**MODERNISM**

THE DEATH OF THE

AMERICAN IDEAL?

1914-

?

# THE AMERICAN DREAM: PART I

● USA as the “New Eden”

Beautiful

Bountiful

Rewarding

Land of great, limitless possibility

# THE AMERICAN DREAM: PART II

● Optimism

Belief in Progress:

Life is continually improving

Opportunities are continually expanding

# THE AMERICAN DREAM: PART III

● Faith in the Individual:

Anyone can triumph and succeed in this land with:

Effort

Perseverance

Common Sense

# DEATH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

* Industrialism
* Civil War and WWI
* Darwin’s Theories
* Dominance of Science

All combine to undermine all traditional values and ideas

## THE RESULTS

* Skepticism
* Cynicism
* Pessimism about life, nature, human condition; human nature
* Disillusionment with morals, religion, country, progress, technology, etc
* Life is absurd: it makes no sense; there is no order in the universe
* Fragmentation: coherent worldviews blown apart

## THE RESULTS

* Cast adrift without an anchor or a compass to muddle through life as best we can
* Spiritual Bankruptcy: atheism and loss of faith in any traditional moral order
* Alienation: a feeling of the loss of all things that give life meaning and order

## THE GOOD RESULTS

* Because all bets are off, because nothing traditional holds water anymore, the following potentially positive things results:
* Freedom from old forms, morally artistically, and socially
* Experimentation as a hallmark of Modern art and literature: you can do WHATEVER

YOU WANT!

## THE GOOD RESULTS

* So, fewer restriction on human thought and behavior
* Wider acceptance of the non-traditional, such as the role of women
* Artists are truly free:

Stream of consciousness

Theater of the absurd

Stories with no plot

Free Verse poetry

* Freedom like this can be either terrifying or incredibly liberating and inspiring

## Responses: The Roaring ’20s

* Drink to oblivion to distract yourself from the pain of existence
* Revel in things of the flesh: food, wine, sex
* Try to fill spiritual void with economic success, social status, etc: whoever dies with the most toys wins.
* But this is not an option after the Depression!

**Responses: Ernest**

## Hemingway’s Code Hero

* World is harsh, cold, uncaring, godless and absurd
* All is “nada”: nothing
* Man is vulnerable and will be maimed and crushed by the universe
* Great suffering, mental, spiritual, and physical, is unavoidable
* All this stuff is a given and must be accepted
* What is important is only this: in the face of the losing battle of life, how do you conduct yourself?

## The “Code” Hero

* Thoroughly disillusioned with no faith in anything
* Always acts in accordance with a “code” of behavior that includes specific actions and attitudes
* Developed by observing the protagonists of Hemingway’s novels and short stories

## The “Code”

* Always maintain honor and dignity
* Show courage in the face of pain and death
* Endure and persevere through the horrors of life
* Never surrender, give in, cry for help, or cry uncle, no matter how severe the suffering

## The “Code”

* “Grace under pressure”: face death and pain with patience and dignity: do not crack or lose your head
* Stoical acceptance of all that the world hurls at you
* You must lose: a single human is far too small and insignificant to battle the universe
* What is important is how you conduct yourself as you are being crushed
* “The Lost Generation”: Hemingway and his contemporaries: meaning should be obvious

**So, what makes life tolerable?**

* Celebrating and savoring life’s simple pleasures: beauty, rest, food,
* Rituals: can give life a sort of order amongst the chaos of existence: The Bullfight.
* Practicing a physical skill or talent:

sports especially for Hemingway

* Comeraderie with fellow sufferers

## The Questions

* In the year 2008, have we emerged from the pessimism, angst, disillusionment, and alienation of the Moderns?
* Yuppies
* Spiritual malaise
* Suicide rates
* Divorce rates
* Alternative music
* Pursuit of wealth and status to fulfill us
* Mid-life Crises
* Depression rates
* What worldview are we today?
* How have the worldviews of the past influenced us today?

## Modernism vs. Naturalism

* Not as scientific.
* Fragmentation of the world is emphasized

●Deeply experimental since all tradition and therefore all conventions have been blown apart through fragmentation

●More focus on the absurd

●Not as focused on determinism.