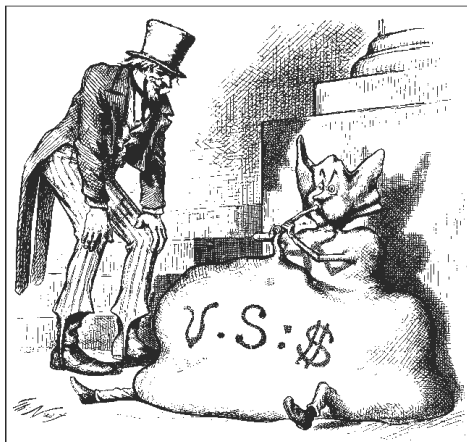


## Introduction

Following World War I, Americans were eager to put the war behind them and enjoy what appeared to be a better way of life. Most people did not want to become involved again in world problems. New machines promised a more comfortable lifestyle for many Americans, and Americans were full of hope that the 1920s would be a time of great progress and prosperity.

The 1920s have been called both the *Golden Twenties* and the *Age of Disillusionment*. The first expression describes the decade as one of wealth and comfortable living. The second expression tells of the many problems that plagued the country. Both terms are accurate. The 1920s was a time of increased wealth and comfortable living for those fortunate to be either businessmen or skilled workers. On the other hand, many of those who were farmers or unskilled workers had difficulty making a decent wage or finding any job at all.

## The Economy in the 1920s



Americans had no money to enjoy the new products being manufactured in the United States.

After the end of World War I, American industry shifted its focus from producing war supplies to producing goods for Americans to use at home. Automobiles, refrigerators, radios, and chemicals were just a few of these goods. Many Americans made money either as businessmen or as skilled workers. A visitor to this country would have been impressed with all the products available. On the other hand, the end of World War I left some workers without jobs. Some

## Many Americans Lived Well

Many Americans enjoyed **prosperity** during the 1920s. Prosperity means living well. Owners of businesses and factories were making more money than ever before. New jobs in industry were created by the **technological revolution**, a period in which science created many new machines and products. As companies grew they hired more workers, increased the wealth of businessmen, and enabled more workers to live comfortably.

The United States government saw business as its key to maintaining prosperity. Consequently, the government protected American-made products through high **tariffs**. A tariff is a tax on **imported goods**, or goods made in other countries. A tariff makes imported goods more expensive than American-made goods. Tariffs encouraged Americans to buy goods produced in American factories.

## Some Americans Did Not Prosper

Some Americans did not share in the new wealth. After World War I, many soldiers came home to their old jobs, causing some workers to become unemployed. Some of the soldiers who returned home from the war could not find jobs. Unskilled workers were still paid low wages. And some factory workers were being replaced by machines.

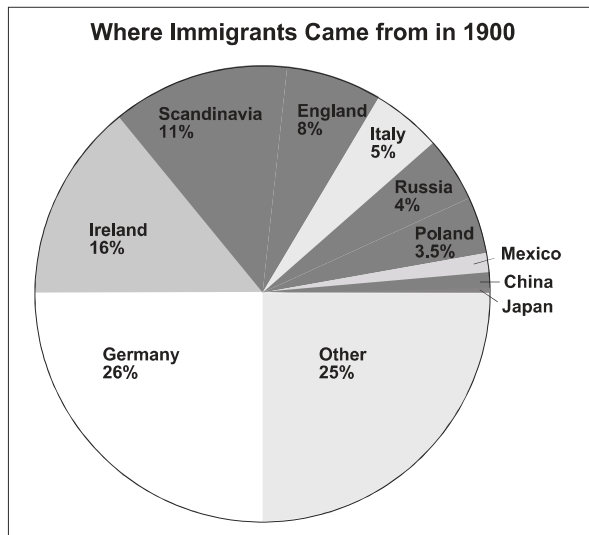


*All Americans did not share in the new wealth.*

Farmers, in particular, did poorly after the war. During the war, the government had asked farmers to increase their production to feed both Americans and the people of the Allied nations. After the war, farmers found themselves with too many crops and not enough markets. Crop prices fell, and some farmers could not make payments on their machines and land. As a result, they lost their farms and became unemployed.

## The Growth of Intolerance

In the 1920s many Americans felt an **intolerance** toward immigrants. Intolerance is an unwillingness to accept people of different races, backgrounds, or different beliefs. Some Americans saw immigrants as a threat to their jobs. Immigrants were often willing to work at unskilled labor for extremely low wages. Some Americans saw immigrants as having different political beliefs and, therefore, as a threat to American democracy. To control the number of immigrants coming to the United States, the government passed immigration laws.



During World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution set up a Communist government in Russia. Americans were afraid Eastern European immigrants would bring foreign political ideas into the country or even try to create a Bolshevik Revolution in the United States. This fear was known as the **Red Scare** because the Russian flag was red. African Americans, Chinese Americans, and other

minority groups were also seen as a threat simply because they were different.

A more publicized example of intolerance towards immigrants became known as the **Sacco-Vanzetti Affair**. *Nicola Sacco* and *Bartolomeo Vanzetti* were two Italian immigrants who did not like any form of government, a belief called *anarchism*. Many Americans considered such ideas dangerous. The United States government accused Sacco and Vanzetti of murder and placed them on trial. The two Italians were convicted and sentenced to death based on little evidence. Some people believed they did not get a fair trial because of their political ideas.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) also demonstrated extreme intolerance. The KKK, a violent organization, had been started by a group of southern white men after the Civil War. The Klan was anti-African American, anti-Catholic, and anti-immigrant. They were also **anti-Semitic**, which means they were hostile to Jews.

During the 1920s, the Klan claimed to have over four million members. They tried to intimidate those they hated through violence and even murder. Their actions worked against them, however. The Klan lost members by the end of the decade because some of their members tired of the Klan's hatred and violence.

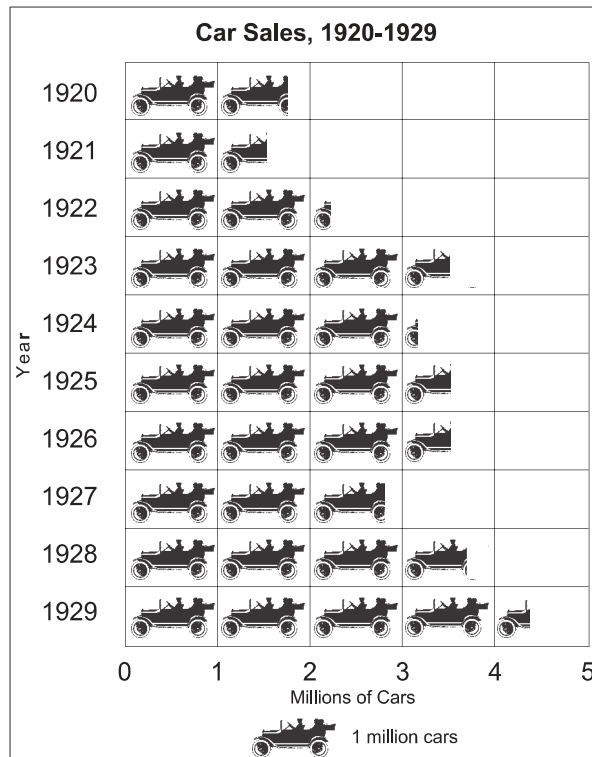
Americans also experienced intolerance toward new ideas. The teaching of **evolution** in public schools was one new idea many people reacted against. Evolution is the theory that over millions of years, animals and plants changed into new types of animals and plants. Some people said that teaching about evolution went against the teaching of the Bible.

As an example of this intolerance, one state, Tennessee, did not permit teachers to teach evolution in its schools. In 1925 *John Scopes*, a science teacher in Tennessee, taught evolution in his classroom. He was arrested, tried, and found guilty and fined \$100.00. The same topic is being debated today.

## A Technological Revolution

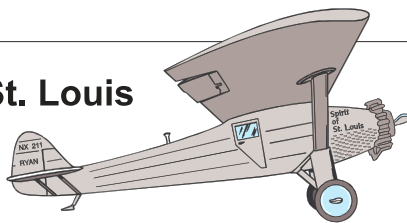
The Industrial Revolution that began after the Civil War continued to affect the United States as new inventions and machines became available. This new **technology** completely **transformed**, or changed, the way Americans lived. It brought the United States into the modern age.

One of the most important new machines was the automobile, which gave rise to many other new industries. One industry was automobile production factories. By 1930 one in every nine workers worked in a factory that produced some part of the automobile. Some workers made rubber and tires; some made glass for windows. Roads were paved as the automobile replaced the horse and buggy. As more people owned cars, automobile repair shops, gas stations, and tourist hotels began to appear.



The automobile changed the way Americans lived socially and economically. By 1928 two out of every three families owned a car. This gave them the freedom to travel far from home on visits and vacations. Most importantly, however, they could travel longer distances between home and work. This changed the way cities looked as more people began to build homes in the **suburbs**, or in neighborhoods beyond the borders of a city.

### Spirit of St. Louis



In 1927 pilot Charles Lindbergh flew alone in his plane named the *Spirit of St. Louis* from New York and landed near Paris about 33 hours later. He became an overnight hero for his solo Atlantic flight. One newspaper praised Lindbergh for performing “the greatest deed of a solitary man in the records of the human race.”

The airplane became more important to American travel after World War I. In 1927 *Charles Lindbergh* became the first person to fly nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean from New York to Paris. He completed the trip in only 33½ hours. The

airplane was making the world “smaller.” It was faster than ships over water and quicker than railroads over land. Air travel was becoming widely used for both business and pleasure trips.



*Cheering crowds welcomed Charles Lindbergh home after his solo Atlantic flight.*

Courtesy of the J. N. “Ding” Darling Foundation

Another important new industry involved the production and use of electricity. Many American homes and businesses were equipped for electricity. With electricity, new, labor-saving products such as the refrigerator and washing machine became available.

As these new products came on the market, ways of selling them changed. The advertising industry boomed as businessmen looked for ways to encourage people to buy products. In addition, buyers no longer had to pay cash for an item. Companies began selling products on *credit*. That

means the customer could pay a little each month until the product was paid for. The new slogan was “Buy Now, Pay Later.” Many Americans began to go into debt to enjoy new lifestyles made possible by new products.

## American Culture

New technology also changed entertainment. With electricity, broadcasting became possible and radios became popular. At first, some people made their own radios, called *crystal sets*. Soon, factories were producing radios, and broadcasting developed into a big, new industry. By 1929 two of every five families owned a radio. For the first time, people were able to listen to music, sports, and news broadcast to their own homes.

In the 1920s, the motion picture industry arose. Americans fell in love with the moving picture show, or the *movie*. The first films were silent, but new technology soon produced films with sound. The first talking movie, *The Jazz Singer*, was released in 1927. Hollywood, California, became the home of the movie industry.

### The Flappers

The main elements of American culture in the 1920s were freedom and spontaneity. Young Americans seemed determined to ignore all traditional rules of behavior, abandoning the waltz for the rhythms of jazz.

The symbol of this new culture was the *flapper*. She was a young woman who had abandoned all older views of a woman’s role. Her hemlines rose above the knee and her long hair, previously known as her crowning glory, was now shortened in a *bobbed hair* style.

Flappers were by no means only young, white women. Young African-American and Chinese-American women also abandoned their long skirts and long hair. In the 1920s, this new ideal for women disturbed adults who had been raised in a more conservative culture.



African Americans played an important role in the culture of the 1920s. In New York City, African Americans were experiencing a cultural rebirth in literature, art, and music. Jazz music became popular in theaters and night clubs. Jazz musicians *Duke Ellington* and *Bessie Smith* were only two of many famous African-American musicians from this period. This

movement, called the *Harlem Renaissance*, had an important influence on all American ideas and culture.

*Langston Hughes* was one of the leaders of the movement. He wrote the following poem which captures part of the Harlem Renaissance which was also involved in challenging some of the racial attitudes of the day.



Teacher will provide copy of

### **I, Too**

by Langston Hughes

Another one of the members of the Harlem Renaissance was *Zora Neale Hurston*. She was born right here in Florida, in a small town called Eatonville, just outside of Orlando. She was a trained anthropologist and was fascinated by folk culture. *Dust Tracks on a Road* is the name of her autobiography.



## Prohibition

In 1919 the **18<sup>th</sup> Amendment** to the United States Constitution changed Americans' social life. The amendment prohibited, or made illegal, the production, sale, or transport of liquor in the United States. This did not end the availability of liquor; some people continued to produce and sell it illegally. The illegal production and sale of liquor became big business, and disobeying prohibition laws was very common. A subculture was created by the people and *speakeasies*, secret bars, became a focal point for social activities. Finally, in 1933, the **21<sup>st</sup> Amendment** cancelled the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and made liquor legal again.



*During the 1920's, there were two schools of thought concerning prohibition. It depended on which side of the clouds you were.*

Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

## Post-War Isolationism

After World War I the United States began a policy of **isolationism**. This means it was withdrawing from European affairs. To protect itself from being drawn into European affairs, the government decided not to join the League of Nations. The country continued to isolate itself until the end of the 1920s.

American tariffs—taxes on foreign-made goods—caused foreign countries to raise their tariffs on goods made in the United States. The high tariffs on foreign goods created an economic problem for both Europe and the United States. Some European countries owed the United States money they had borrowed to fight the war. They needed to sell their products to the United States so they could pay off their war debt. Because of the tariff, however, few foreign goods were bought in the United States. Only Finland ever paid its debt in full to the United States.

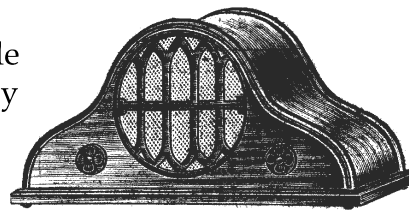
## The End of the Twenties

The United States began to end its isolation at the close of the decade. In 1928 more than 60 nations, including the United States, signed the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**. This **pact**, or agreement, promised to reduce the number of military weapons each country had. It also said countries would solve all their disagreements peacefully.

In 1929 the *Golden Age of the Twenties* came to an abrupt end. In that year, the Great Depression began. The Great Depression was a period of economic collapse in the United States (see Unit 15). The prosperity many Americans experienced in the 1920s suddenly turned to hard times.

## Summary

Many Americans prospered during the decade of the '20s. They made enough money to enjoy new goods such as automobiles and radios. Not everyone's life improved, however. Some Americans had trouble finding work. Americans responded to immigration with intolerance, and, for the first time, Congress passed immigration laws limiting the number of immigrants who could enter the United States.



Radios were called "crystal sets."

The nation's culture flourished. Radios, movies, and jazz became sources of entertainment. As the nation's culture, industry and technology grew, the country remained isolated from Europe. At the decade's close, the wealth that many people had enjoyed suddenly ended in the Great Depression—a period of economic collapse.