Mr. Gorham Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

US History II/*The Tribal Twenties Block: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

**The “Sick Industries”**

The symbol of the twenties is gold. This was the age of the gold standard, a time when people with money slept with confidence: their banknotes were redeemable in the precious metal. Small boys received gold watches on ceremonial occasions, and little girls were given gold pieces as birthday gifts. The noted Philadelphia banking family, the Stotesburys, equipped their bathroom with gold fixtures (“You don’t have to polish them!”)…The twenties were, indeed, golden, but only for a privileged segment of the American population. For workers and their families, the serious maladjustments of the economic system fell upon them with disproportionate weight. *The interplay between illusion and reality is the key to [understanding the 1920s]. This was a society in imbalance*.

--Irving Bernstein, The Lean Years (Boston: 1960)

**Fact:** Between 1920 and 1929, according to Department of Agricultural statistics, 19,436,000 Americans moved from farms to cities (mostly large cities).

**Analysis:** You are a union leader. Is the influx of unskilled, poor laborers a positive or a negative for your union? Explain.

**Fact:** Between 1920-1929 the number of trucks on farms increased from 139,000 to 900,000 and tractors from 246,000 to 920,000. Three thousand combine harvesters were sold in 1920; 20,000 in 1929.

**Analysis:** Describe how the motorization of the American farm impacted productivity (output) and prices of agricultural commodities like wheat, corn, hogs.

**Fact:** The Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union had 105,400 members in 1920; by 1929 it had 32,300 members and no money.

**Analysis:** Why did union membership decline in the 1920s?

**Fact:** You are a Gaston County, North Carolina textile mill hand (your wife and children work in the mills, too). Your hours are from 6AM to noon, then from 1 PM to 6 PM, and from 6 AM to 11 AM on Saturday.

**Questions:** How many hours per week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Average hourly rates for such work was $.29. How much do you earn on a weekday: $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is your weekly pay? (Don’t forget to add Saturday!): $ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Your room and board (plumbing but no electricity) is $4.00 per month and your grocery, fuel and insurance bill comes to $4.00 per month. (Your expenses are $2.00 per week).

After deducting your expenses, how much did you make this week? $ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Amortize that over a 52 weeks, how much is your yearly income? $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Fact**: In 1920, there were 500,000 unionized coal miners in the northeast and coal fetched $4.20/ton from the railways. Coal output that year was 568,000,000 tons. In 1929, railways paid only $2.40 per ton of coal.

**Analysis**: What accounts for the decline in coal prices?

You are a coal mine owner. How do you cut costs?

**Summary:** There are three “sick industries” in the 1920s. What are they?

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

**Fact:** National income in the US rose from $60.7 billion in 1922 to $87.2 billion in 1929. Wages and salaries rose 41.5 percent. Stock dividends rose 110 percent.

**Analysis:** Who benefitted more from the increase in national productivity?

“This was a society in imbalance.” ~ Irving Bernstein, describing the 1920s