

# The USA: A Nation of Contrasts

## 1910 – 1929



	Topic area	Key Question
2	Religion and race	Was America a country of religious and racial intolerance during this period?
3	Crime and corruption	Was the 1920s a decade of organised crime and corruption?
5	The end of prosperity	What factors led to the end of prosperity in 1929?
6	Popular entertainment	How did popular entertainment develop during this period?
7	Role of women	How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

5 topic areas / 5 different questions to revise

## 2. Religion and race: Was America a country of religious and racial intolerance during this period?

### ➤ Religious fundamentalism and the Bible Belt

1920s – most rural Americans very religious.

The south-east of the USA (including states such as Alabama, Kentucky) had been given the name of the 'Bible Belt' and the people viewed themselves as righteous, God-fearing Christians.

Many in these areas known as Fundamentalists. They were Protestants who believed everything in bible should be taken literally and must not be questioned.

In the 1920s, many people in the Bible Belt sought to hold back the changes that were taking place such as gambling and provocative clothing and dancing and general decline in moral standards.

### ➤ The Monkey Trial

1925 – the state of Tennessee passed the Butler Act which banned teaching evolution instead of creationism.

5 other states passed similar laws.

Biology teacher (John Scopes) challenged this ban. He deliberately taught evolution in his class in Tennessee to be arrested on put on trial. Both sides hired best lawyers for a trial which took place in July 1925.

Scopes was convicted of breaking the law and was fined \$100. However, trial a disaster of public image of fundamentalists. The media mocked those who opposed the theory of evolution.

### ➤ The Treatment of Native Americans

Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Native Americans placed on reservations. 1924 – Indian Citizenship Act passed.

Granted them full American citizenship. Some white reformers argued Native Americans could only survive by rejecting their culture & merging into white society.

Special boarding schools established – 1000s of Native American children taken from families & cultures. This tended to destroy the identity of tribes & the children were encouraged not to speak their language.

### ➤ Segregation and the Jim Crow Laws

Slavery came to an end in 1860, more blacks than whites living in southern states. Fearing the power of black Americans, governments introduced laws to control their freedom. These were known as the Jim Crow Laws, after a 19<sup>th</sup> C comedian's act that ridiculed black people. They segregated blacks in schools, hospitals, libraries.

They could not vote and were denied good jobs and a good education. Between 1915 & 1922 – more than 430 black Americans were lynched.

### ➤ The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – set up in the 1860s

After WW1 – labour tensions rose as veterans tried to enter the workforce. In reaction to new immigrants, the membership increased. Klan members were WASPs. Also, anti-communist, anti-black, anti-Jew, anti-Catholic.

Dressed in white robes and wore white hoods to conceal the identity of Klan members. The film 'Birth of a Nation' led to the revival of the KKK as it showed them to be heroes.

1920 – the Klan had 100,000 members. By 1925 – claimed to have more than 5 million members.

Attracted members all over the USA, but especially in the south. State governors of Oregon and Oklahoma were members of the Klan.

Activities – carried out lynchings of black people, beat up and mutilated anyone they considered to be an enemy. No action taken against the KKK politicians knew if they went against them in the south they would lose votes.

Decline – after 1925 because Grand Wizard David Stephenson, was convicted of the rape of a woman.

### ➤ Black reaction

<b>Migration</b>	<b>The NAACP</b>	<b>The UNIA</b>
<p>Due to poor treatment in the south, 1000s black Americans moved to the cities of the north after 1910, hoping for a better life.</p> <p>1916-20, almost 1 mil. black Americans left south for jobs in the north. This became known as 'the Great Migration'. Conditions not much better in the north. Black Americans given low-paid jobs and first to be laid off. Lived in ghettos and faced racial intolerance.</p> <p>Northern white Americans frequently objected to the arrival of black Americans fearing competition for jobs and housing.</p> <p>Improvements – were some – Chicago – growing black middle class. Jazz brought fame to some black singers such as Louis Armstrong.</p> <p>Life expectancy for blacks increased from 45 in 1900 to 48 in 1930.</p>	<p>Organisation to draw attention to the unfair treatment of blacks.</p> <p>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.</p> <p>Set up by W.E.B Du Bois in 1909.</p> <p>He wanted America to accept all people, with equal opportunities for all.</p> <p>By 1919, the NAACP had 90,000 members in 300 branches.</p> <p>Concentrated on legal methods to fight segregation. Using non-violent activities such as marches and petitions.</p> <p>Du Bois made black Americans more aware of their civil rights, especially their right to vote.</p> <p>NAACP also campaigned against lynching in the south.</p> <p>Although they failed to get a law passed banning lynchings, the publicity led to a great reduction in the number being carried out.</p>	<p>Universal Negro Improvement Association set up in 1914 by Marcus Garvey. By 1920 - 2000 members &amp; at its peak had about 250,000 members.</p> <p>Garvey thought black people should not try to be part of white society.</p> <p>UNIA used more militant tactics than NAACP. Garvey encouraged black people to set up their own businesses and only employ black workers. He encouraged black Americans to return to Africa.</p> <p>1925 – Garvey was put to prison for postal fraud.</p>

### 3. Crime and corruption: Was the 1920s a decade of organised crime and corruption?

➤ **Prohibition (18th Amendment, which became effective in January 1920.)**

Sept 1918, President Wilson banned beer production until the end of the war.

In 1920, Congress passed the Volstead Act which banned the consumption of 'intoxicating liquors'.

Reasons for prohibition (WRAP)	Life under prohibition	Enforcement of prohibition
<p><u>Anti-Saloon League</u> – a group who campaigned for prohibition.</p> <p><u>Industrialists and business men</u> - Drinking reduced efficiency and output.</p> <p><u>Religious groups</u> – alcohol was the root of all sin and evil</p> <p><u>Patriots</u> – buying from countries who you have been to war with was betraying the USA.</p> <p><u>Female reformers</u> – there was a clear link between wife beating &amp; child abuse.</p>	<p>Prohibition drove drinkers &amp; drinking underground. It became impossible to stop people drinking alcohol. Huge numbers of people were prepared to break the law. They did not feel like they were breaking the law. To satisfy the demand, organised crime stepped in.</p> <p>Bootlegging – The illegal manufacturing, distribution or selling of alcohol.</p> <p><u>Smuggling</u> – alcohol was smuggled from Europe and Mexico. 30,000 km of coastline – difficult to prevent smuggling.</p> <p><u>Speakeasies</u> – illegal drinking saloon. By 1930 – 30,000 in New York alone. An owner of a speakeasy had many overheads. As well as purchasing illegal alcohol, they would have to pay off police officers.</p> <p><u>Health</u> – Deaths from alcoholism had fallen by 80% by 1921, but by 1926 about 50,000 people had died from poisoned alcohol.</p>	<p>Enforcing prohibition proved impossible.</p> <p>Internal Revenue Service (IRS) never had more than 2,500 agents and some became paid hands of the gang leaders.</p> <p>Most famous IRS agent – Eliot Ness. The man who eventually arrested Al Capone.</p> <p>Most Americans prepared to break the Prohibition law, so a new criminal age began. Making &amp; selling alcohol brought profits.</p> <p>Police and city officials were being bribed by these lawbreakers.</p>

End of Prohibition – Late 1920s – growing opposition to Prohibition. Prohibition law abolished December 1933.

➤ **Organised Crime**

1920s saw a rapid growth in the power of criminal gangs. Prohibition gave criminals the opportunities to broaden their involvement in activities like bootlegging. The gangs brought out 100s of breweries & transported illegal beer in armoured lorries. When faced with competition they often took over their rivals through violence and murder.

They often used the Thompson sub-machine gun, nicknamed the 'Chicago Piano'.

Gangs were involved in what was known as rackets e.g. protection & prostitution.

➤ **Al Capone**

Born in 1899, the son of Italian immigrants. Nicknamed 'Scarface'. Cemented himself as a leading gangster in Chicago by bribing local officials. He controlled mayor 'Big Bill' Thompson, senior police officials & fixed local elections. He controlled speakeasies, gambling houses, night clubs & brothels. To ensure he controlled Chicago, he had more than 200 of his rivals killed in the year 1925-29. No convictions for any of these murders. Despite his criminal activities, Capone was seen by many Americans as a glamorous person.

➤ **St. Valentine's Day Massacre**

In his quest for the control of all gangs, Capone was involved in the infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

14 Feb 1929 – Bugs Moran, leader of a rival Chicago-gang, escaped death but 7 of his men were shot by Capone's men who entered the building dressed as police officers. Capone was in Florida with the perfect alibi.

➤ **Arrest of Capone**

1931 – Capone prosecuted for income tax evasion for the years 1925-29. Claimed he owed over \$200,000 in taxes from gambling profits. Found guilty and role as gang leader was over.

➤ **Corruption – Harding and the 'Ohio Gang'**

In 1919, new president, Warren Harding, promised that there would be a return to 'normalcy' after the distress caused by the First World War.

Harding surrounded himself in his cabinet with friends and colleagues from Ohio – they were given the nickname 'Ohio Gang'.

However, some of Harding's friends used their position to line their pockets with money.

The head of the Veterans Bureau was fined and sent to jail for selling off veterans' hospital supplies for personal profit.

Some colleagues resigned and some even committed suicide rather than face the public over the scandal.

➤ **Corruption – The Teapot Dome Scandal**

Albert Fall, Harding's secretary of the interior, leased government oil fields to friends in exchange for bribes. Harry Sinclair acquired leases to drill for oil at Teapot Dome, Wyoming. Fall received about \$400,000 from Sinclair.

The deals were secret but when Fall began spending large amounts, suspicions grew.

Some of the details of the deals were published in newspapers in April 1922 and President Harding defended the actions of Fall saying that he had approved them. The senate began to demand an investigation and Harding became so distressed by the events that he fell ill.

Harding died in August 1923 and was succeeded by Calvin Coolidge.

In 1927, the Supreme Court ruled that the oil leases had been corruptly obtained.

Fall was found guilty of bribery in 1929, fined \$100,000 and sentenced to one year in prison.

## 5. The end of prosperity: What factors led to the end of prosperity in 1929?

### ❖ **Long term reasons for the end of prosperity**

#### ➤ **Over-production**

1. Fewer products such as cars being sold which was partly due to over-production.
2. More products made than Americans could afford to buy.
3. Could not sell abroad because foreign companies put taxes on American goods.
4. Sales fell, and bosses cut prices & wages.
5. They cut their losses by sacking workers.
6. This meant fewer workers to buy goods. Factories cut costs & more people lose their jobs.

#### ➤ **Falling demand for consumer goods**

During WW1 – US banks lent money to European countries. They found it hard to repay the loans in the 1920s. Unequal distribution of wealth – not everyone benefitted from the boom so could not afford consumer goods. Could not sell products abroad because many countries put taxes on American goods.

#### ➤ **The boom in land and property value**

Consequence of increased wealth of the 1920s was a dramatic rise in the value of land and property. People bought this land hoping to make a profit in future. They lent money to do this. However, in 1926, property prices began to fall sharply in Florida & this left many homeowners in negative equity. Now worth less than they paid.

### ❖ **Short-term reasons for the end of prosperity**

#### ➤ **Over-speculation on the stock market**

1920s – more Americans bought shares on the stock exchange & prices kept rising.  
1928 – shares did not rise as much as in previous years because companies not selling as many goods, so profits fell. Fewer people were willing to buy their shares and there was a drop-in confidence in the market. This was a warning, but when share prices began rising again, greed took over & speculation recurred.  
1925 – stock market value of stocks stood at \$27 billion but by October 1929, it had reached \$87 billion  
By 1929, there were 20 million shareholders in the USA and prices continued to rise.

#### ➤ **The availability of easy credit**

Growth of credit made it easier for people to buy goods even though they could not afford them. Firms arranged for customers to pay in instalments on hire purchase. This included buying shares on credit. This worked well as long as prices were rising. However, when the price rise slows down or prices fell, problems set in.

#### ➤ **The Wall Street Crash**

The boom of the 1920s ended abruptly with the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. Panic selling – when experts started to sell their shares heavily before their value fell even further, small investors panicked. They saw the fall in prices and rushed to sell their own shares. Black Thursday – prices fell so quickly that people have rushed to sell their shares. Nearly 13 million shares have been traded. This led to a complete collapse of prices and thousands of investors lost millions of dollars.

#### ➤ **The immediate effects of the Wall Street Crash**

By the end of 1929 there were about 2.5 million unemployed in the USA. Those who had money were unwilling to spend. Unemployment began to gather pace as fewer consumer goods were purchased. USA full of unemployment, tramps, bread queues and soup kitchens. Many people evicted from their homes and lived on the streets – children included. Time of the hobo – thousands of men travelled the country hitching rides on railcars & freight wagons.

#### ➤ **The Depression**

People were not buying goods and even the rich began to economise. Employers began to lay off employees. Many stockbrokers were unable to repay their debts to the banks – many banks went bust. Thousands of people who had saved in banks were bankrupted. Workforces were laid off. Credit collapsed, and loans were taken in.

## 6. Popular entertainment: How did popular entertainment develop during this period?

### ➤ **The popularity of the cinema**

By 1910 – movie industry well established in the USA & there was more than 8000 cinemas. This rose to 17,000 in 1926. By end of WW1, movies were the most popular form of entertainment in the USA.

Visit to Cinema was a part of American life

Popularity of the cinema - people had more leisure time, cheap prices, attraction of the stars, films interesting and a form of escapism – cowboys, historical romances.

### ➤ **Silent movies**

Until 1927 – movies were silent, although they were often accompanied by live musicians.

In most cinemas, a pianist played tunes while the film ran.

Cinemas improved their facilities to attract more people e.g. Roxy Theatre in New York – 6000 seats

Yearly output in the 1920s of about 800 films, there was always something for the filmgoer to see.

Comedies of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton and romances of Clara Bow most popular.

The cinema contributed to the growth of the American economy in the 1920s.

### ➤ **Movie stars**

As the film industry developed, film producers found that movie-goers wanted to see certain stars.

Stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Rudolf Valentino & Greta Garbo could draw in millions of people.

Fan magazines were published, and newspapers wrote about the lives of stars.

Rudolf Valentino was the first male star to be sold on sex appeal. Women would faint when they saw him. He died in 1926 & several people killed themselves when hearing of his death.

### ➤ **The talkies**

In 1927, the first 'talkie', *The Jazz Singer*, was released which made the cinemas even more popular.

Some silent screen stars lost their jobs because their voices were not fit for the 'talkies'.

By 1930, more than 100 million cinema tickets were sold every week.

By the end of the 1920s, there were several famous film studios such as Warner Brothers.

After WW1 – Hollywood emerged as the centre of the film industry in America.

Hollywood & the film industry in general did provoke criticism from some who believed movies were lowering the morals of American society.

### ➤ **Changes in popular music including jazz**

1920s known as the 'Jazz Age' because the popular music of the time was jazz.

It had originated with black slaves who were encouraged to sing to increase production.

They used washboards, cans, pickaxes.

Originally, the music had various names including 'blues', 'rags' and 'boogie-woogie'.

Despite its African American origins, in the 1920s jazz became popular with young middle class whites, especially flappers.

Some condemned jazz as another sign of a decline in moral standards.

Some cities, inc. New York prohibited the public performance of jazz in dance halls. However, this only made it more exciting for the young. Jazz became the great attraction of the night clubs and speakeasies.

Famous jazz musicians included Louis Armstrong (famous recordings included 'Tiger Rag'.)

### ➤ **The impact of the radio and gramophone**

Radio had a massive influence on many Americans. First radio station, Station KDKA, began in 1920.

By 1930 – more than 600 radio stations in the USA & 40 % of US homes had a radio set.

Radio enabled people to listen to sporting events, music such as jazz, as well as advertisements.

Radio became the main source of family entertainment. It created sporting heroes such as the boxer Jack Dempsey & the baseball player, Babe Ruth. It made events accessible to people who could not afford to attend.

As radio reached more than 50 m people by the end of the 1920s, there was an increase in political awareness.

**The Gramophone** industry grew rapidly after 1900, peaking in 1921 with sales of \$106 million. However, by 1922, radio destroyed the market with the free music it offered. Sales fell through the entire decade.

### ➤ **Dancing**

Dance was a big change in popular culture during this period.

Dancing before WW1 – slow and formal. There was a more carefree approach in the 1920s.

One of the most well-known dances of the time was the Charleston which had a quick pace.

Dance marathons – contests where people would dance until one couple remained. The craze began in 1923.

### ➤ **The speakeasy culture**

The introduction of prohibition in 1920 resulted in an increase in drinking clubs referred to as speakeasies.

The entertainment in speakeasies was often provided by groups of black Americans playing jazz.

Drew audiences from all social classes, allowed whites and blacks to mingle socially.

Prices in speakeasies where alcohol was consumed ensured the clientele was mainly middle class.

Mixing of the races & the belief that jazz incited sexual activity caused large numbers of people to oppose jazz.

## 7. The role of women - How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

### ➤ **The role of women in the pre-war years**

Political role – women not allowed to play a part in politics. They had no vote.

Social role – thought to be unladylike for a woman to smoke or drink in public. Women would only go out with a chaperon. Divorce and sex before marriage were rare.

Appearance – expected to wear ankle-length dresses, have long hair tied back and not wear make-up.

Employment opportunities – limited and most middle and upper-class women did not go out to work. Most working women were in low-paid jobs such as cleaning, dress-making and secretarial work.

### ➤ **The impact of WW1**

American entry into WW1 in 1917 provided greater opportunities for women:

Around 2.8m men had been drafted into the armed forces. More than 1m women helped with the war effort.

Around 90,000 women served in the US armed forces in Europe. Navy enlisted women as nurses & accountants.

Women were required for work traditionally done by men, such as heavy industry, engineering works, transport.

Proved women could do jobs as well as men. Encouraged greater freedom such as going out un-chaperoned.

Also made a powerful argument for gaining the vote.

### ➤ **Changing political attitudes**

Securing the right to vote – Women's suffrage groups such as the North American Women Suffrage Association (formed in 1890) had been campaigning for the vote but had been unsuccessful.

Turning point – impact of WW1. Contribution to WW1 made their demands for political equality hard to resist.

19<sup>th</sup> Amendment became law in 1920, granting women the right to vote.

After securing vote, some women did make progress in gaining political power. In 1924, Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming became first woman to be elected governor of state.

However, these were exceptions and women made little progress in politics itself. Political parties wanted their vote but did not see them as realistic candidates for political office.

### ➤ **The influence of jazz culture**

1920s – younger middle- and upper-class women began to lead a more liberal lifestyle.

They were influenced by the newly emerging jazz culture.

Jazz music and the jazz culture gave young women an opportunity to break free from the norm and rebel.

Jazz clubs, speakeasies and dance halls – women had greater freedom to express themselves in language, clothing and behaviour. Provided new jobs for women – cosmetic and clothing industries.

Not all women were able to live this life. Some rejected the lifestyle because of religious or social beliefs. They criticised the women for being too sexual. Others were forced to continue with their role of housewife and mother.

### ➤ **The flapper lifestyle and feminism**

Greatest change in position of women was experienced by the flappers.

In the 1920s – a number of women, generally middle- and upper-class families in the northern states, decided to challenge the traditional attitudes towards women. They became known as the flappers.

Their aim – become more independent in their social life and a freer approach to their behaviour and appearance.

Flappers celebrated their sexuality and independence, went out with their boyfriends and smoked in public.

Joan Crawford – the most famous flapper. She kissed, drank and danced the Charleston and starred in the film *Our Modern Maidens* (1929). Girls tried to copy her.

### ➤ **New fashions for the flappers**

They wore short skirts and bright clothing, wore make-up, cut their hair short. They smoked and drank in public.

They drove cars and even motorbikes, and they openly danced the Charleston with men in public.

### ➤ **Opposition to the flapper lifestyle**

In some respects, the flapper lifestyle did little to further the cause of women's rights in the 1920s.

Flappers seen as too extreme by many traditional groups, especially in rural areas.

Met with strong disapproval from religious societies. Many of the older generation criticised the lifestyle of the flappers and formed Anti-Flirt Leagues.

Some flappers deliberately flouted the law and were arrested, e.g. wearing revealing clothing such as banned swimsuits.

While some objected to the flapper lifestyle, other women were sympathetic but lacked the financial means or the opportunity to adopt the new fashions or attend the new social events.

## The USA: A Nation of Contrasts – 1910-1929 – Exam Guidance

### 1. Use source A and your own knowledge to describe... [6 marks] 5 minutes

- Describe what you can see or read in the source. Make use of the information written with a visual source.
- Link the information to your own knowledge of the period for context
- Aim to make at least 2 developed points of own knowledge.

### 2. Describe... [8 marks] 10 minutes

- Start answer with the words of the question.
- Include specific details such as dates, events, names of key people.
- Cover a number of key points.

### 3. What was the purpose of Source B [8 marks] 10 minutes (Content - P, Origin - P, Own Knowledge - P, Conclusion – P)

- You need to explain why this source was produced. PURPOSE!!!
- Use your knowledge of this topic to consider the CONTENT of the source and what it shows.
- Make use of the ATTRIBUTION / CAPTION of the source. This can supply important information such as DATE of publication, the NAME of the newspaper, book or magazine.
- Use this information to identify MOTIVE - who was the intended AUDIENCE? What did the source AIM to do?
- Conclusion stating which is the main purpose and why.
- It is crucial that you give a number of PURPOSES of the source.

### 4. Which of the sources is more useful to an historian studying... [12 marks] 15 minutes

- You have to evaluate the USEFULNESS of two sources to the historian studying the key issue named in the question.
- You must consider usefulness in terms of:
  - CONTENT value - what the source tells you about the key issue.
  - ORIGIN - who said it and when.
  - PURPOSE - why was the source produced and what was its purpose?
  - LIMITATIONS – How could the source be more useful?
  - OWN KNOWLEDGE - link the source to your own knowledge of what was happening at the time.
- **DO COPLOK FOR BOTH SOURCES**
- JUDGEMENT - which source is most useful to an historian studying the topic and why.

### 5. Essay question – Was the... [16 +3] 20 minutes

- Must provide a 2-sided answer.
- Start by discussing the key feature in the question. Use your knowledge to explain why this is important.
- Discuss the counter-argument. Cover a range of other factors using factual detail (2/3). Explain why these are important.
- Keep linking back to the key concept in the question.
- Analyse the significance of the other factors in relation to the key feature.
- Conclude with a judgement. How important is the factor in the question compared with other factors?