

USA Depth Study

1919 – 1941

Key Notes

Key Question 2: How far did US society change in the 1920s?

Focus Points

What were the 'Roaring Twenties'? • How widespread was intolerance in US society? • Why was Prohibition introduced, and then later repealed? • How far did the roles of women change during the 1920s?



Key Question 2: How far did US society change in the 1920s?

Big Picture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IMAGE we have US Society in the 1920s is that it was an exciting time of societal advances with greater freedoms and a more liberal society and age of exciting change in entertainment, sport and improved living standards as well as an age of greater tolerance and understanding. • In REALITY - The USA was a Society of Contrasts between those who benefitted from societal changes and those who did not. • The USA presented an IMAGE to the outside world as a 'melting pot' in which different groups were welcomed and integrated into US society – the REALITY was that it was more like a 'salad bowl'.
What do we mean by the Roaring Twenties?	
Why was the decade called the 'roaring 20s'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a proliferation of entertainment (in spite of restrictions such as prohibition) Symbolised by the expansion of the Hollywood film industry, developments in sports such as baseball and boxing and in music and the emergence of a group of women who epitomised the period – 'flappers' who challenged the stereotypical view of how women should behave. • The era is also referred to as the 'Jazz Age'. • It saw migration from rural America to towns and cities – urbanisation of society.
The 'limits / reality'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The booming economy underpinned the Roaring 20s and was symbolised by the growth of cities with skylines dominated by skyscrapers. • The working week fell from 47 hours to 44 – people had more leisure time and more disposable income – they wanted something to spend their money on. • These changes saw some 'conflict' between rural and urban areas as rural America viewed these changes as immoral and decadent. (Skirts going up, morals going down!) • BUT it was a time of contradictions: More civil liberties and freedom but discrimination against African Americans remained (KKK) and strict immigration rules – it was a time of wealth and prosperity and a consumer society, YET 40% lived below the poverty line.
Describe the developments in the radio industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio played a major part in the development of entertainment. • KDKA was one of the first major broadcasters in 1920 – by 1922 there were 600 radio stations • By 1930 over 60% of US families owned a radio – it was a 'family thing' • Stations specialised in Jazz, sport, Opera • By 1929 NB network was making \$150 million a year. • Radio gave opportunity – especially to African Americans playing jazz. (Hence the 20s being known as the Jazz Age)
Why were the 1920s also called the Jazz age?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jazz music as a new genre became very popular – played in clubs and on the radio • The Cotton Club was renowned / symbolic of the era and featured many of the greatest African American entertainers of the era, including Count

	<p>Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Jazz came new dances – The Charleston, Black Bottom, the Lindy Hop • With Jazz came ‘flappers’ – young woman challenging societal ‘norms’ (See below)
<p>How did Cinema develop in the 1920s?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hollywood movie industry grew in Los Angeles – by end of 1920s it was a multi \$billion industry. • Over 300,000 cinemas across the country. • Even trying colour film – Ben Hur 1925 • Paramount, Warner Brothers and MGM produced over 500 films a year. • One hundred million cinema tickets being sold every week. • Low cost of tickets 10c for a ticket made entertainment accessible to even the poorer sections of society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People of all ages attended movie theatres (replacing traditional stage shows) • Cartoons became popular – Mickey Mouse (Steamboat Willie, 1928) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All films were silent until 1927 – the first ‘talkie’ was the Jazz Singer starring Al Johnson. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinema gave rise to a new generation of movie stars: Epitomised by box office hit, Charlie Chaplin.
<p>How did cinema change US society’s moral values?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because....film industry was influential - pre-war moral values were being challenged. Cinema promoted immoral behaviour! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Sex appeal’ had major selling power – women actors such as Theda Bow made ‘risqué’ films with titles such as ‘Forbidden Path’ and when a women sins’ – Clara Bow was sold at the ‘It’ girl, a flapper. People copied their looks and behaviours. • Rudolph Valentino became a male ‘sex symbol’ and earned \$1 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 21st century terms these films were very ‘tame’ but at the time they challenged the values of more conservative rural America • 36 states threatened to bring in their own censors before Hollywood agreed to the Hays Code. (Scenes of nudity and dancing of a sexual nature were prohibited, killing scenes should be condemned and a kiss could not last longer than 7 film metres) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinema prompted broader societal changes in esp. for women – contraception was more widely available and young women didn’t have chaperone’s and fashions changed (Coco Channel)
<p>Focus Point: How widespread was intolerance in US society?</p>	
<p>Immigration</p> <p><i>Was the US a ‘melting pot’ or a ‘salad bowl’?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The USA prided itself on the idea that it was a ‘melting pot’ where all nationalities were welcomed. • Most US citizens were ‘old’ immigrants or descendants of immigrants • In the 1920s immigrants became despised and feared and laws were passed to restrict them. • Discrimination came especially from WASPS (white Anglo-Saxon protestants) who pulled up the ladder behind them to Eastern Europe and Asian immigrant who were Catholic or Jewish.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After WWI there was a strong spirit of 'ISOLATIONISM'
Making it law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration Law 1917 required immigrants to read English. (Literacy tests)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1921 Emergency quota act – limited immigrants to 3% of the number from a country already in the US
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1924 The National Origins Act (Johnson-Reed Act) reduced the 3% quota to 2% • This act completely excluded immigrants from Asia including Japan.
What was the 'Red Scare'? What were the Palmer Raids?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fear of bolshevism (Communism) • General disturbances / strikes were blamed on communists. • A series (36) of planned bomb attacks in 1919 were blamed on communist agitators.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was US Attorney General: very anti-communist. • On January 2, 1920 thousands of individuals (estimates vary between 3,000 and 10,000) were arrested in more than 30 cities and c. 600 deported without trial.
Who were Sacco and Vanzetti? <i>(Victims of the Red Scare)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Italian anarchists – arrested 1920 and put on trial for armed robbery and murder • Their trial became a trial of their radical ideas. • They were convicted on flimsy evidence It was said '<i>Judge Thayer is full of prejudice...he has been carried by fear of the Reds</i>' • After 6 years of appeal, they were finally executed (1927) – VICTIMS of anti-communist sentiments (even though they were anarchists and the actual perpetrator had confessed in 1925!) • They were pardoned in 1977!
What was the experience of African Americans in the USA in the 1920s?	
What was segregation? How were African Americans 'discriminated' against?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although slavery was abolished in 1865 there was widespread discrimination / racism in the 1920s. • There were many laws (especially in the South) to limited their freedom – in housing, employment and education. • The John Crow laws (in the south) saw segregation on buses, parks, schools, cinemas, restaurants, toilets, separate entrances – even separate cemeteries.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Supreme Court refused to challenge the Jim Crow laws! • There were public 'lynching' without a trial for alleged crimes. (61 lynching in 1921) • Education was less accessible – only 15 of African Americans attended school in the South. • Education authorities spent less on black American schools than those for white people. Textbooks were rare and class sizes were huge. • Difficult literacy tests prevented black people from getting the vote. • After WWI there was a 'great migration' of 1.5 million African Americans from the South to the North. • They found work (albeit low paid and unskilled) many worked in domestic service. They still had less job security and their general standard of living was lower than white people.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most black Americans in the south were <i>sharecroppers</i> who suffered when agricultural prices fell throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Three-quarters of a million lost their jobs
Who were the Ku Klux Klan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A white SUPREMACY movement - that persecuted Jews, Catholics and black people • Formed after the American Civil war but in decline before WWI: revived after release of a film – The Birth of a Nation which glorified the KKK as defenders of American values. E. they saw divorce as immoral • They believed immigration threatened WASPs (and supported the anti-immigration laws). • Its membership (WASPs – white Anglo-Saxon protestants) grew to c 5 million by 1925 before falling away. • It was divided into ‘chapters’ and more local groups ‘Klaverns’ The overall leader was the Imperial Wizard. • They used violence and intimidation – burning crosses outside the houses of potential victims, encouraged people to boycott ‘black’ business. • It had some important members including a few senators, judges and police officers that used their influence to protect Klan members.
What happened to the KKK?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Grand Dragon named David Stephenson was found guilty of rape and murder of a young women – this damaged the reputation of the KKK which said it believed in traditional values. • By 1929 it had only 200,000 members.
What ‘improvements’ occurred in the lives of African Americans in this period?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several organisations were set up to promote the case of African Americans. E.g the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of coloured people) which had over 90,000 members AND the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) which supported African Americans in starting their own businesses. It had over 1 million members.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: Some Universities (In the North) accepted African Americans e.g Howard College. (but schools still segregated)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society: In the world of popular entertainment the rise of jazz music turned some black musicians into worldwide celebrities such as • African American culture was able to thrive in Harlem (New York) – The Harlem Renaissance (Art, literature, poetry all promoting African American culture)
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A married woman still had to be on their husband's passport if they wished to travel! • Working class and rural women could not afford the new fashions and they didn't have the time to go out and enjoy social events. • Black women could not benefit from the changing lifestyle due to discrimination and poverty. • Many women in the Bible Belt disapproved – changes were considered immoral and unchristian. • Older women disliked the immodesty of the flappers. Their behaviour was considered 'immoral' (<i>Skirts going up, morals going down! esp. the petting parties!</i>)

Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decade started promisingly for women but ended with many unfulfilled expectations. • Certainly, new opportunities and changing expectations and attitudes, but the changes were more evolutionary than revolutionary.
Religion	
What was fundamentalism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of Christians (protestants) that believed the bible should be followed literally and strictly. • They proclaimed to have very strict morals and values – their influence was mainly in rural areas – an area referred to as ‘The Bible Belt’ across Southern and Mid-Western states of the USA.
What was the Scopes Trial?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes referred to as the ‘Monkey Trial’. • The trial of Johnny Scopes, in 1925, a high school teacher who deliberately broke Tennessee law (The Butler Act) by teaching Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution in school. • This went against / challenged fundamentalist belief in creationism. • An anti-evolution league was established to campaign against the teaching of evolution and the trial ultimately weakened the anti-evolutionary cause – the trial was broadcast live on the radio (The first ever to have been so) • Scopes was fined \$100 for breaking state law but the Butler Act was not enforced thereafter.
Focus Point: Why was Prohibition introduced, and then later repealed?	
What was Prohibition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In was the 18th Amendment to the US constitution. • Also known as the Volstead Act • Referred to some as ‘The Noble Experiment’ – in the belief US society would benefit. • It banned the production, transportation and sale of alcohol. • It lasted from 1920 to 1933 (When Roosevelt ended it)
(Explain)why it was introduced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of the success of the Anti-Saloon League campaign (pre-war) and the Women’s Christian temperance movement. Revivalist preaching. • Strong support in rural America – 33 states had already passed their own restrictions. Politician supported it as they wanted the rural vote. • After the war it was seen as unpatriotic – many brewers and bar owners were German (e.g Budweiser) • Alcohol was blamed for domestic violence, poverty, absenteeism from work, gambling and crime. • Businessmen supported it (e.g Henry Ford) – they felt workers would be more efficient
How did people react to prohibition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People ignored the law! Even President Warren Harding! • George Cassidy (The man in the green hat) was Congress’s main ‘bootlegger’ – he made up to 25 deliveries a day! Never stopped by Capitol Police. Operated for 10 years without being stopped. • Illegal bars – speakeasies – sprung up all over America. In New York there were 32,000. • More spirits were drunk (than beer)

<p>Why was it so difficult to enforce?</p> <p>+</p> <p>Why was it finally repealed in 1932?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too few prohibition agents (2300) in total and easily bribed. 1 in 12 officers sacked for corruption. Only paid \$2500 per year. • Criminal gangs made vast profits – bribed judges, court officials, government officers, mayors etc. ‘The National Gesture’ was taking a bribe. • US border with Canada vast – almost unpoliceable and rum runners from the Bahamas. 29,000 miles of coastline! • Lack of public support! Al Capone said ‘I’m only providing a public service’. People made moonshine / bathtub gin for personal consumption. • Speakeasies everywhere (See above) • 280,000 illegal stills were seized – demonstrating the huge scale of law breaking. • It cost over \$13 million to enforce – without real success! It had led to an increase in criminal activity and prostitution and gambling (Harding the ‘noble experiment’) • Economic damage – loss of \$11 billion in taxation / unemployment was rising – the industry could provide jobs. (especially as the Great Depression gripped the US after 1929)
<p>Who was Al Capone?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notorious gang leader in Chicago – bootlegging, gambling and prostitution • Made \$60 million a year – controlled city officials through bribery and intimidation. • Battled with his competition – Bugs Moran (North Chicago) leading to St Valentine’s Day massacre (14 February 1929) and infamous ‘Last Supper’ where he killed 3 he didn’t trust with a baseball bat. • Finally arrested for 1931 and sentence to 11 years for tax evasion and sent to Alcatraz.
<p>Summary</p>	<p>Why did Prohibition fail?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public demand (which criminalised everyone who drank!) – A Government commission established by Hoover said it was unenforceable! • Failed to ‘improve society’ e.g. caused organised crime. • Impossible to enforce with existing resources. • Costly and Economically damaging
<p>Focus Point: How far did the roles of women change during the 1920s?</p>	
<p>What were the ‘traditional pre war expectations of women?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre war expectations were that women should lead ‘restricted’ lives – be modest in their appearance e.g no make-up, have a chaperone (if not married) and to not undertake physical exertion in public e.g sport!). Their role in society was that of the dutiful housewife and mother. • In politics – in most states they could not vote – politics was for ‘men’. • In employment few paid jobs were open to women – most employment was in low paid jobs such as cleaning, dressmaking and secretarial work,
<p>What political changes / advances came after the war?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics In 1920 women won the right to vote. (19th Amendment) 8 million women voted in the 1920 election. • Political parties paid more attention to the views of women – This helped the passing of the Shephard -Towner Act 1921 creating women and children’s health clinics.
<p>What political limitations remained?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics: remained dominated by men. • By the end of the 1920s only 24 states allowed women to serve on a jury.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 1928, ONLY 145 women had seats in 35 State governments and there were only 2 were State Governors. • The National Woman's Party, failed to get an Equal Rights Amendment accepted. (1923) Not passed until 1970s! • Many women still believed in a women's traditional role as mother and housekeeper - esp. in rural USA.
What economic / employment opportunities opened up for women after WWI?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The War had seen women working in factories proving they were not limited to pre-war employment roles. • Women were employed in greater numbers -By 1929, 10.6 million women were employed outside the home.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were employed in greater numbers and in a far wider range of jobs - especially in new industries and especially single women.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economic boom saw department stores employ many women as designers and buyers - potentially lucrative positions including international travel.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was an increase of 25 per cent in the number of women working during the 1920s.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 1930 26% of married women were in employment (compared to 7% pre 1900)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They found jobs as telephonists, typists, secretaries and clerks.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in employment gained greater financial independence - allowing them to purchase consumer goods and enjoy greater free time.
What economic / employment limitations remained?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expectations remained, that single working women would eventually marry ("I pay our women well so they can dress attractively and get married." - Henry Ford) • jobs in management continued to be male dominated. • pregnant employees would lose their jobs - there was no maternity pay / leave • Many US states forbade women from working night shifts (after 10pm) • many law firms refused to employ women with law degrees (or only hired them as secretaries) • most women were still housewives and were not as free as men. • the average weekly wage for men in 1920s was \$29 compared to \$17 for women
What societal changes / improvements occurred for women?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations changed: Women started to smoke and drink in public and to go out without chaperones, all of which would have been frowned upon before the war. • It became acceptable for women to drive cars and take part in energetic sports.
and Flappers....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young 'liberated' women that challenged societal norms. (In reality represented an extreme example of societal changes taking place at the time) • Short skirts, bobbed hair, bright clothes, make-up. • Strong sense of independence and a demand for 'equality' – not looking to be married to have a family.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FASHION: Women wore clothing more suited to an active life. • They stopped wearing corsets. Skirts became shorter. • In 1919, women’s skirts were about six inches above ground level, but by 1927 the hems of skirts were up to knee-level. • Fashions - It was all the rage for women to cut their hair in a bob. Beauty salons spread across America. • Maybelline – New York was the first major make-up company - Maybelline became the first cosmetic company to advertise on radio and sales boomed.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young women danced the new daring dances, such as the Shimmy and the Bunny Hug, and rejected the formal dances of their parents, for example the waltz. • Petting Parties and Flirt Clubs began where women could kiss men in public!
<p>What society limitations / expectations remained in place?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence: Increased use of contraception gave women control over their bodies. (Reproductive rights) • The divorce rate increased - from 1 /1000 to 1.9/1000 • A married woman still had to be on their husband's passport if they wished to travel. • Working class and rural women could not afford the new fashions and they didn't have the time to go out and enjoy social events. • Black women could not benefit from the changing lifestyle due to discrimination and poverty. • Many women in the Bible Belt disapproved - it was considered unchristian. • Older women disliked the immodesty of the flappers. Their behaviour was considered 'immoral' (Skirts going up, morals going down! esp. the petting parties!