

Roaring '20s

A. Postwar Problems

1. The process of *demobilization* (transition from wartime to peacetime production levels) after World War I caused social & economic strain
 - a. The return of nearly 4.5 million soldiers to the workforce caused unemployment to rise & wages to fall, while wartime shortages left prices high
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Consumers purchasing goods put off during the war caused the prices of goods & services to roughly double from 1914 to 1920, but this trend ended during a brief but deep recession in 1920-21
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. This led many workers to protest, where they demanded higher wages & shorter workdays, leading to more than 3,600 strikes in 1919 alone
2. Anti-labor forces tried to convince the public that these strikes were proof of an impending communist revolution similar to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia
 - a. The spread of communism in Russia combined with strikes across the U.S. prompted the first American *Red Scare* (wave of widespread fear of suspected communists & radicals thought to be plotting revolution within the U.S. from 1919 to 1920)
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Events like the *Palmer Raids* led immigrants to come under great suspicion, which was highlighted in the murder trial involving *Nicola Sacco & Bartolomeo Vanzetti*, which were immigrants that held radical political views
 - (1)
 - (2)

- c. Defenders of civil liberties were outraged at the verdict of the *Sacco & Vanzetti case*, claiming that the conviction was not based on evidence but on them being immigrants & radicals
- 3. The growth of immigration & the widespread belief that immigrants were radicals & took jobs from the native-born led many to demand federal limits on immigration
 - a. The *Emergency Quota Act of 1921* & the *National Origins Act of 1924* established a quota system to govern immigration from specific nations
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. The *National Origins Act* nearly barred “new” immigrants from entering the U.S., since many did not arrive until much later than 1890, while immigrants from northern & western Europe were not limited much

B. The Booming ‘20s Economy

- 1. Much of the explosive growth of the 1920s was sparked by the automobile industry
 - a. More so than anyone else, *Henry Ford* changed the automobile from a toy of the wealthy to a necessity for all with the development of his *assembly line* (divided operations into such simple tasks that most work could be done by unskilled labor)
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. *Ford*’s highly automated system of production was dull & many workers quit within a few weeks, so *Ford* worked on ways to stop the high turnover
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. *Ford* shrewdly realized that if workers made more money & had more leisure time, they would become potential customers for his automobiles

2. Led by *Alfred P. Sloan*, *General Motors* began to design more expensive luxury cars & offered an ***installment plan*** (consumers would make a small down payment & then pay off the rest of the debt in regular monthly payments) to allow average consumers to buy these more expensive cars
 - a. By 1926, about 75% of cars were purchased on credit & the *installment plan* soon expanded to other items, like kitchen appliances, pianos, & sewing machines
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Such measures proved to cause problems for some that went greatly in debt trying to keep up with the latest styles
3. By 1930, cars, trucks, & buses had almost completely replaced horse-drawn vehicles, & trains & trolley cars also lost riders to automobiles
 - a. More than 400,000 miles of new roads were built during the 1920s to accommodate the increased traffic
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
 - (4)
 - b. ***Auto-touring*** became a new past time with people using automobiles for camping & sightseeing vacations, with highways like *Route 66* allowing people to travel west
4. Advertising also became big business during this era with money spent on advertising soaring to more than \$3 billion yearly by 1929
 - a. Commercial messages appeared in magazines & newspapers, on billboards, & over the radio
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Companies used slogans, jingles, & celebrity testimonials to fix product names in customers' minds

C. Republican Control in the 1920s

1. President Warren G. Harding's primary goal was to provide "less government in business & more business in government"

- a. His cabinet included successful business leaders Andrew Mellon & Herbert Hoover that believed the government should not interfere with the economy except to aid business
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
 - b. Also, the *Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act of 1922* supported businesses by pushing tariff rates on manufactured goods to an all-time high, which enabled U.S. businesses to keep prices high & increase their profits
2. In this era more than 1,000 businesses merged with the government making little effort to enforce antitrust laws
- a. While business profits increased about 60% from 1923 to 1929, workers' incomes grew only about 10% over the same time span
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. While the Harding presidency was characterized by support of business interests, it was also characterized by scandal with many of his close friends using their government positions in the government to get rich at the expense of all Americans
 - (1)
 - (2)
3. After President Harding's unexpected death on Aug. 2, 1923, Calvin Coolidge became president, which proved to be even more pro-business than Harding with his passing of the *Revenue Act of 1926* was passed that repealed the gift tax, cut estate taxes in half, & reduced taxes on the wealthy
- a. By keeping government spending low, Coolidge made possible both a tax cut & further reductions in the national debt
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Coolidge generally opposed laws designed to help farmers or workers stating that such legislation limited private initiative & harmed the economy

D. Social & Cultural Tensions

1. In the 1920s, many rural Americans favored a more traditional view of religion, science, & culture, & often turned to a Protestant religious movement called ***Fundamentalism*** (followers believed that every word of the Bible should be regarded as literally true without question)
 - a. At the same time, many urban Americans embraced ***modernism***, which was the growing trend to emphasize science & secular values over traditional ideas about religion
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. In 1925, conflict erupted between *fundamentalism* & *modernism* over the teaching of evolution in public schools during the celebrated ***Scopes Trial***
2. In the *Scopes Trial*, Tennessee schoolteacher *John Scopes* was put on trial for teaching biology from an evolutionary standpoint in violation of a Tennessee state law
 - a. The *Scopes Trial* drew nationwide attention as journalists flocked to Dayton, TN to cover the emotionally charged event
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. The highlight of the trial came when *Darrow* called *Bryan* to the stand as an expert on the Bible, where he affirmed his belief in the literal truth of the Bible
 - (1)
 - (2)
3. A sign of growing racism was the rebirth of the ***Ku Klux Klan (KKK)*** in 1915, which originally dissolved during Reconstruction
 - a. The new *KKK* grew rapidly outside the South in northern & Midwestern towns & cities, & targeted not only blacks, but also Catholics, immigrants, Jews, & suspected radicals
 - (1)
 - (2)

- b. By 1930, the KKK had vanished from public view due to decreased *Red Scare* tensions & poor leadership, including scandals & corruption by several leaders
 - 4. Some African Americans that lost hope of ever achieving equality in the U.S. favored the ***black nationalism movement***, which was led by ***Marcus Garvey*** that rejected integration & preached racial pride & self-help
 - a. *Garvey* was convinced blacks would not achieve equality in the U.S. & organized a “Back to Africa” movement
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. While *Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association* boasted almost 2.5 million members & sympathizers by the mid-1920s, the movement fell apart in the second half of the decade as *Garvey* was sent to prison & deported back to Jamaica
 - 5. Prohibition at first appeared to be a success with distilleries, breweries & saloons shut down, arrests for drunkenness declining, & alcohol-related deaths seeming to disappear, but much of the early success was actually due to decreased production that caused prices to rise beyond the average worker’s means
 - a. In many parts of the country, prohibition was extremely unpopular & widely ignored
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Lax enforcement enticed *organized crime* to enter bootlegging, proving to be one of the decade’s most profitable businesses with Chicago gangster ***Al Capone*** having a gross income of \$60 million in 1927
 - (1)
 - (2)

E. Life in the ‘20s

- 1. To fill Americans leisure hours, many Americans turned to radio, movies, & professional sports for entertainment
 - a. The radio had tremendous impact on the public with sales soaring from \$60 million in 1922 to \$426 million in 1929
 - (1)
 - (2)

- b. Radio stations soon learned they could make money by selling advertisement spots, with businesses sponsoring numerous programs
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. Millions of fans tuned into radio broadcasts & attended sporting events, with professional sports becoming a form of mass entertainment available to almost all Americans
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - d. Americans increasingly turned to movies for entertainment, which saw movie attendance soar to 90 million weekly in 1929
2. During the 1920s, magazines, movies, & literature began to discuss the life of the “new woman,” which was stylish, adventurous, independent, & often career-minded
- a. Young women exercised new freedom in how they dressed by no longer wearing heavy corsets & starting to wear dresses with shorter hemlines, put on more makeup, danced to the latest crazes, & generally assumed that they had the same political & social rights as any man
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Many young single women became salesclerks in department stores, secretaries, & telephone operators with females dominating clerical & sales jobs
 - (1)
 - (2)
3. *Jazz & blues* music first gained a widespread following during the 1920s

- a. *Jazz* incorporated West African rhythms, elements of black spirituals, & ragtime as well as European harmonies, while *blues* grew out of a long history of slave music & religious spirituals
 - (1)
 - (2)
- b. These types of music began to be played by white musicians as well & became popularized in jazz clubs & by big bands
4. The movement for black pride found its cultural expression in the ***Harlem Renaissance***, which was a literary & artistic movement centered around the NYC neighborhood of Harlem
 - a. Harlem became the cultural center for black writers, musicians, & artists
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. African American literature was central to the Harlem Renaissance, with Harlem writers & poets celebrating their ethnic identity & acknowledging the struggles faced by many blacks
5. The *Harlem Renaissance* coincided with the rise of a new generation of American writers, whose work reflected their horror at the death & destruction of WWI, which became known as the ***Lost Generation***
 - a.
 - b.