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“While many Americans were enjoying economic prosperity during the 1920s, there was also increasing social conflict.” Assess the validity of this statement with reference to the following: KKK, prohibition, & nativism.

Thesis

While many Americans were enjoying economic prosperity during the 1920s, there was also increasing social conflict. Groups such as the KKK, terrorized blacks, Jews, foreigners, and Catholics. The belief of nativism increased the dominance of American-born citizens. Finally, the installation of prohibition increased violence and crime throughout cities.

Ku Klux Klan

- * 1915 William Joseph Simmons revived the Klan after seeing the noble portrayal of the KKK in D.W. Griffith's film, A Birth of A Nation.
- * In the the 1920's the KKK reappeared, targeting not only blacks, but Catholics, Jews, and foreigners.
- * KKK promoted fundamentalism, patriotism, "clean" living, & white supremacy.
- * Opposed bootlegging & motion pictures. The KKK appealed to those uncomfortable with the shift from agricultural to industrial America. Attacked the elite and intellectuals.
- * Membership ballooned in the 1920's. the secret organization had as many as 8 million members. Members included the poor and uneducated, as well as the middle class (doctors, lawyers, and ministers).
- * Devised voting strategy called "decade", which required every member to recruit ten people to vote for a selected candidate. Known as the "Invisible Empire", the Klan had elected officials across the country.

Nativism

* Nativism is the belief that American-born citizens, especially if of Anglo-Saxon descent, had superior rights to those who were foreign-born. The rise of Nativism in the 1920's was caused by an increase in immigration to the U.S. It resulted in the passage of highly restrictive immigration laws that imposed quotas by national origin, stemming the flood of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe seeking to enter the United States in the wake of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Emergency Quota Act, passed in 1921, was signed by President Harding. The National Origins Act, passed in 1924, also penalized Japanese would-be immigrants in addition to southern and eastern Europeans. One result of the restrictions was the emergence of a national labor force largely without foreign-born workers beyond those who already were here, a turn of events that ultimately favored African-American workers. Nativism also was a part of the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Prohibition

* During Prohibition, the manufacture, transportation, import, export, and sale of alcoholic beverages were restricted or illegal by the 18th amendment in 1919. However, the consumption of alcohol was still legal. Prohibition was supposed to lower crime and corruption, reduce social problems, lower taxes needed to support prisons and poorhouses, and improve health and hygiene in America. Instead, Alcohol became more dangerous to consume; organized crime blossomed; courts and prisons systems became overloaded; and endemic corruption of police and public officials occurred. A new breed of gangster arose during this period. These people took notice of the amazingly high level of demand for alcohol within society and the extremely limited avenues of supply to the average citizen. Within this imbalance of supply and demand, gangsters saw profit. Al Capone in Chicago is one of the most famous gangsters of this time period. Speakeasies, secret drinking clubs, popped up all around the countries. Newly hired Prohibition agents were responsible for raiding speakeasies, finding stills, and arresting gangsters, but many of these agents were under-qualified and underpaid leading to a high rate of bribery and corruption.

Conclusion

- * Many Americans found economic success in the 1920s, but others, notably foreigners, Jews, Catholics, and blacks, found social conflict. Groups, such as the KKK spurred on this unrest by hunting out individuals from these different groups. The idea of nativism increased hatred for foreigners. Finally, prohibition resulted in higher crime rates and intense violence rather than the peace and prosperity it was supposed to bring.