

# America 1917-1929 Revision Sheet

- IMAGE** - FIVE reasons why America rejected ToV - Isolationism; Money; American Soldiers; Germans; Empire. Two principles of the Ford-McCumber Act – set by the wages in country of origin and the American cost of production in America.
- WAIF** – FOUR reasons Americans wanted high tariffs – Wartime boom was coming to an end; American wages being high; Isolationism; Farmers wanted protection because of over-production;
- PRT** - THREE reasons Americans wanted to stop immigration – Prejudice; Red scare; Trade unions; THREE laws to control immigration – Immigration law imposing literacy test (1917); 1921 Emergency Quota Act (3% of 1910); 1924 National Origins Act (2% of 1890) THREE measures to ‘Americanize’ immigrants – Americanization Day rallies; Citizenship exams; classes in English language and American civics.
- CI SUCCESS** - SEVEN indications of a booming economy in the 1920s – Consumer Confidence; Innovation in production methods; Synthetics; Upsurge in car ownership; Cycle of prosperity; Exchange of Stocks (stock exchange); Skyscrapers.
- PAT GOT CASH** - TEN reasons why industry boomed in the 1920s – Population; Abundant raw materials; Tariffs; Government relaxed regulations and taxes; Opportunities for new technology; Techniques of production (assembly line production methods); Cycle of prosperity; Advertising; Sales Methods; Hire Purchase.
- FLOP CUTS** - EIGHT weaknesses of the American economy in the 1920s – Farming; Low wages; Old industries; Poor Black Americans; Cartels; Unemployment; Trade problems; Stock exchange.
- POWER** - FIVE aspects of the ‘Roaring Twenties’ – Prohibition (A CRIME, DAMAGE & ALE) ; Organised crime; Women’s lives; Entertainment; Racism.
- A CRIME** – Anti-Saloon League; Christian organisations – e.g. Women’s Temperance Union; Rural America – reacted against cities; Isolationism – rejection of foreign culture, especially German beer. Madness and lateness to work; Easy Street – film by Charlie Chaplin that highlighted the dangers of alcoholism;
- DAMAGE** – SIX reasons Prohibition was a failure – Drinking continued; availability of liquor underground; Made criminals of ordinary people; Adverse effects of bad liquor; Gangsterism; End (abolished in 1933 by 21<sup>st</sup> amendment)
- ALE** – THREE reasons Prohibition was a success – Alcohol was destroyed; Lowered consumption even after 1933 – pre-1914 levels not reached until 1971; Eliot Ness and the Untouchables became national examples of high standards;
- HACKLE** - SIX examples of racism in 1920s America – Hostility to immigrants; American government; Jim Crow; KKK; Lynchings; Even in the north – de facto segregation.
- RHINO** - FIVE aspects of the Black renaissance.

## Part 1: The growth of Isolation, 1919-1922

### How did the USA react to the end of World War I?

#### Rejection of the Treaty of Versailles

1. 1918 Republicans won a majority in the Senate/ Republican opposition to Wilson led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge - proposed 14 changes (‘reservations’)
2. Wilson set off on a nation-wide tour, but had a stroke. ToV and LoN rejected by the Senate in March 1920.
3. **Reasons [IMAGE]:** Isolationism (led by Senator Borah)/ Money – not wanting to spend money on wars/ American soldiers – 100,000 had died in WWI/ Germans – German immigrants hated the ToV/ Empire – Americans hated the British Empire PLUS WILSON (80% of Americans wanted the League, only 12 Senators were isolationists; the rest would have accepted Lodge’s 14 reservations. But Wilson would not accept any compromise and his 23 supporters voted against the Treaty.)

### How did the policies of the American Government encourage isolation?

#### American Isolationism in the 1920s

In 1920 Warren Harding became President under the slogan ‘return to normalcy’.

#### Tariffs:

1. Fordney-McCumber Act (1922) – highest tariffs in history (up to 400%) set according to Scientific tariff (the wages in the country of origin) and American selling price (the cost of production in America).
2. **Reasons Americans wanted high tariffs [WAIF]:** Wartime boom: American businessmen wanted this to continue/ American wages: were rising, and American businessmen feared low wages in Europe would bring

down cost of production abroad and foreign goods would be cheaper/ **I**solacionists wanted America to be self-sufficient/ **F**armers wanted protection because overproduction was causing prices to fall

### Immigration

1. 1917 Immigration Law (immigrants must be able to read English/ banned immigrants from China & Japan),
2. 1921 Emergency Quota Act (maximum number 357,000 / reduced immigration from eastern and southern Europe by only allowing each country to send 3% of immigrants already in America in 1910)
3. 1924 Reed-Johnson Act – also called the National Origins Act (maximum number 154,000 / reduced immigration from eastern and southern Europe by only allowing each country to send 2% of immigrants already in America in 1890)
4. **AMERICANIZATION**. This term was brought into general use during the organization of “Americanization Day” celebrations in a number of cities for July 4, 1915. It properly refers to the “science of race assimilation” Americanization of immigrants otherwise known as ‘Naturalization’. The National Americanization committee was established in May 1915 in the context of WWI and particularly after America entered the war in 1917. After the war, the emphasis shifted from emergency propaganda to education. During the 1920s Americanisation committees sprang up across America. Over 30 states passed laws requiring Americanization programmes; in hundreds of cities Chambers of Commerce organised classes in English language and American civics; immigrants were asked to take 'citizenship exams'; over 3000 school boards operated after school and Saturday classes; companies like the Ford Motor Company played a prominent role.
  - a. The Federal Bureau of Naturalization organised naturalization proceedings, and patriotic 'Americanization Day' rallies and Fourth of July celebrations.
  - b. The Federal Bureau of Education organised courses on politics and democracy to prepare immigrants for the 'citizenship exam'.
  - c. The courts clamped down harshly on political crimes by immigrants
5. Sacco and Vanzetti - two anarchist immigrants from Italy found guilty of armed robbery and murder (1920) and executed (1927), despite 107 witnesses that they were elsewhere at the time, and in 1925 the murderer giving himself up. The jury did not believe the defence witnesses because they were all of Italian origin.
6. **Reasons [PRT]:** Prejudice against Japanese and Chinese, and poor Catholics and Jews from eastern Europe – claims America was turning into 'a race of mongrels'/ **R**ed scare over communists and anarchists (e.g. Sacco and Vanzetti)/ **T**rade Unions feared that immigrants would take their jobs.

## Part 2: The Promised Land? The USA in the 1920s

### How far did the USA achieve prosperity in the 1920s?

#### The 1920s Economy

1920-1929: Gross National Product rose 40% and income per person 27% – mass production (e.g. Ford motor cars), a consumer boom (including buying things on hire purchase) and a stock market boom.

- **Boom [CI SUCCESS]: Consumer Confidence; Innovation in production methods – e.g. Ford Production line; Synthetics – production of new plastics; Upsurge in Car ownership:** 1920-1929 rose from 8m to 23m; by 1925 one Ford car every 10 seconds/ By 1929, 75% of all leather, glass and rubber went to the car industry; demand for petrol and oil grew; road construction, garages also increased; meanwhile travelling salesmen began to take products far and wide. The growth in spending and demand led in turn to more employment and more money and more spending: **Cycle of prosperity:** more sales = more production = more wages = more spending/ **C**onsumer durables (e.g. fridges) and electrical goods (telephones x2, radios 60,000 to 10 million) **PLUS** (the first plastic), cellophane and nylon; products went down in price as a result of mass production making them more affordable (Ford car that cost \$950 in 1908 would cost \$350 in 1926 for a much improved version. The number of cars in the US in 1915 was 1 million; by 1939 it was 28 million. Hire Purchase made buying possible for poorer people so that they too could share in the prosperity/ **E**ntertainment Industry: boomed (Hollywood, cinemas, jazz clubs and speakeasies)/ **S**tock **E**xchange: a ‘Bull market’ on Wall Street/. Buying on the margins – people borrowed money to buy shares in the expectation that their value would increase and thereby enable them to pay back the brokers’ loan and make a profit. **S**kyscrapers, urban growth and highway development.
- **Reasons for economic boom [PAT GOT CASH]:** **P**opulation growing rapidly/ **A**bundant raw materials – esp. coal, iron and oil/ **T**ariffs protected American industry/ **G**overnment relaxed regulations and low taxes (laissez faire)/ **O**pportunities of New Technology (e.g. electrical, radio, film, nylon)/ **T**echniques of

**production** – Ford's **Assembly line**, and Frederick Taylor's time and motion/ **Cycle of prosperity** – increased prosperity increased prosperity/ **Advertising** (billboards, radio commercials,)/ **Sales methods** (commercial travellers, mail order, chain stores such as Woolworths)/ **Hire Purchase** – instalments.

But many Americans did not share the prosperity, esp. farmers, coal and textiles workers, and Black Americans.

- **Poverty [FLOP CUTS]: Farming** - 1929 farmers' wages 40% of national average, 1/2m farmers go bankrupt pa/ **Low wages**: top 5% of the population earned a third of the income, but 40% were below the poverty line/ **Old Industries** textiles and coal a coal miners' wages a third of the national average. There were 2 million employed throughout the 1920s/ **Poor Black Americans** – 1m black farm workers lost their jobs in the 1920s – Blacks stuck in low-pay, menial jobs – New York's black Harlem district: sleeping in shifts, 'Rent parties'. **Cartels, trusts and monopolies** 'fixed the market' to keep prices high and wages low. **Unemployment** – never below 2 million in the 1920s; **Trade Problems** - high tariffs caused retaliation in kind by other countries; **Stock exchange** was overheating.

## **'The Roaring Twenties'. Is this a good description of the USA in the 1920s?**

### **POWER:**

#### **Prohibition – Why?**

##### **A CRIME – Reasons for Prohibition**

- a. **Anti-Saloon League** - campaigned that drink hurt families because men wasted money on beer, that it ruined their health and lost them their jobs, and that it led to domestic violence and neglect.
- b. **Christian organisation** – esp. Women's Christian Temperance Union – supported prohibition. (The early 20th century was a time of Christian revival.)
- c. **Rural America** – scandalised by behaviour in the towns – supported it.
- d. **Isolationism** – it was said that money spent on drink 'flew away to Germany' because much of the beer drunk in America was brewed there.
- e. **Madness**, crime, poverty and illness were seen as caused by alcohol - many (including BOTH my grandparents, 'signed the pledge' *never* to drink.)
- f. **Easy Street** – Charlie Chaplin's comic film (1917) showed how drink damaged, and Christianity nurtured, families' happiness and prosperity.

In 1919 - as the result of a long and powerful campaign - the 18th Amendment to the Constitution made the manufacture, transport or sale of alcoholic drinks illegal. The Volstead Act, passed at the same time, declared any drink more than 5% proof 'alcoholic'.

##### **DAMAGE – Prohibition was a failure**

- a. **Drinking continued**: impossible to enforce (not enough police - only 4000 agents, many of whom were sacked for taking bribes).
- b. **Available**: the liquor trade just 'went underground'. speakeasies (illegal bars), moonshine (illegally-made alcohol), bootlegging (smuggling alcohol to sell). It is sometimes asserted that there were more speakeasies than there had been saloons (not true, but there were 200,000 speakeasies in 1933).
- c. **Made criminals of ordinary people**
- d. **Adverse effects**: moonshine was poor quality and sometimes killed people. 'Jackass brandy' caused internal bleeding, 'Soda Pop Moon' contained poisonous alcohol.
- e. **Gangsterism flourished running the illegal trade**: It became hugely profitable, and led to a growth of violence, protection rackets etc. associated with the illegal trade (see ['Organised Crime'](#) below). The general flouting brought the rule of law in general into disrepute as police 'turned a blind eye'. Corruption grew.
- f. **End**: in 1933 the 21st Amendment abolished Prohibition (= 'proved' that it failed).

##### **ALE - Prohibition was a success**

- a. **Alcohol destroyed**: in 1929, 50 million litres of illegal alcohol were discovered and destroyed.
- b. **Legacy**: the actual consumption of alcohol fell, not just during prohibition, but for many years after - did not reach pre-1914 levels until 1971.

c. **Eliot Ness and the Untouchables:** became famous as examples of the high standards police SHOULD achieve.

## Organised Crime

Organised crime stepped in to take over from the breweries and spirits manufacturers:

- a. They ran the speakeasies, and bootlegging.
- b. They also ran protection rackets, prostitution and drug-running.
- c. They bribed trade union leaders, police, lawyers, judges and even Senators.
- d. The most famous gangster was Al Capone, who earned \$100,000 a year from beer sales alone, ran a private army of more than 700 mobsters, and is thought to have murdered more than 200 opponents.
- e. They fought with each other for control of their 'territory' - the most famous incident was the [St Valentine's Day Massacre](#) in 1929, when 'torpedoes' from Capone's gang shot dead 7 members of Bugs Moran's gang.

## Women's Lives

How significant were the changes in women's lives in the 1920s?

### Argument 1 - VERY significant:

- a. **Work:** Many women had taken over jobs traditionally reserved for men (such as manufacturing), and 1920-29 the number of working women increased by 25%; many went to be teachers and secretaries.
- b. **Vote:** In 1920 the 19th Amendment gave women the vote. The former suffrage campaigners formed themselves into the Woman's Joint Congressional Committee, which lobbied successfully for a Maternity and Infancy Protection Act (1921), equal nationality rights for married women (1922), and the Child Labor Amendment (1925).
- c. **Flappers:** dumped the old restrictive fashions, corsets etc. in favour of short skirts, short hair, and the flat-chested 'garconne' look. Many of them wore men's clothing. They smoked, drank, used make-up, played tennis, and danced wildly in jazz clubs. Some were openly lesbian, others were sexually active.

### Argument 2 - NOT significant:

- a. **Work:** most working women were in low-paid jobs, and they were paid less than men for the same job. 10 million women were working in 1930 ... but this was still only a quarter of the females age 15 and over; the rest worked for free in the home and on the farm.
- b. **Vote:** Apart from exceptions such as Florence Kelley and Alice Paul, few suffrage campaigners went into politics; they gave up politics and returned to being housewives. Women campaigned in vain after 1920 for an Equal Rights Act.
- c. **Flappers:** The flappers scandalised many Americans - the Anti-Flirt Association tried to persuade young Americans to behave decently. Most girls, especially in rural America, still behaved 'decently', got married and had babies.

## Entertainment

### a. Films:

- movie actors such as Charlie Chaplin, Rudolf Valentino and Mary Pickford became 'stars'.
- in 1927, *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson, was the first 'talkie'.
- a well-known early two-colour film was *The Toll of the Sea* (1922) and two-colour films were common by the end of the 1920s; after 1932, films were produced in three-colour technicolour.
- Mickey Mouse was created by Walt Disney in 1928 (who released *Snow White* in colour in 1937).
- by 1930, 100 million Americans went to the movies every week.
- companies like United Artists and MGM produced hundreds of films a year.
- films taught people new fashions (e.g. smoking) and new ways to behave - many girls wanted to be like It' girl, Clara Bow.

### b. Jazz:

- Jazz was first played in New Orleans by black musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton. After 1917, racist violence forced many of them to leave New Orleans, so they went

- north to play in the night clubs of towns like Chicago and New York.
- The invention of radio and the phonograph (record player) made it available in people's homes. The first jazz record was made in 1917 by the Dixieland Jazz Band. They were called 'race records', because they were recorded by black musicians.
- Because it was often played in speakeasies, by black musicians, it was seen as wild and exciting - which soon made it very popular.
- Jazz music contributed to many of the social developments of the age - baggy trousers and short skirts, wild dancing such as the Black Bottom, and a new kind of convention-free poetry called 'jazz poetry' (poets such as TS Eliot and ee cummings). It was part of the Harlem Renaissance, and the growth of black pride (see below).

c. **Dances:**

- The Charleston was a fast dance developed in Black communities which was adopted by flappers, who danced it alone to challenge the 'drys' who wouldn't go out to clubs. (Both Joan Crawford and Ginger Rodgers began their movie careers by winning Charleston competitions.)
- The 'Black Bottom Stomp' was first recorded by Jelly Roll Morton and named after Black Bottom - a Black neighbourhood in Detroit. After 1926 it became the most popular dance.
- The dances scandalised many Americans, who thought they were immoral.

## Race Relations

How far were the 1920s a time of racism and discrimination for Black Americans?

### HACKLE – the 1920s was a time of racism

- Hostility to immigrants:** and the Red Scare' - see [this page for more information](#).
- American Government:** refused to pass laws banning lynchings or giving Black Americans the vote.
- Jim Crow Laws:** the name for laws passed in the southern states which prevented Black Americans from mixing with whites ('segregation'), denied them equality of education and civil rights, and prevented them from voting.
- Ku Klux Klan:** an organisation to maintain WASPs supremacy, which had 5 million members by 1925. Many supporters were poor whites, who did not want Black Americans to be their equals/fear they would take their jobs, but many were racism wealthy white Americans. They wore white sheets and hoods, and marched with burning crosses. They spoke with each other in a secret language which they called 'Klonselversations'. They attacked, tortured and killed Black Americans, but also Jews and Catholics and 'immoral' people such as alcoholics.
- Lynchings:** mobs of white people often hanged ('lynched') Blacks Americans whom they suspected of a crime (usually the police turned a blind eye).
- Even in the north:** Black Americans ended up with the low-paid menial jobs, such as janitors, bootblacks, cooks, houseboys, baggage handlers, waiters, doormen, dishwashers and washroom attendants. In 1919, white Americans in Chicago rampaged through Black neighbourhoods after a drowning black man clinging to a log had drifted into a whites-only swimming area.

### RHINO – The 1920s was a time of Black renaissance

- Role models:** some Black Americans became famous - the sprinter Jesse Owens, the baseball player Jackie Robinson, the dancer Josephine Baker. They were an inspiration to other Black Americans.
- Harlem Renaissance:** a cultural flowering in the New York Black neighbourhood of Harlem, based on jazz, but also excellent Black architects, novelists, poets and painters. Many of these believed in 'Artistic Action' - winning equality by *proving* they were equal.
- Identity:** in 1925 Alain Locke wrote *The New Negro*, who had to smash the old image of 'Uncle Tom' and 'Sambo', and develop a new identity, 'uplift' the race and fight for equality. There were Black newspapers and magazines. This was the time when the phrase was coined: 'Black is Beautiful'.
- NAACP:** Set up in 1909, it campaigned for civil rights.
- One-and-a-half million** Black Americans migrated from the south to the north. Although many of them ended up in low-paid jobs, some of them formed a new Black middle class, and were educated at university.



## Positives

- **Social:** Cinema: by 1930, 100 million Americans went to the movies every week., Charlie Chaplin and Clara Bow (the 'It' girl); the first 'talkie' (*The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson); colour films; Disney cartoons (*Mickey Mouse*)/ Jazz: The first jazz record the Dixieland Jazz Band, 1917, Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton./ Dances: Charleston and 'Black Bottom' (by Jelly Roll Morton, named after a Black Detroit neighbourhood).
- **Women:** Working women increased 25% during the 1920s, esp. as teachers and secretaries/ Vote: In 1920 the 19th Amendment women got the vote; Flappers represented the fashion of women who did not depend upon men to support them. They therefore represented a new independence, social and sexual freedom. They wore short skirts and hair, flat-chested 'garconne' look, men's clothes, smoked, drank, used make-up, danced wildly in jazz clubs and were sexually active. Most women married eventually, however, and when they did tended to live as modern labour-saving a home life as possible and perhaps even continued to work.
- **Black Americans:** Famous Black Americans such as the sprinter Jesse Owens, the baseball player Jackie Robinson, the dancer Josephine Baker./ Harlem Renaissance of jazz musicians, Black architects, novelists, poets and painters who believed in 'Artistic Action'./ NAACP campaigned for Black Rights. W.E.B. du Bois (1868-1963) helped to set up the Niagra movement and later the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People). Highly educated, he took degrees at Nashville and Harvard before teaching in Atlanta University and later becoming editor of the NAACP's newspaper, Crisis. His goal was integration and civil rights for African Americans. More famous but perhaps less respected, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) arrived in the US from Jamaica in 1915 and sought to promote a black separatist movement that focussed less on getting rights from white governments and more on establishing black self-help organisations and businesses. Garvey argued that African-Americans should look to build a country of their own, and established a 'back to Africa' campaign, in which Liberia could become the black persons' home country. He set up the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) but was eventually arrested and deported back to Jamaica for fraud in 1927. At first, Du Bois welcomed Garvey but later withdrew his support, particularly after it was revealed that Garvey had met with members of the KKK.

## Negatives

- **Prohibition:** 19th Amendment (1919), the Volstead Act declared any drink more than 5% proof 'alcoholic'/ In 1929, 50m litres of illegal alcohol discovered and destroyed/ 200,000 speakeasies (illegal bars), moonshine (illegally-made alcohol), bootlegging (smuggling alcohol to sell). **Reasons for Prohibition [A CRIME]:** Anti-Saloon League/ Christian Temperance Union/ Rural Americans were shocked by flappers and speakeasies/ Isolationists hated buying German beer/ Madness, crime, poverty and illness were seen as caused by alcohol – 'signing the pledge'./ Easy Street, a comic film by Charlie Chaplin, showed how drink damaged people. It failed because of **DAMAGE: Drinking continued; Availability** of alcohol; It **Made criminals of ordinary Americans** and thereby damaged respect for the law and encouraged law breaking; **adverse affects** of alcohol were greater because less controlled - illegal moonshine was potentially lethal (e.g. Soda Pop Moon' and Jackass Brandy); **Gangsters flourished** and led to the growth of violence and corruption. Finally, it **Ended** in 1933 when the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was overturned by the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment, proving that the American experiment with prohibition had utterly failed.
- **Organised Crime:** Gangsters ran speakeasies, bootlegging, protection rackets, prostitution and drug-running, and bribed police, judges and Senators./ Al Capone had an army of 700 mobsters, and murdered more than 200 opponents – the most famous incident was the St Valentine's Day massacre of 1929, when 'torpedoes' from Capone's gang shot dead 7 members of Bugs Moran's gang/ Eliot Ness and his 'Untouchables'.
- **Racism:** Immigration laws (Quotas, the Red Scare and the Sacco-Vanzetti case)/ Ku Klux Klan: 5m by 1925, white sheets and hoods, burning crosses, 'Klonsversations', lynched Black Americans, but also Jews, Catholics, alcoholics etc./ 'Jim Crow Laws' in the southern states enforced segregation and denied the vote. Segregation occurred everywhere in the south, from restaurants to toilets, cinemas, schools and transport. Black schools were given less money for books and building repairs. Jim Crow laws included literacy tests that were administered unfairly against black people so that they would lose their vote. Social pressure was also important – with black people told that they would lose their jobs if they registered to vote. Violence was also threatened. **In the north** there were no Jim Crow laws but black people found themselves living in separate neighbourhoods anyway as 'white flight' led to black people occupying the worst parts of town. Once again, schools became de facto segregated. Northern cities – such as Detroit, Chicago and New York came to have their own ghettos. Harlem, for example, became increasingly dominated by black population (33% in 1910; 70% by 1930). The Ku Klux Klan was re-founded by Walter Simmons after the 1915 film 'Birth of a Nation' celebrated their role in the South following the civil war. They carried out lynching attacks and terrified black Americans, particularly in the south. The KKK wanted America to be a WASP

nation (White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) and therefore targeted Catholics, Jews and other immigrants from non-Anglo-Saxon countries, as well as blacks. They also targeted anyone associated with left-wing political groups, such as the Communist Party. The influence of the Klan went deep into Southern society, involving judges and law enforcement agencies, making it hard for anyone to bring charges against them.

- **Religious fundamentalism and social attitudes in rural areas** – experience of the change was fuelled by radios (10 million had been sold by 1929); brought people in rural areas news and information as well as music and advertising; motoring meant that people could move around more freely. However, many in rural areas reacted negatively to change – Ohio passed laws about the length of dresses; smoking was banned in North Dakota in 1925. Fundamentalists – objected to any teaching that conflicted with the ‘truth’ of God’s word in the bible; William Jennings Bryan campaigned to ban any teaching of evolution in schools; in 1925 the State of Tennessee passed a law that banned the teaching of anything that contradicted the Bible’s creation story. This law was tested by the American Civil Liberties Union who funded the defence of John Scopes, a biology teacher in Dayton Tennessee who deliberately taught evolution so there would be such a court case. Scopes lost the case and the Tennessee law was not repealed until 1967.