The 1920s

11 ATAR Modern History | Semester 2 2021

**Overview**

Each year the President makes a speech to Congress in which he survey's the 'State of the Union', that is the condition of the nation. In 1928 President Coolidge said:

“No Congress of the United States ever assembled... has met with a more pleasing prospect than that which appears at the present time. In the domestic field there is...the highest record of years of prosperity.”

Many Americans were enjoying the highest standard of living ordinary people had ever known.

“The average working week in industry had been cut from 47.4 hours in 1920 to 44.2 hours in 1929. Unemployment was steady at a comfortable 3.7% after 1922, and there were fewer industrial troubles Worker’s wages rose by 13% in the 1920s behind the picture of improving the living standards for ordinary Americans lay a 50% growth in manufacture”

* Increased efficiency of manufacture
* Specialisation
* Assembly line
* Women enter the commercial workforce
* Consumer led boom at the cost of the farmer
* Credit & Investment
* Change in advertisements – bold and minimal, “you need this”
* Electricity

**Elections of 1920**

By 1920, World War I was over. The wartime boom had collapsed. Diplomats and politicians were arguing over peace treaties and the question of America's entry into the League of Nations. Overseas there were wars and revolutions; at home there were strikes, riots and a growing fear of radicals and terrorists. Disillusionment was in the air.

The giants who had dominated the political scene for a generation were gone: Theodore Roosevelt died in 1919 and Woodrow Wilson was an invalid living in seclusion. Even so, the presidential election of 1920 continued the debate between the nationalistic activism of Roosevelt's presidency and the global idealism of Wilson's administration.

On June 8, 1920, the Republicans nominated Warren G. Harding, an Ohio newspaper editor and United States Senator, to run for president with Calvin Coolidge, governor of Massachusetts, as his running mate. The Democrats nominated another newspaper editor from Ohio, Governor James M. Cox, as their presidential candidate, and thirty-seven-year-old Franklin Delano Roosevelt for vice president.

The presidential election of 1920 was the last election campaign made accessible to the public solely through the use of record albums.

By election night November 2, 1920 the "election campaign by phonograph" was a thing of the past, superseded by the first commercial radio broadcast coverage of election returns.

1. Retraction of foreign affairs
2. Protectionism
3. Divisions of society
4. Role of Women change
5. Economic Boom – Consumerism
6. Immigration Quotas

Boom Times

* Economic giant
* Support big business stimulated economy

Isolationism

* Political isolation
* US maintains this policy until WW2

Consumerism

* Installment plans and credit
* Washing Machines
* Radios
* Vacuum Cleaners
* Refrigerators
* Cars

Red Scare

* Bolsheviks revolutions occurring worldwide
* Ideology overthrew capitalism
* Desired the abolition of free enterprise and private property

KKK

* Terrorisation and lynching of Black Americans
* Popular rise particularly in southern states
* Burning crosses
* Business alliances of white supremacy

Social Darwinism

Warren Harding 1921-1923

1. Corruption
2. Womaniser
3. Business (Newspaper)
4. Calls for isolationism
5. Kellogg-Briand Pact

* Involved in 64

Secretary of the Treasury – Mellon repealed high taxes on industry, personal tax rates dropped by 40%, trend towards small government and low taxes

Mellon was accused of receiving a tax break larger than the tax payers in Nebraska

Calvin Coolidge 1923-1929

* Business (Newspaper)

Herbert Hoover 1929-1933

* Volunteerism
* Quaker

Prohibition and Conservation

* Wartime legacy
* Prohibition was considered patriotism
* Americans save grain, food and productive hours by banning alcohol, helping the war effort
* The was no referendum on prohibition
* Supporters believed it was a social and economic revolution – William Jennings Bryan
* People wanted to drink, they were not interested in the Volstead Act
* Many who were “mild drinkers” became protest drinkers for personal liberty
* Attempted moral reform
* Illegal consumerism led to greater efficiency in meeting the demands for alcohol
* Private enterprise: bootleggers
* Wealthy bootleggers surrounded themselves with private armies, lawyers and conservative America grew ever fearful of social change
* Volstead act January 1920 – “Noble Experiment”

1. Prohibitionists claimed prohibition would eliminate crime, boost production, and lift national morality, which turned into 14 years of lawbreaking
2. Holes in the laws of prohibition
   1. Sacramental Wine was okay, people would fake religious gatherings
   2. Doctors and dentists were able to prescribe alcohol for medical purpose
3. Detroit was home to 20 000 speakeasies making the alcohol industry the second largest industry in the city

Which sources 1-7 try to frighten people into supporting Prohibition?

Source 1 suggests that disease is caused by alcohol.   
Source 2 describes that alcohol is a curse.  
Source 3 illustrates alarming data on crime, picturing it as the cause of the crimes, rather than their correlation.

The Prohibitionists suggest that banning alcohol will have economically productive benefit, moralise America and reduce the crime rates of the era.

Source 2 and Source 4 suggest that alcohol is a curse from God. It generates religious connection, and hence a Church congregation would warn away from this curse. They wish to be blessed, not cursed after all.

It is claimed in Source 7 that workmen are inefficient workers due to the presence of alcohol, hence a factory owner would support the banning of alcohol to increase the productive yield.

The Anti-Saloon League would be capable of bribing politicians to drive support for Prohibition and campaign to increase populous support.

Overall, was the prohibition a success or failure?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Success | Failure |
| Deaths from alcoholism has fallen by 80% by 1921, male sufferers of liver failure drop by 10% | Ordinary people produce alcohol at home, moonshine/bathtub gin |
| Alcohol consumption per person fell during prohibition, falling to 30% of the previous level | Gangsters were able to provide ordinary people with the alcohol they wanted |
| Deaths from drink related accidents on the roads reduced considerably | Smuggles like William McCoy brought alcohol into the country |
|  | People died from the poisonous moonshine |
|  | More speakeasies opened up after prohibition than there were legal saloon. In New York there were an estimated 30,000 speakeasies |
|  | Deaths from alcohol poisoning went up from 98 in 1920 to nearly 800 in 1926 “Jackass Brandy” causes internal bleeding, “Soda Pop Moon” contained poisonous alcohol |
|  | Bootleggers were everywhere selling alcohol to people |
|  | Violent crimes increased between rival gangs selling alcohol |
|  | Alcohol consumption per person during prohibition, falling to 30% of the previous level |
|  | Jitterbug |
|  | Quality issues |
|  | Speakeasies |
|  | Revealed corruption of police officials and magistrates |
|  | Adaptions of society such as the drink pouches in pants for under skirts |
|  | Valentine Day Massacre |
|  | Al Capone |
|  | Untaxable profits on gangsters and bootleggers |

Successes are tampered by data from the Temperance Movement, desperate to prove that Prohibition was working.

Attacked ethnic groups with a culture of drinking, such as the Italians and Irish.

Overwhelmingly, the Volstead Act, and the Prohibition of Alcohol it imposed was a failure. The immediate societal impact saw the rise of organised crime, such as Al Capone’s gang, which resulted in events such as the Valentine Day Massacre. These gangs were a from of bootleggers, people selling alcohol illegal. Ordinary people were buying alcohol from this individual, it was untaxable. The number of alcohol

**Women in the 1920s**

Background:

The War had brought about two big changes:

Women had been given the vote in 1920s. This gave them political power

Women during the war worked in factories and this created the desire to find more work opportunities.

Key points to consider:

women were entering the workforce in great number. Mechanisation of workplaces meant that women would not be excluded in the workplace because they were not as physically strong as men.

Employers were employing more women because they were cheaper to hire. By the end of the decade, there were 10 million women in employment.

There were also social changes in particular with fashion, dresses were light weight. This gave women freedom of movement, cutting hair, use of make up and smoking in public places.

Advertisers were targeting women and offered new labour saving devices which gave women free time. Women's magazines sold millions of copies.

Flappers was name given to a liberated urban woman. The Flapper represented the extreme example of the changes that were effecting women.

It is interesting to note, that not all women experienced these freedoms, black American women were extremely poor and women in country towns still followed the traditional values: stay home, have children and be good Christian women.

**Religious Fundamentalism**

* Americas are free to believe in religion
* WW1 Conservative Americans tried to reform old values – Fundamentalism
* Social changes of 1920s see religious revival among conservative Christians
* They did not like influence of cinema, jazz, women’s roles
* City VS Rural
* Fundamentalist strong and literal
* Laws passed to prohibit short swimming costumes, gambling on Sunday
* 1925 Fundamentalist gained publicity
* Six states banned teaching Darwin’s evolution theory – contradicted Genesis
* John Scopes ignored the law taken to court

**Scopes Monkey Trial**

* Broke the Butler Act:

*An act prohibiting the teaching of the Evolution Theory in all the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of Tennessee, which are supported in whole or in part by the public-school funds of the State, and to provide penalties for the violations thereof.*

* Outside the “Bible Belt” it is irrational
* Guilty and fined $100 ($1400 today)
* Bryan (lawyer) dies days after winning case for Fundamentalist
* Contrasted America in the **Jazz Age**

**The KKK**

*"Last warning for you Syles, you have got to leave this neighbourhood vary soon or you may prepair death hell and grave as ever KKK*

*Advert in Marion Star, 12th of July 1871*

“Ku Klux Klan.” Marion Star, 12 July, 1871. Darlington County Historical Commission, Darlington, South Carolina.

* **First KKK 1865-71**
* Set up by former Confederate soldiers
* Response to Civil War
* Opposed freedmens voting rights
* Opposed Northerners coming south
* Declared terrorist organisation in 1969
* Destroyed by the Civil Rights Act of 1871
* Hundreds of Black Americans murdered
* Churches and schools burned
* Prounion whites whipped in public
* Threats of violence made against Northern teachers and government officials
* Intimidated from Black voters from elections
* **Second KKK**
* 1915 – The Birth of a Nation
* First feature movie
* Black militias attempt to rape white women in the film
* Protect the weak, the innocent and the defenceless from the indignities, wrongs and outrages of the lawless. Must be a WASP
* Protect and defend the Constitution of the US
* To aid and assist in the execution of all constitutional laws
* Essentially a private militia
* Alcohols and bootleggers
* Roman Catholics
* Jews
* Communists
* Immigrants from Southern Europe or Mexico
* Homosexuals
* Black Americans
* Opposed vice activities such as prostitution and gambling

Summary

The 1920s were a reactionary decade

* Against Victorian ideals of orality saw defying parents. Changed dress styles, cut their hair short, smoked in public and drank
* Birth rates fell and young people had more freedom, partly b the automobile and changing social practice
* A time of reaction against war – the Great War cost 100 000 in 6 months. It brought about a reaction against expansionist ideas 3

Recovering from WW1

* Rapid Disarmament
* Naval Cargos Sold
* Army reduced
* 1920s the railroads were returned to private controls
* Railroad Labour Board established
* Businesses set out to meet demands of consumers producing consumer appliances and automobiles
* Government tough on labour supporting open shops

Internal Struggles

* City against country
* Rise of KKK
* Isolationist policies
* Fight for law and order; technical criminals rise because of prohibition
* Rises of the Heroes: Babe Ruth, Charles Lindbergh
* Movies and radio
* New opportunity or African-Americans