Unit #4: The Changing Face of America
Part 2
(1890 – 1920s)
Part 1: America Faces Many Changes: Urbanization, Immigration, & World War I
Extreme Changes in America

- The last few decades of the 19th century were a time of rapid change and sharp contrasts.
- During the nineteenth century, the United States experienced a period of rapid urbanization.
- Many American workers were now industrial laborers working in these new factories.
- The Industrial Revolution and America’s change from a small, agricultural country to a major commercial and industrial power led to a massive change in the makeup of the American city.
Urbanization Increases

• The early United States was mostly a rural country for many centuries.

• In fact, according to the 1790 census, 95% of Americans lived in the countryside while 5% lived in small villages or small cities (New York, Boston, Philadelphia).

• After 1830 the urban areas of the country grew more rapidly than the rural areas.

• By 1890 industrialization had produced substantial growth in cities, and 35% of Americans lived in urban areas.
Immigration between 1800-1880

- The population in American cities continued to grow at a rapid rate between 1880 and the 1920s.
- Many of those who helped account for the population growth of cities were immigrants arriving from various countries around the world.
- The 10 million immigrants who came to the United States between 1800-1880 were categorized as the “old immigrants” because they mostly came from north and western Europe.
- They were (for the most part) white Protestants.
1891-1910 – 12 million immigrants came to the U.S.

- By the early 1900’s, 60% of the people living in the largest cities in this country were the children of foreign-born parents or were foreign born themselves.
- Seventy percent of these immigrants came from the south and eastern parts of Europe. These immigrants are referred as the “new immigrants.”
- They included Czechs, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Slovak.
- There were also Jews, Arabs, Armenians, Chinese, French Canadians, and Japanese.
Why did the Immigrants come to the U.S.?

• They came to the United States for (basically) the same reasons that earlier immigrants came. Reasons included:

  ➢ escape poverty
  ➢ escape religious persecution (seek freedom of religion)
  ➢ escape political persecution (seek freedom of speech)
  ➢ escape war
  ➢ escape famine
  ➢ enjoy better economic opportunities (The American Dream!)
Immigrants MADE America

• America’s growing industries would have been impossible without the hard work of the immigrants.

• Their cultures brought new dimensions to American life that (ultimately) resulted in a stronger society.

• Even though life in America was a huge improvement over their conditions in Europe, it still was not easy for the immigrants as they assimilated into the American society.
Immigration is shown in the 1992 movie *Chaplin* as Charlie Chaplin leaves England for The United States.

This clip also shows Chaplin as he sees a movie for the very first time.

(Chapter 8, fast forward to archive footage)
Working Conditions for the Immigrants

• Many immigrants found work in building skyscrapers, bridges, subways, and trolley lines in the growing cities.

• However, many of the work opportunities that immigrants (and their children) faced were the ‘dirty’ jobs that involved the iron ore and coal mines, steel mills, and sweatshops.

• This was the nation’s ‘dirty work’.
Life was Tough for the Immigrants

• Some immigrants worked as many as 15 hours a day for small wages.

• They often could not make more than just enough to feed, clothe, and shelter their families.

• They also faced crowded, unsanitary living conditions in poor, inadequate housing.

• Anzia Yezierska’s story “America and I” provides a glimpse of what life was like for immigrants in the sweatshops of New York City’s garment district.
Far and Away movie clip

• In these clips from the 1992 film *Far and Away*, we see Joseph (Tom Cruise) and Shannon (Nicole Kidman) immigrate from Ireland to the United States.

• These characters come from two different social classes in Ireland, but because they are immigrants, they are treated the same.

• You will see what happens when they leave their ship, as well as the type of living and working conditions their characters face as immigrants.

• (chapter 5 – skip through Ireland scene)
The American Dream?

- As the new century dawned, the belief in America as a unique place where work and merit, rather than social privilege, determined one’s fate remained a powerful ideal.
- Stories of people who had risen, through their own efforts, from humble beginnings to achieve fabulous success were told and retold.
- This American ideal and the stories of American success continued to bring in new immigrants every year.
- They hoped to be the next success story.
Writers Examine the Flaws of America

• However, many writers of the early 1900s focused on the flaws that were hidden underneath the “perfect image” of America.
• In *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair exposed the appalling working conditions of immigrants in the Chicago stockyards.
• The poet and folksinger Carl Sandburg presented the dirty side of urban industrialization – the poverty, the crime, the corruption.
• However, Sandburg also celebrated the courage and resilience of everyday men and women in the face of these blights.
World War 1 – the Next Event

• Aside from urbanization and immigration affecting the people and literature of the early 1900s, the next event that helped shape America was World War I.

• World War I, the so-called Great War, began on June 1914 when the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist.

• The act of violence called the world to arms, and a local European conflict ultimately became the first global war.
World War 1 Ends…

- In 1916, more than a half-million soldiers were killed in a ten-month-long battle near the town of Verdun in northeastern France.
- In 1917, the United States entered the conflict.
- Nearly 50 million lives were lost by the time the armistice, or truce, was signed in November 1918.
- The Treaty of Versailles officially ended the war in June 1919.
- Although America emerged from the war as a victor, at home its values were beginning to be challenged.
- The war was also one of the events that changed the American voice in literature.
World War 1 Affects Literature

- Even though some American writers wrote about the dark side of urbanization in the early 1900s, most Americans were still very optimistic.
- However, after the war the idealism of many Americans had turned to cynicism.
- Many Americans began to question the authority and traditions that Americans had come to depend on.

The American Dream

life, liberty, pursuit of happiness
War Horse movie clips

- In this first clip from the 2011 movie War Horse, British Captain James Nicholls is nervously awaiting his first battle in World War I. Then, he and the British army make a surprise attack on the Germans.

- The second clip takes place four years later, and young Albert Narracott has joined in the war effort and is looking for the horse that he once owned. This clip shows one of the newest tactics that was used in War War I – the use of mustard gas, also shows the men in the trenches.

- (Chapter 12, fast forward to “France -1914”; stop after horse is running by itself)

- (Chapter 21 – stop before fog and chapter 22)
Part 2: Writers Challenge the American Dream during the 1920s
The American Dream

• As the 20th century progressed, Americans and American writers really began to question the “American Dream.”

• So what is the American Dream?

• So let’s review some of the uniquely American beliefs that had for centuries played a major role in the formation of the “American mind.”

• There are three central assumptions that we have come to call the American Dream.
America as a New Eden

• First, there is admiration for America as a new Eden: a land of beauty, bounty, and unlimited promise.

• Both the promise and the disappointment of this idea are reflected in one of the greatest American novels, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

• This work appeared at a time when great wealth and the pursuit of pleasure had become a goal in itself for many people.
The Belief in Progress

• The second element in the American dream is optimism, justified by the ever-expanding opportunity and abundance that many people had come to expect.

• Americans had come to believe in progress – that life will keep getting better and that we are always moving toward an era of greater prosperity, justice, and joy.
Triumph of the Individual

- The final element in the American dream is the importance and ultimate triumph of the individual – the independent, self-reliant person.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed this ideal of the self-reliant individual during the time of the transcendentalism movement.
- He probably deserves most of the credit for defining the essence of the American dream, including its roots in the promise of the “new Eden” and its faith that “things are getting better all the time.”
- “Trust the universe and trust yourself,” Emerson wrote.
Change Begins the “Roaring Twenties”

- World War I changed the country – its optimism and the time period that followed.
- Many historians have described the period between the two World Wars as a “traumatic coming of age.”
- “The Roaring Twenties” was a large time of change in America, beginning with a new amendment in 1919.
- The Constitution was amended to prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcohol, which was singled out as a central social evil.
“The Jazz Age”

• However, Prohibition ushered in an age characterized by the bootlegger, the speakeasy, the cocktail, the short-skirted flapper, the new rhythms of jazz, and the dangerous but lucrative profession of the gangster.

• Recording the Roaring Twenties and making the era a vivid chapter in our history, F. Scott Fitzgerald gave it its name: “the Jazz Age”.

Rich vs. Poor

• The early 1920s was a time of increased wealth and prosperity for America.
• The rise of industrialization produced a working class and a wealthy class that were worlds apart.
• While the working class worked hard and stressed morals, the wealthy class lived leisurely and lavishly.
• Twentieth-century American literature reflected these times, leaving behind the romantic and spiritual world of the past for the harsh realities of modern society.
• The 1920s witnessed a revolution in American literary style called modernism that touched on ideas such as the rich vs. the poor.
Modernism

- Modernism was not only a literary movement, but also a movement in painting, music, and other arts.
- Modernism was fueled by the American writers who expressed disillusionment following World War I.
- Their disillusionment focused on the American traditions of earlier times that seemed to have become spiritually empty.
- Modernism called for bold experimentation and rejection for traditional themes and styles.
Characteristics of Modernism - Juxtaposition

- When writers use juxtaposition in literature, they use two images that are otherwise not commonly brought together.
- These two images appear side by side or structurally close together.
- This forces the reader to stop and reconsider the meaning of the text through the contrasting images, ideas, motifs, etc.
Characteristics of Modernism - Discontinuous Narrative & Intertextuality

• Discontinuous Narrative is when the story moves back and forth through time.
• Intertextuality is a relationship between two or more texts that quote from one another, allude to one another (allusions), or otherwise connect.
New Themes in Literature

• With modernism authors moved away from traditional themes that emphasized morals and values.

• Instead authors revealed real human fears, emotions and desires of the time so readers could relate to their characters.
New Themes in Literature - Social Norms/Cultural Sureties

• Women were given the right to vote in 1920.
• Hemlines raised; Margaret Sanger introduces the idea of birth control.
• Karl Marx’s ideas flourish; the Bolshevik Revolution overthrows Russia’s czarist government and establishes the Soviet Union.
• Writers begin to explore these new ideas.
New Themes in Literature - Alienation

• Sense of alienation in literature:
  – The character belongs to a “lost generation” (Gertrude Stein)
  – The character suffers from a “dissociation of sensibility”—separation of thought from feeling (T. S. Eliot)
  – The character has “a dream deferred” (Langston Hughes).
New Themes in Literature – City vs. Country Life & Valorization of the Individual

- Life in the city differs from life on the farm; writers began to explore the positives and negatives associated with city life.
- In the literature of this time period, conflicts begin to center on society and city life.
- Valorization of the individual is when characters are heroic in the face of a future they can’t control.
- This demonstrates the uncertainty of life and the future felt by individuals living during this time period.
- One of the best examples of this is the character Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby
New Themes in Literature - Desire

- Authors such as Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway used themes of desire as fundamental elements that motivated their characters.
- In each of their works, these authors presented intricate, self-conscious characters that desired wealth, love, and pleasure in order to attain their American dream.
- Of the authors of the 1920s, the stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald best captured the restless, pleasure-hungry, and defiant mood of the time period.
F. Scott Fitzgerald

- The American dream of material success was a major focus in Fitzgerald’s literature, as well as capturing the emptiness and emotions of his times.
- Nearly all of his works focus on the tension between the very wealthy and those – like him – who were attracted to them.
- In following the lives of characters whose fates are determined by their responses to wealth and to those who possess it, he gave his readers insights into the American preoccupation with money.
Poetry of the 1920s

• By the 1920s the last traces of British influence on American poetry were washed away, and American poets entered into their most dazzling period of experimentation.

• Poets of this decade, like the authors of short stories and novels also explored the darker aspects of society in post-war America.

• The 1920s produced much of the most powerful and acclaimed poetry in history.

• Four men stand at the top of this pyramid of the new breed of verse: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, and E.E. Cummings.

• Poetry in the 1920s made the great leap toward questioning all of the established rules of the form, pushing boundaries with the same zeal as the writers of novels.