

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

Major constitutional and legal issues divided Americans in the 1920s. Many of them reflected the struggle between modern and traditional values. They also showed how international affairs affected domestic policies.

The Red Scare

As you read in Unit 3, the government took drastic steps during World War I to suppress dissent. Stern measures continued through 1919 and into 1920 in a crusade against internal enemies known as the **Red Scare**. Some Communists were affected, although they made up only one-half of 1 percent of the population. However, the crackdown targeted many other Americans viewed as "un-American," among them socialists, anarchists, labor leaders, and foreigners.

The crusade was led by U.S. Attorney General **A. Mitchell Palmer**. It was sparked by several events that took place after the war ended. There were race riots in over 25 cities. A series of strikes climaxed with a walkout by Boston police. Several unexplained bombings added to the hysteria. All these events were seen as part of a Communist conspiracy.

The Attorney General ordered the first so-called **Palmer raids** late in 1919. In 33 cities, police (without warrants) raided the headquarters of Communist and other dissident organizations. Eventually they arrested 4,000 people, holding them without charges and denying them legal counsel. Some 560 aliens were deported. Palmer's extreme actions and statements soon turned the public against him. But the Red Scare had lingering effects, discouraging many Americans from speaking their minds freely in open debate.

SACCO AND VANZETTI Closely linked to the Red Scare was the fate of **Nicola Sacco** and **Bartolomeo Vanzetti**. These two Italian immigrants, admitted anarchists, were convicted of murder in 1921 in connection with a Massachusetts robbery. Many people questioned the evidence against Sacco and Vanzetti, concluding that the two men were convicted more for their beliefs and their Italian origin than for a crime. In spite of mass demonstrations and appeals, the two men were executed in 1927. In 1977, 50 years later, the Massachusetts governor cleared the two men.

THE KU KLUX KLAN Anti-foreign attitudes encouraged a revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The first organization, active during the Reconstruction period, had died out in the late 1800s. A reorganized Klan, formed in 1915, grew slowly until 1920. In that year, it added 100,000 members. The KKK of the 1920s was not only anti-black but also anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and anti-foreign. The Klan stood for "100 percent Americanism," which meant that the only true Americans were white, Protestant, and American-born.

FOREIGN POLICY

In 1914 the United States was a **debtor nation**, meaning that it owed more money to foreign nations than they owed to the United States. In the 1920s the United States became the world's leading **creditor nation**, meaning that other countries owed more to the United States than it owed them. The nation was also the world's leading industrial producer, exporter, and financier. These changes were due in large part to money from the payment of war debts owed this nation by the former Allies.

The War Debt Controversy

During World War I, as you reviewed in Unit 3, the European Allies borrowed a great deal of money from the United States in order to buy war supplies from American manufacturers. After the war, these debts became a source of conflict. European nations argued that their debts should be canceled because, while the United States had contributed money, Europe had paid a heavy price in lives. But the United States insisted on repayment.

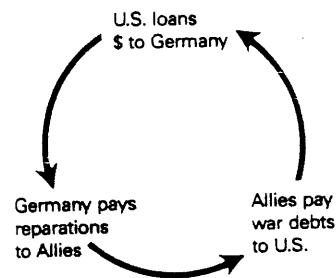
A factor that made repayment difficult was U.S. protectionist policy. High American tariffs limited European trade with the United States, and thus reduced earnings that might have been used to pay off war debts. These tariffs also led to retaliation by 26 nations which raised their own tariff rates.

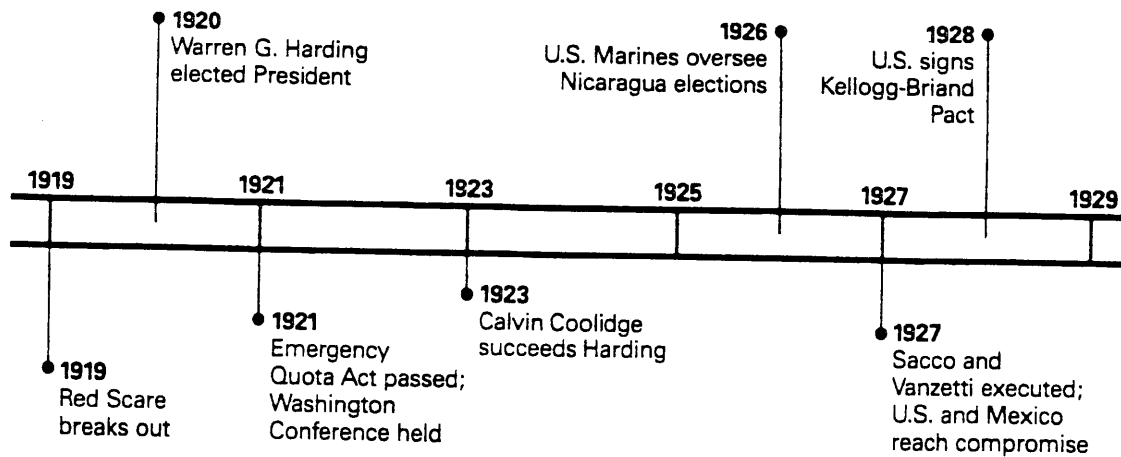
One step aimed at making repayment easier was the **Dawes Plan**, adopted in 1924. Under this plan, the United States lent funds to Germany so that it could make war reparations—money payments it owed to the European Allies. The Allies would in turn use the funds to make payments on the war debts they owed the United States.

The Search for Peace and Arms Control

Although the United States failed to join the League of Nations, it was still concerned with keeping the peace.

- In 1921 President Harding hosted the **Washington Naval Conference**. The United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan agreed to set limits on the number of warships each nation could build. They also pledged to keep the peace in Asia and to protect the independence of China. The conference, however, failed to establish any means of enforcement.
- In 1928, 15 nations met in Paris to sign the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**, which outlawed war except in self-defense. Enforcement provisions were missing from the pact which 60 nations eventually signed.





THE POLITICS OF THE 1920s

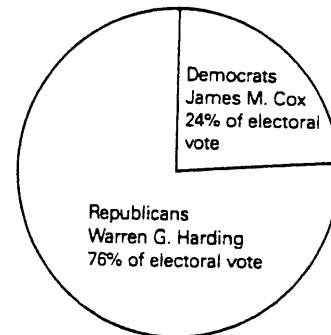
The 1920 landslide election of Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge represented a desire of many Americans to remove themselves from the pressures of world politics and the idealistic goals of the Progressives. Disillusioned, many Americans wanted to return to the traditional foreign policy of isolationism and to a less hectic social and political life for our nation. Harding responded to this national mood when he said that "America's present need . . . is normalcy."

The Harding Administration

Harding was an Ohio newspaper publisher, who had little experience or interest in politics. To his credit, he (a) pardoned socialist Eugene Debs, serving a prison term for opposing the war, and (b) supported antilynching legislation. Personally, Harding was an honest man. He appointed some talented, dedicated people to office, including Charles Evans Hughes as Secretary of State. But the President also gave political jobs to members of the so-called **Ohio Gang**, corrupt associates who took advantage of him. After Harding's death in 1923, the public learned of several scandals during his administration. These included:

- **Theft in the Veterans Bureau.** Its head, who sold hospital supplies for his own profit, was imprisoned and fined.
- **Fraud by the Alien Property Custodian.** He was imprisoned for selling former German property for private profit.
- **The Teapot Dome Scandal.** Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall was convicted of accepting bribes from two oil executives in exchange for allowing them to lease government-owned petroleum reserves. One of the oil fields was at Teapot Dome, Wyoming.

Election of 1920



THE ECONOMY OF THE 1920s

The end of World War I was followed by a recession, caused by the shift from a wartime to a peacetime economy. Production, farm income, and exports fell. Unemployment rose, reaching 12 percent in 1921. By 1923, however, a period of economic recovery had begun.

The Coolidge Administration

Vice President Calvin Coolidge became President when Harding died in office in 1923. A year later he was elected President in his own right. He is best known for his strong commitment to business interests.

Coolidge Prosperity

Coolidge retained the financier Andrew Mellon as Secretary of the Treasury. Mellon continued to act on the philosophy that government's role was to serve business.

The years between 1923 and 1929 were seen as a time of booming business. The Gross National Product (GNP) rose 40 percent. Per capita income went up 30 percent. Since there was little inflation, actual purchasing power, and therefore the standard of living, also increased. Yet when the stock market crashed in 1929 people questioned this "Coolidge prosperity."

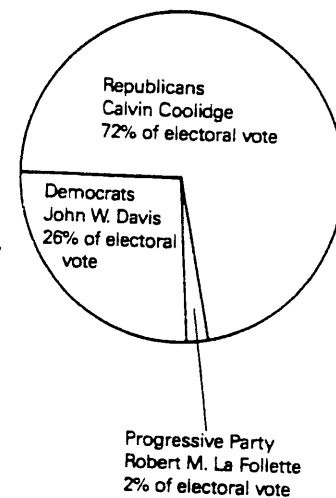
Were the 1920s a Time of Business Boom or False Prosperity?

In order to answer that question, let us look at various aspects of the economy.

GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICIES The government's major economic policies helped only certain groups and often hurt the economy in the long term. Some groups, especially big corporations and the wealthy, benefited greatly from Coolidge prosperity.

- Businesses and the most wealthy were helped by tax laws which reduced personal income tax rates, particularly for upper income groups, removed most excise taxes, and lowered corporate income taxes.
- Reducing the national debt and balancing the budget were carried out by raising tariffs and demanding repayment of war debts.
- Tariff rates were raised in a return to protectionism. While Republicans argued that higher tariffs would limit foreign imports, thus helping both industry and agriculture, the actual effect was to weaken the world economy.
- Regulatory agencies such as the Federal Reserve Board, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Interstate Commerce Commission were staffed with people who saw their role as helping business rather than regulating it.
- A relaxed attitude toward corporate mergers was supported by the executive branch and by the Supreme Court, which continued to apply the 1911 "rule of reason." By 1929 about 1,300 corporations produced three-fourths of all American manufactured goods, and 200 companies owned half the nation's wealth.

Election of 1924



Shifting Cultural Values

The Roaring Twenties saw a revolution in American lifestyle. With a shorter work week and with more paid vacation, Americans had more leisure time in which to pursue pleasure.

LEISURE Movies such as *The Ten Commandments* and the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*, drew 100 million people a week to theaters. Americans idolized movie stars like Charlie Chaplin. They also admired such sports figures as Babe Ruth and Red Grange.

Popular Heroes of the Twenties

Aviation	Charles Lindbergh, first solo flight across Atlantic
Baseball	George Herman ("Babe") Ruth
Boxing	Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney
Football	Harold ("Red") Grange
Golf	Bobby Jones
Jazz	Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith
Movies	Clara Bow, Theda Bara, Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, Rudolf Valentino
Swimming	Gertrude Ederle, first woman to swim English Channel
Tennis	William ("Big Bill") Tilden

Americans eager for a good time enjoyed jazz and blues, styles created in the South by black musicians but soon carried all over the country and abroad. This distinctively American music—to which people danced such daring new steps as the Charleston—became so popular that the period of the twenties is often called the **Jazz Age**. The twenties were also a time when fads swept the country. These included bridge, crossword puzzles, and the board game of mah-jongg.

LITERATURE The conflict created by changing American values saw expression in literature as well as in music and the movies. American writers of the twenties created many enduring works of literature. Several writers protested the effects of technology and mass consumption. They criticized the business mentality, the conformity of the times, and Americans' preoccupation with material things. Some, called **expatriates**, even left the United States to settle in Europe.

Leading Writers of the Twenties

T.S. Eliot	poet	<i>The Waste Land</i>
William Faulkner	novelist	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>
F. Scott Fitzgerald	novelist	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>
Ernest Hemingway	novelist	<i>A Farewell to Arms</i>
Langston Hughes	poet, novelist	<i>The Weary Blues</i>
Sinclair Lewis	novelist	<i>Main Street, Babbitt</i>
H.L. Mencken	journalist	<i>Prejudices, The American Language</i>
Eugene O'Neill	playwright	<i>Desire Under the Elms</i>
Ezra Pound	poet	<i>Cantos</i>
Edith Wharton	novelist	<i>The Age of Innocence</i>

Women's Changing Roles

The conflict between modern and traditional values, so much a part of the twenties, is particularly clear when the contradictory roles of women are examined.

THE WORKFORCE Women lost many job opportunities when World War I ended in 1918. Even so, the number of women in the work force increased throughout the 1920s. By 1930, 10.5 million women were working outside the home. They made up 22 percent of the work force; this figure, however, represented an increase of only 1.4 percent of the total work force.

The influence of tradition can be seen in many aspects of women's working lives. Most working women were single, widowed, or divorced. While more married women worked than ever before, most Americans still believed that married women belonged at home, and that is where 90 percent of them were to be found. When working women married, they usually quit or were dismissed from their jobs.

Most women who did work continued to hold jobs in traditionally female—and traditionally low-paying, low-status, and low-mobility—occupations such as teaching, clerical work, and retail sales. Fewer than 20 percent worked in better-paying factory jobs. The number of female doctors and scientists actually decreased, at a time when almost a third of graduate degrees were earned by women.

One important gain for working women was the creation in 1920 of the **Women's Bureau**, part of the Department of Labor. It tried to improve conditions by working inside the government for women workers, and also provided data about them.

POLITICS In 1920 women voted in a national election for the first time. But their vote had little effect on the outcome. Women did not vote in large numbers, nor did they vote as a bloc. To encourage women to play a larger part in politics, the National American Woman Suffrage Association reorganized itself as the nonpartisan **League of Women Voters**.

The divisions of the 1920s were reflected in the fate of two different pieces of legislation. Encouraged by women reformers, Congress passed the **Sheppard-Towner Act** in 1921. With the aim of reducing infant mortality rates, the law provided for public health centers where women could learn about nutrition and health care. The program came to an end in 1929, largely because of opposition from physicians. An **Equal Rights Amendment** to the Constitution, proposed in 1923, led to bitter disagreement among women. Many feminists supported it. But others opposed it because they believed it would do away with special laws protecting women workers.

DAILY LIFE The "new woman" of the 1920s was the **flapper**—young and pretty, with bobbed hair and short skirts. She drank, she smoked, she was independent-minded, and she took advantage of women's new freedom. Economic, political, and social limits still restricted even flappers, however, and the image itself meant little to farm and factory workers, to minorities, and to the poor.

In some ways, technology made life easier in the 1920s. With electric washing machines, vacuum cleaners, stoves, and refrigerators, household chores did not require so much time, and there was less need for servants. On the other hand, the typical homemaker now had to handle almost all the household tasks.

Families changed during this period. There was a freer sexual climate, so that both divorce and family planning became more acceptable. Family size decreased; only 20 percent of women who married during the 1920s had five or more children. The family, which in earlier times had been a producing unit—growing and processing much of its food—was now a consuming unit. Marketing and advertising appeals flooded the media, appealing to consumers to buy more goods.



What type of people was attacked during the Red Scare?

2. Who was J. Edgar Hoover AND what did he do?

3. What caused people to think that a Communist conspiracy was taking place?

4. What were Palmer Raids?

5. How many people were arrested during the raids AND how many were deported?

6. What effect did the Red Scare have on Americans?

7. What crime were Sacco and Vanzetti accused of?

8. What did many feel the real reason was for their arrest?

9. What happened to Sacco and Vanzetti?

10. When did the reorganized Ku Klux Klan form?

What did the new Klan now stand for?

12. What change occurred from 1914 to the 1920's economically for the U.S.?

13. Define Debtor Nation.

14. Define Creditor Nation.

15. Why did the change occur?

16. Why did the Europeans not want to pay their debts to the U.S.?

17. What made the repayment of the debts difficult?

18. What was the purpose of the Dawes Plan?

19. What was the purpose of the Washington Naval Conference?

20. What was the purpose of the Kellogg-Briand Pact?

What did the election of Warren Harding indicate about American attitudes in 1920?

2. Name two positive things Harding did during his presidency.

3. Explain what happened during the Teapot Dome Scandal.

4. Define the term Recession(use a dictionary).

5. What is Calvin Coolidge best known for?

6. Who was Andrew Mellon **AND** what was his philosophy?

7. Name two reasons for "Coolidge Prosperity."

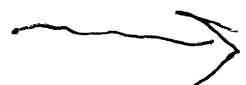
8. Define Gross National Product(use a dictionary).

9. Define Inflation(use a dictionary).

10. Who benefited from Coolidge Prosperity?

11. What was the purpose of raising tariffs? What was the actual effect?

12. How many companies owned half the nation's wealth?



Society and Culture
Shifting Cultural Values

Name:
Date:

1. Why did Americans have more time for pleasure in the 20's?

2. What was the film with audible dialogue?

3. How many people were going to the movies on a weekly bases during the 20's?

4. What was the new form of music created just prior to the 20's and who created it?

5. What was one of the new dances created during the decade?

6. Name three fads from the decade.

7. What did some writers protest against during the 20's?

8. Name 3 writers and their works from the decade.

9. What is an expatriate?

10. What was the percentage of women working by the end of the decade?
Why is this figure misleading?

11. Name three common characteristics of many of the working women of the 20's?

12. What was the purpose of the Women's Bureau?

13. What was the purpose of the Sheppard-Towner Act?

14. Describe a "Flapper."

15. Describe the changes in family life during the 20's.

