

Review of modern temper

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Modern Temper: American Culture & Society in the 1920s is a very well-known book written by Lynn Dumenil. In this book, the author has portrayed some very important factors about the 1920's. The book basically presents aspects of the 1920's that are usually looked over by us and go unnoticed. It can also be said that in the book, the author has attempted to paint a more accurate picture of how American society was formed in the rise of this era. She has accomplished this by precisely detailing the fire of this explosive era and by documenting the variety of cultural and political changes that had taken place to give better precision as to the pressure these events had on our society.

While trying to obtain this end, the author has placed a deliberate emphasis on putting forward ideas that rise above the basic beliefs about the cause and effects of the events that become apparent during the roaring twenties. The main theme revolves around the era after the war, the factors that brought about changes in that era, and basically the notion that the changes in the 1920s were not brought about because of the war, but these changes were natural and unavoidable and were to take place even if the war never took place.

Author's Background

Lynn Dumenil is the Robert Glass Cleland Professor of American History at Occidental College in Los Angeles and is at present the Bicentennial Fulbright Professor in American Studies at the University of Helsinki. She completed her B. A from the University of South California and further on, she received her Ph. D. at the University of California, Berkeley in 1981. The author of this well-known book has written a vast number of books and her articles have

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also appeared in the Journal of American History; the Journal of American Ethnic History; Reviews in American History; and the American Historical Review. Her well-known books include *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*; *Freemasonry in American Culture*; and (as co-author) *America: A Concise History* and is also the co-author of *Through Women's Eyes: an American History*.

At the moment she is studying American women and World War I.. She has also played a major role as a historical consultant to more than a few documentary film projects and is on the Pelzer Prize Committee of the Organization of American Historians and according to sources, “ she is currently working on World War I, Citizenship, and the State: Los Angeles on the Home Front, for which she has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, and *Women-Made History: from Colonial America to Modern Times*. She specializes in U. S. cultural and social history since the Civil War, with an emphasis on multiculturalism” (Lynn Dumenil, p. 1).

Critical Review of the Book “ Lynn Dumenil's *The Modern Temper* provides an exciting and original synthesis of a crucial decade that few of us really understand. She makes the insights and confusions of the women and the men of the twenties come alive. This is an important book” --Ellen Dubois.

When a vast number of us look back at the 1920's, we usually end up thinking of bars and the jazz age, of movies stars and flappers, of Harold Lloyd and Mary Pickford, of Lindbergh and Hoover, but most of all we think of the October 29, 1929, Black Friday, the day when the sinking stock market steered in the great depression. The book under consideration that is Lynn

Dumenil's, *The Modern Temper* is basically a book about the cultural differences that took place in the American society during the 1920's. The purpose of writing this book would be to inform the people about the aspects of the 1920's that have previously remained unknown to us or have perhaps gone ignored.

In this book, the author has put forward a very interesting account of the 1920's and years before it as well.

In *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, the author has put much emphasis on the fact that the notion that the, groundbreaking makeovers in culture and the social order that took place at this particular time in history were direct results of the First World War is not true at all. Instead of this notion that the 1920's can be analyzed by assuming that the post war period was a undeviating manufacture and end result from the war, the author has put forward the proposition that the seeds of the happenings that took place in the twenties were planted way before the time at some stage in the industrial revolution and through the effects of a culture that undermined individuals may it be men or women and a culture industrializing in a capitalist society.

In the words of the author, " the 1920s have emerged as such a distinctive period in part because it was sandwiched between two major eras of reform, the progressive period and the New Deal. In comparison with what came before and after, the twenties seem an anomaly. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt enjoy major reputations as dynamic liberal leaders, while the chief executives of the 1920s fare less. Twenties politics seem not

just stagnant, but reactionary, a period in which many rejected reform and embraced big business and Babbitry” (Dumenil. P. 1)

According to the author of the book, life in the 1920s took a positive turn for everyone.

A vast number of people belonging to the United States of America gained a chance to live in proper cities, towns and houses for the very first time in their lives. In the 1920s a vast number of social changes took place and along with these changes a number of disputes took place as well between what is right and what is wrong. The author has presented a number of social and political issues that took place in that era.

Although life in the 1920s became more stable, organized, sexually liberated, there was always the ever-increasing reaction. Now the basic notion under consideration is that the war has not had any effects on the post war era, but the war only seems to have speeded up the process of the transformation that took place in the 1920s by contributing to the financial boom that shaped the affluence of the twenties, glowing the resettlement of the countryside residents of African Americans and whites into urban areas, and by escalating opportunities for women in the work force.

The author further goes on to tell us that although this era, the 1920s seems to have an image of prosperity and success all over the United States of America, this notion is not true as well. The most that can be said about this era is that America was definitely going through a period of having wealthier societies, but just like any other country or just like any other society, not

everyone got to enjoy the luxuries of life or simply said, and not everyone got to have the same share of prosperity during this era.

The author has presented certain facts such as the conditions of the tarnished farming industry, that had never seemed recover completely from the aftermath of the negative economic effects of war, which caused many farmers to live their lives in dearth throughout the entire period of the twenties. Further on, she also tells the readers about the African Americans and other minorities who still faced extreme forms of racial discrimination and never got the chance to secure their lives or live comfortably by taking part in the work force that had far more increased opportunities for work for every single American.

The people who made the most benefit (in terms of capital and industries) during this era were the people belonging to the middle and upper class White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or WASP's, who had always lived in and continued to live in extremely good and ever-expanding urban areas. It was these opportune members of society who more frequently enjoyed the raise of the standard of living brought about by the mass production of goods such as electric irons and vacuum cleaners that contributed to the oversimplification of life's everyday tasks. A major trend and that too a very positive one as said by the author is the urbanization, which according to the author was completely natural and unavoidable due to the advancement from the Victorian era into a very modern and liberal period of life, which the people looked forward to.

A factor which played an extremely important role in this case was the immigration of the African Americans to the northern parts of the country in order to look for work and also to escape from the extremely racially discriminated south. Not only did the African Americans migrate but the Mexicans and other rural people also came in looking for work. The author has also proved her point by mentioning the women of this era who finally got a chance to attain their much wanted rights along with the gender equality that had always been wanted by these women for which they had been struggling forever.

Putting more stress on the more rightful, professional means of freedom rather than the flapper ideals, the author has put forward information about how the women's suffrage amendment did much to augment women's role in politics and how the war helped raise opportunities obtainable by women in their professional lives. Even though women were only able to attain only a few specific specialties in politics, they were still under paid as compared to men for the same work, and after the men came back from war, the stereotypically male jobs were rapidly given back to the men.

Although women earned a vast number of victories during their period for their rights, but it did not matter much to any of the minorities who were rarely given their rights.

In order to prove her point that the war did not have any effects on the era and that 1920s were better than any other era; the author has presented a number of arguments as previously mentioned. She has put forward the disasters of the previous " progressive" era.

In the words of the author, “ although the twenties did witness a reaction against social reform in a spirit of what Harding called the desire for normalcy, the decade is not as distinct from the reform eras that framed it as might first be supposed. During the progressive era, many reformers reacted against the extra ordinary power, the private sector had acquired. Despite the persistence of some reformers, in the 1920s the enthusiasm for social justice waned and the dilemma of he relative influence of the private sector versus the public sector was resolved largely in favor of the former” (Dumenil, p. 1-2).

In order to do so the author has defined a number of terms such as secularization, urbanization, the progressive time period, pluralism, modernity, conformity etc. The only lacking is that she has defined them in a very complex manner, which makes the idea hard to grasp by any normal reader who does not have any background of the issue at hand. Her research has been put forward in plain theory, which can be taken as a plus point (Dumenil, p. 3). As said, the evidence provided by the author is narrative and has been researched through libraries, surveys and her personal observation and understanding of the readings related to that era.