

Basic US History

Unit 7 - Changing America

The Roaring 20s

The 1920s have been called “The Roaring Twenties” and “The Jazz Age.” It was this and more.

After the Great War ended in 1918 Americans were determined to begin enjoying themselves as much as possible. The United States turned its back on the rest of the world (isolationism) and hoped to find meaning in making fortunes, having fun, and living out fantasies. President Calvin Coolidge said in 1925, “*The business of America is business*” and American businesses boomed during the twenties. It was a decade devoted to the making and spending of money. The only goal was to make a profit and business leaders became national heroes.

Read and annotate each of the 1920s categories below. Answer the questions in the box to the right of each passage.

AUTOMOBILES

Henry Ford put America on wheels in 1908. He organized a mass production system using a moving assembly line. Each worker performed the same task all day long. An entire car could be built in two hours. The auto industry gave birth to new industries – service stations, garages, rubber, plate glass, and tourism. Automobiles, called “tin lizzies”, became the symbol of the 20s. Cars gave people a sense of freedom and independence. They could go places they never had before. In 1925, the ford Model T cost about \$300 and came in any color – as long as it was black.

In 1925 the Model T cost about \$300, now allowing the workingman to own a car. Identify three ways the automobile changed American society.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

During WWI and the 1920s, hundreds of thousands of blacks joined in the Great Migration from the rural south to the industrial cities in the north. As populations swelled in the cities, nightclubs began to immerge, none more prominently than New York’s Harlem neighborhood. It was there that black artists expressed themselves through writing, art, and music. When New Orleans native Louis Armstrong moved to Chicago in 1922, he introduced an early form of Jazz that would spur the growth of many new musical talents. Duke Ellington led a small band that would play at a famous nightclub called “the Cotton Club”. The jazz movement would continue its growth seeing many black artists play the Cotton Club, like Bessie Smith and Benny Goodman, ironically to all white audiences.

Define the term renaissance and apply how it relates to African Americans in the 1920s.

Review:

What was the name of the plane used in the first successful flight across the Atlantic Ocean?

Where was the black arts movement in the 20s centered?

WOMEN IN THE 20s

Many young people rebelled in the 1920s. They were determined to dress and behave differently than their parents. Having won the right to vote in 1920 with the 19th Amendment, women started to strut their independence. Attitudes toward marriage changed considerably. Many went back to school to earn college degrees and the number of women in the work force continued to increase. Some young women, called “flappers”, wore short “bobbed” hair, short skirts, flesh-colored stockings, loose-fitting blouses, and bright make-up. They smoked cigarettes, drank liquor and went on dates without chaperones. They listened to “jazz” music and danced the “Charleston.”

How were American women different during the 1920s?

PROHIBITION and ORGANIZED CRIME

The 18th Amendment took effect on January 16, 1920. Prohibition outlawed alcoholic drinks in the United States with the purpose of reducing crime and fixing ills in society. Gangsters like Al Capone made fortunes in “bootlegging” – supplying illegal alcohol. Some people made homemade alcohol called “bathtub gin,” but thousands of otherwise honest citizens broke the law by visiting illegal taverns called “speakeasies.” Chicago alone had 10,000 of these “hidden” bars worth \$100 million a year. Prohibition ended in 1933 when the 21st Amendment was ratified.

How were the actions of Americans towards the 18th Amendment reflective of the attitudes during the 1920s?

NATIVISM RESURGES

The depression of 1919 helped fuel the resurgence of nativism and racial tensions as many returning soldiers found it hard to find jobs. At the forefront of the movement to restrict immigration was the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan targeted Catholics, Jews, immigrants, blacks, and other groups said to be “un-American.” In the Sacco-Vanzetti Case, police arrested two immigrants for the robbery and murder of two employees of a shoe factory. The evidence against them was questionable, but the fact that the accused men were anarchists and foreigners led many to assume they were guilty. They were sentenced to death and executed in 1927.

What were many Americans’ opinions of race in the post WWI -1920s era?

Review:

What was the most famous dance of the “Roaring Twenties?”

Who was the most famous gangster of the “Roaring Twenties?”
