

SUBJECT: History

UNIT: 20th C America-1920s



The 'Boom'

During the 1920's America experienced a '**Cycle of prosperity**' based on consumerism. People bought consumer goods in large numbers which fuelled a dramatic boom in economic production and rising living standards.

Advertising – encouraged people to buy consumer goods. Campaigns encouraged people to 'Keep up with the Jones's' whilst mail order catalogues targeted people at home.

Hire purchase – enabled people to buy now pay later. Many Americans entered into these schemes so they could buy the newest consumer goods now. **Mass production** – In order to meet the rising demand for consumer goods, companies embraced mass production techniques. Here, technological advancements such as assembly lines enabled companies to produce identical goods quickly, which drove down prices and created jobs Ford – The most famous example of this is the Henry Ford car factory. Mass production meant a car was finished every 10 seconds. The price of cars fell from \$850 to \$295 by 1920

Republican government policies – believed in a policy of non-interference in the economy. Laissez faire meant the government left businesses alone. Low taxes and regulation were examples here.

Stock market boom – Many Americans speculated by borrowing money to buy shares, enjoying the 'bull market' where shares continually rose in value. **Inequality of wealth** – However, despite the Boom, 60% of Americans lived below the \$2000 poverty line. Workers in older industries, farmers, and ethnic minorities suffered worst.

Social and cultural developments

Entertainment – Rising employment meant many Americans had disposable income to spend on entertainment. Rising demand encouraged more production which fuelled its own mini cycle of prosperity

Cinema – 100m Americans went to the cinema each week. Films cost only pennies to watch, and many people used the cinema to escape the harsh reality of life. Silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin became Hollywood superstars

Jazz – was the most popular form of music. Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong were household names. The music was seen as risqué as it was made popular by African Americans

Women – For some, the 20's was a time of liberation. Labour saving consumer goods such as vacuum cleaners meant many women had more time for leisure activities. 25% more women worked during this time, with certain industries like radio production favouring women workers over men. Flappers emerged mainly in Northern urban areas. Middle class women with disposable income changed the way they dressed and the activities they took part in. They smoked, wore make up, danced suggestively, and turned against traditional norms. Important to say the majority of women. did not experience this change – rural/poor/conservative traditions.

Divided Society

Immigration – 20m came to America between 1880 and 1920. Older WASPs felt threatened by newer immigrants, who may threaten their way of life or spread Communism. Laws were passed to restrict immigration numbers, banning it completely from places such as Asia. Two examples of discrimination were the Red Scare and Sacco and Vanzetti case studies. Ku Klux Klan had 5m members by 1925. They believed in white supremacy and lynched 2 people a week on average. Many police, judges and politicians were members meaning people were rarely caught or punished e.g. young H Truman.

