s still resonates among generations that never experienced it. Yet the popular stereotype of this crucial decade largely obscures its greater cultural and historical significance. From a cultural and historical perspective, the 1910s and 1920s were marked by a deep clash of cultures.

During the previous half century, the United States had undergone probably the most dramatic metamorphosis of its short history. It had transformed itself from a fragmented, regional agrarian economy into one of the most powerful industrial and urban economies of the world. The prospect of economic opportunity drew millions of immigrants from abroad into its factories and cities. The farmer, who had occupied a favored place in American mythology since the time of Thomas Jefferson, rapidly gave way to the industrialist, the capitalist, and the entrepreneur. The town, the cultural center of preindustrial America, rapidly gave way to the city. The Victorian value system that prioritized restraint and had dominated mainstream American life in the nineteenth century gave way (over a half-century of struggle) to the more relaxed morals of the twentieth century. In an increasingly consumer-based society, leisure and pleasure were now prized over hard work and self-denial.
The economic, political, and social changes of the past half-century manifested themselves in a widespread clash of cultures. As twentieth century modernity increasingly challenged Victorian traditions, this provoked a defense of older values. The watershed years for this fundamental transition in American culture were the 1910s and 1920s. Although the various sides in the cultural debate cannot easily be defined, historians have noted a general division between those who embraced the new changes and looked with hope to the future and those who idealized the past and resisted cultural change. At the same time, the values of the new industrial economy as well as the lingering traditions from Victorian America suffused all sides in this cultural debate and blurred the lines between the various parties.

One such area of conflict centered on Prohibition. The temperance movement, the effort to limit and/or ban alcohol consumption, began in the early nineteenth century, but it was not until the eve of the 1920s that reformers succeeded in passing a constitutional amendment that forbade the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages. This passage of national Prohibition precipitated a major cultural clash in the 1920s between those who favored Prohibition and those who wished to repeal it. Ironically, industrialization influenced both movements. Those in favor of Prohibition believed that alcohol consumption limited one's ability to participate productively in the new industrial society. Those who opposed the amendment believed that an outdated moralism was responsible for Prohibition and argued that the changes of the past several decades, which they deemed to be progressive and objective, had rendered the morality of preindustrial America obsolete.

Another area of conflict was the changing role of women in American society. The transformation from an agrarian economy to an industrial one created new opportunities for women, particularly single young women. Now enjoying the freedom that comes from having an independent source of income, many women created a new culture for themselves that centered on consumer culture and mass entertainment. Many, however, considered the new woman to be a threat to social morality and opposed the flapper, the icon of the new woman in the 1920s, and what she represented.

The 1920s were also marked by a high degree of racial and ethnic conflict. One of the least-remembered facts regarding the 1920s is that it was the golden age of the Ku Klux Klan. While the KKK purported to represent "old-fashioned values," it unabashedly adopted the new methodologies of the industrial economy. Although the Klan continued to target African Americans, it focused much of its attention on the rising immigrant population of the cities. Indeed, the clash between immigrants and those who opposed virtually all immigration to the United States, particularly from southern and eastern Europe, was very prominent in the 1920s. Yet, at the same time, the workforce that the new immigrants represented was crucial to the health of the industrial economy, which greatly complicated this cultural debate.

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<th>&quot;Old&quot; Culture</th>
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<td>Emphasized Production</td>
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The above graph indicates in a general sense what historians mean when they refer to the "old" and the "new" cultures of the 1920s. This list is not meant to be definitive and, as can be seen throughout the website, some groups and debates encompassed aspects of both cultures. Taken *en passim* from Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).
One of the most prominent episodes of the 1920s, the Scopes trial, epitomizes the complexity of this cultural clash. The trial of John T. Scopes, a high school biology teacher accused of teaching evolution in the classroom, took on a life of its own when prominent politician William Jennings Bryan agreed to serve as prosecutor while famed lawyer Clarence Darrow came to Scopes' defense. The trial soon became an international spectacle. Although caricatured in such films/plays as *Inherit the Wind* as a clash between ignorant, backwoods fundamentalists and enlightened moderns, the reality of the Scopes trial was far more complex. The people of Dayton were not nearly so backward as they were portrayed in the media. Taking advantage of the national media, so-called Dayton boosters engineered the trial to attract tourism and economic opportunity to their town. Nonetheless, the trial took on a life of its own and, to many, brought into sharp focus some of the issues at stake in the great cultural debates of the decade; however, a close look at the positions of each side demonstrates that they were much more complex than most people view them today.

Just as the icons of the 1920s, such as the speakeasy and the flapper, are still with us today, so too are the legacies of these cultural clashes. The issues at stake were never fully resolved. The debate over prohibition continues today in the debate over cigarettes and the legalization of marijuana and other controlled substances. The place of women in American society continues to be a subject of much discussion. Many recent events show that race continues to be a compelling issue in American politics and society. Indeed, even the issues at stake in the Scopes trial continue to be debated on public school boards around the country, most recently in Kansas. A look at the cultural clash of the 1920s provides an important historical backdrop to issues that continue to resonate in American culture.
When most Americans think about this country's experience with Prohibition, they remember it as an ill-conceived experiment and an undeniable failure. A prime reason for this attitude, of course, is that the Prohibition amendment was repealed thirteen years after its passage. However, the dismissal of Prohibition as an embarrassing mistake, a shameful blot on America's legislative record, is too simplistic. A more thorough examination of Prohibition reveals more success than expected and a contentious scholarly debate about its impact. It also demonstrates that the battle over alcohol provided an arena for the mounting conflicts between modern and traditional, urban and rural, immigrant and native, Catholic and Protestant. The use of alcohol sharply divided American society; alcohol became a symbol for larger cultural clashes.

After a nearly one hundred year history in America, the temperance movement culminated in a constitutional amendment, passed in 1919, that mandated national Prohibition. The amendment forbade the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages. Temperance was a popular reform movement in the nineteenth century when many predominantly Protestant Americans responded to the problems created by drunkenness. Temperance was associated with many other forward-looking reform movements of the 1800s, including women's rights, abolitionism, and education reform.

Likewise, Progressives in the early twentieth century championed Prohibition as one of their constellation of reforms. Fighting the liquor trust, or the whisky ring, was part of the Progressives' campaign to regulate and reform big business. The movement to achieve Prohibition was most persuasive when it focused on eliminating the evil saloons rather than on controlling personal drinking habits. Saloons were places where men, usually working class and often immigrant men, gathered for fellowship and drink. Saloons were quite numerous, especially in northern cities, and were associated with a host of unsavory habits such as gambling and prostitution. Rallying Americans around the closure of what were depicted as corrupt, ethnic, working-class saloons proved an effective tactic.
The temperance movement can be viewed as simultaneously traditional and modern, making it difficult to position Prohibition in the cultural clash between old and new. In one sense, the temperance movement was traditional for it sprung from Protestant religious activism, an emphasis on family and morality, and an effort to mandate behavioral standards for the American populace. Prohibitionists believed that they were prioritizing the good of the community over the good of the individual. Prohibition also was associated with conservative anti-immigrant attitudes as well, for many Prohibitionists believed that the massive influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe was embedding a culture of drink in America.

Yet temperance was also a modern movement, especially when headed by the bureaucratic Anti-Saloon League because it embodied many of the new and "progressive" values of the time. These modern characteristics included bureaucratic organization, use of experts, scientific investigation, and the idea of using the authority of the government to create order and well-being in a society. The League also profited from an excellent understanding of modern politics.
But what once had been viewed as a forward-looking movement of social progress came to be viewed in the 1920s as a misguided, backwards, and puritanical blunder, bent on repressing people's freedoms and corrupting the laws of the land. Progressive Prohibitionists claimed that modernity meant alcohol must be eliminated from society. Yet, as it turned out, modernity undermined Prohibition.

There were, of course, groups of Americans who opposed Prohibition from the outset, but the size and fervor of the anti-Prohibition movement grew over the course of the 1920s and ultimately -- and surprisingly -- resulted in the repeal of the Prohibition amendment. Opposition to Prohibition began as a largely ethnic and working class phenomenon, but large segments of the middle-class withdrew their support during the 1920s. People opposed Prohibition for many reasons. One widespread concern was the lack of enforcement; Prohibition presented thorny legalistic and enforcement problems. The law was widely flouted by many, especially young adults in urban areas. This caused many Americans -- even some who agreed with temperance goals -- to fear that Prohibition had brought not the law-abiding, sober society promised by Prohibitionists but instead a dangerous loss of respect for law and order in this country. Sensational images of speakeasies, bootleggers, gangsters, and rampant corruption abounded.

A number of wealthy and prominent Americans formed the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment (AAPA). The AAPA was most troubled by what it viewed as national government paternalism and maintained that Prohibition was a harsh statute that threatened Americans' liberties and took away the right of local governments to determine the drink question for themselves. Although the AAPA led the movement to repeal the Prohibition amendment, other organizations were influential as well, especially the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform.

Another reason for opposition to Prohibition was that Americans' moral standards were changing rapidly during the 1920s, serving to undermine adherence to Prohibition. Modern values that emphasized youth and self-fulfillment challenged the traditional, Victorian principles of the middle class. The "consumer culture" was flourishing. Moreover, attitudes toward women were changing during this period, and it became more acceptable for women to drink -- and to drink socially with men. The 1920s was the era, for certain segments of Americans, of cocktail parties, jazz clubs, and fast automobiles. The issue of drink -- whether one chose to be Wet or Dry -- signified an important cultural divide during this period. One's stance on alcohol was significant; it became a symbol for an individual's broader character and morality. Modern values often included a more open attitude toward moderate alcohol consumption.

Finally, Prohibition was often associated with racist and anti-immigrant attitudes and even with the Ku Klux Klan. The Dry vs. Wet battle was epitomized in the controversy surrounding the 1928 presidential candidacy of Al Smith, the Catholic governor of New York who opposed Prohibition.
Additional Information

Professor K. Austin Kerr of The Ohio State University writes: The Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893, proved the most successful of the dry political organizations. It focused attention on the saloon and "the liquor traffic"-the businesses that supplied and sold liquor. By choosing to focus on the evils of the saloon, the league was in the tradition expressed by the woman's crusade; it was also opposing an institution widely seen as undesirable. The saloon won the attention of muckrakers, reform-minded journalists in the early twentieth century who exposed vice, corruption, and other social and political sores. Excerpted from George Kibbe Turner, "The City of Chicago: A Study of the Great Immoralities," McClure's Magazine 28 (April 1907): 576-79.

The sale of dissipation is . . . a great business . . . in Chicago. The leading branch . . . is the sale of alcoholic liquor .... [T]he liquor interests are vastly more extended in Chicago than any other. There are 7,300 licensed liquor sellers in Chicago, and . . . about a thousand places where liquor is sold illegally. The only business which approaches this in number of establishments... is the grocery trade, which has about 5,200. The city spends at least half as much for what it drinks as for what it eats. . . .

The great central power in the liquor business in America is the brewery. . . . [T]he breweries own or control the great majority of the saloons of American cities. They have a distinct policy:--If there are not as many saloons as there can be, supply them. This is what has been done in Chicago. Fully ninety percent of the Chicago saloons are under some obligation to the brewery; with at least eighty per cent, this obligation is a serious one.

The business of the brewery is to sell beer. . . . The brewery, under present conditions . . . must sell beer at all cost, or promptly die. This is because the brewing business has been over-capitalized and overbuilt there for at least ten years. There has been furious competition .... [A]t the present time a full third of the capital invested in the forty companies and fifty plants is not earning dividends. Under these circumstances, the breweries of Chicago can have but one aim--to fill Chicago with beer to the point of saturation.

Each brewer disposes of his product by contracting with special saloon-keepers to sell his beer and no other. The more saloons he has, the better. . . . The brewers employ special agents to watch continually every nook and cranny in Chicago where it may be possible to pour in a little more beer. If a rival brewery's saloon-keeper is doing well, his best bartender is ravished from him and set up in business alongside. If a new colony of foreigners appears, some compatriot is set at once to selling them liquor. Italians, Greeks, Lithuanians, Poles . . . have their trade exploited to the utmost . . . [N]o man with two hundred dollars [capital] . . . need go without a
saloon in Chicago .... [T]he brewery sorts him out a set from its stock of saloon fixtures, pays his rent, pays his license, and supplies him with beer. He pays for everything in an extra price on each barrel of beer . . . .

Under this system . . . Chicago has four times as many saloons as it should have, from any standpoint whatever, except, of course, the brewers' and the wholesalers' . . . . There is . . . one retail liquor dealer to every two hundred and eighty-five people, disregarding, of course, the one thousand unlicensed dealers. In the laboring wards the licensed saloons run as many as one to every one hundred and fifty. Take the stockyards. Around that long and dismal stockade, at every hole from which a human being can emerge, a shop or group of shops sits waiting. At the main entrance they lie massed in batteries . . . .

The Chicago market is thoroughly saturated with beer, and incidentally with other liquor. Reckoning it out by population, every man, woman, and child in Chicago drank, in 1906, two and one-quarter barrels of beer, -- that is, seventy gallons, -- three and one-half times the average consumption in the United States . . . .

Now, if the competition is red-handed among the breweries, it is simply ravenous among the saloon-keepers. There is a popular fallacy that there is great profit in the retail saloon business. The saloon-keepers themselves believe this when they go into it . . . .

All this means one thing -- a premium on the irregular and criminal saloon-keeper. . . . A place is popular, or it is nothing . . . . There are two general business methods of attracting it [a good trade]: By giving unusually large measures and big bonuses of free lunch; or by carrying illegitimate and illegal side lines. The first . . . does not leave large margins of profit; the second does. A year ago the license fee was raised [to] . . . wipe out the criminal saloon. It did, of course, nothing of the sort. The poor, miserable little dives in the working-man's ward, each snatching a starvation living from the lips of the dwellers of the dozen smokebefouled frame tenements about it, staggered down--a few hundred of them--and died. The man with the side-line of prostitution and gambling naturally survived and had the benefit of the others' failure.
TILL DEATH
DO US PART

Alcoholic Drinks Helped Break Up
9,228 Homes Every Year
184,568 in Twenty Years
1887-1906

One in Every Three Husbands Divorced for Cruelty was
Intemperate

Alcohol is an Enemy to the Home

Marriage and Divorce: Special Report U. S. Census Bureau, 1909, Part I.

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