

# 1920's: the groundbreaking and progressive change in us essay sample

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The 1920's was a period of groundbreaking and progressive change in the United States. Women's roles in society changed and the economy experienced great growth as a result of innovative ideas and entrepreneurs. However, at the same time it was an era of intolerance and conservative ideas like prohibition.

Women's roles in society changed during the 1920's. As a direct result of the war, the number of women in the workforce rose and they moved into better, higher-paying jobs. After the Nineteenth amendment was passed, all women were now allowed to vote. At first many women did not take advantage of this opportunity and didn't even vote at all. Some felt they shouldn't be allowed to vote, while others just lacked interest. Eventually toward the end of the decade, more women began to express their right to vote. Culturally, by mistake the rebellious flapper brought all women closer to their goal of greater equality with men. The flapper represented only a small portion of women in America but their impact was wide and greatly affected fashion and behavior (E). Dresses became shorter. So short that between 1913 and 1928, the average amount of fabric used to make a woman's outfit shrank from 19.5 yards to just 7 yards. Women's manners changed during this time too. Prior to the 1920's women considered "proper" rarely drank or smoked in public. But during the 1920s many women were doing both, mostly to express their new freedom.

The cigarette production in the United States nearly doubled between 1918 and 1928. Women weren't the only ones causing this dramatic increase in production but they accounted for a large part of the increase. These new changes shocked American society and enraged many parents. Also the <https://assignbuster.com/1920s-the-groundbreaking-and-progressive-change-in-us-essay-sample/>

1920's was home to a growing consumer economy. This is when the economy depends on a large amount of spending by consumers-individuals who use, or consume, products. Increased spending will lead to greater profits for the businesses and then they can raise wages and it encourages even more spending. This was what the 1920's saw developing. For example, a lot of new homes were being built and they mostly all were wired for electricity which then allowed them to be filled with electric appliances. For this reason the number of electric power customers nearly quadrupled. Also the number of people who had electric lights increased from 16% to 63% (Part of this large increase came from the new homes mentioned earlier).

Not to mention this increase in electricity definitely helped the appliance industries grow as well. As a case in point General Electric became one of the world's largest companies as a result of the wave of consumer buying. Equally important is the fact that this consumer economy could not have developed as rapidly as it did without an increased amount of goods to sell. In order to meet the consumer demand, productivity had to increase. Consider the Gross National Product (GNP), which is the total value of goods and services a country produces annually. From 1921 to 1929, the GNP grew at an average rate of 6% per year, whereas the preceding decade had seen a growth rate of less than 1%. Productivity rose because the nation developed new resources, new management methods, and new technologies. Large oil fields were discovered among the states which provided the resources to power industrial growth. Business leaders were ordering their customers to follow new principles and it helped workers

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produce more goods. In addition the increasing use of machines and other kinds of technology significantly increased workers output. Calvin Coolidge, a president during the 20's, did not interfere much with business. He thought that it was best to let business do its business on its own.

He ran a laissez-faire government (I). The best that the government could do, he believed, was to leave businesses alone and allow them to grow. This was nothing new to America. A laissez-faire government had been practiced before and seemed to be found successful. Although the economy was doing great and thus was a sign of " progressive" change, it was being done by an old idea and old style of government. Henry Ford wanted to " democratize the automobile". Meaning he wanted to produce more cars and sell them at prices ordinary people could afford. Ford accomplished this goal by adapting the assembly line. The old manufacturing process was too inefficient to produce something like an automobile so the assembly line allowed a person to complete a single process in producing a car allowing people to only have to master that one part, not the whole thing. For instance one worker might install windshields while another might put on the tires. At Fords most productive factory the assembly line produced a Model T every 24 seconds. On the other hand the country during the 1920's also experienced a handful of intolerance and conservatism.

Organized crime developed as a result of prohibition. Liquor, beer, and wine could no longer be manufactured, sold, or transported in the United States. Americans who decided to defy the new law needed to find a private source of alcoholic beverages. They turned to a new type of criminal, the

bootlegger. The bootleggers brought alcohol to restaurants, nightclubs, and speakeasies. They would get their alcohol from either private stills (B) or from Canada and the Caribbean. Supplying this illegal liquor was a complex operation and its huge potential profits lead to the development of organized crime. As local gangsters started to join forces with other gangsters and create larger organizations, trouble began. As they tried to expand their "business" they ran into other organizations supplying alcohol and they fought for their territory. They used machine guns and other weapons and soon gang wars and murder became commonplace. The streets became a battleground. Successful bootlegging led to other illegal activities. They would often bribe police men or other government officials to ignore their illegal doings. One famous gangster named Al Capone, had so much money at his disposal he managed to buy the cooperation of the police and city officials. Even politicians and judges took orders from him.

Keep in mind most of this could have been avoided if the Volstead Act was strictly enforced, which it was not (C). Along the coasts and in the upper Midwest the Act was widely ignored. The idea of prohibition had been around but it was never put into law until the 1920's. It is important to remember that it was a conservative idea. Equally important racial tension grew in the 1920's as people were intolerant with African Americans. For example, the summer of 1919 became known as the "Red Summer" for all the blood that was spilled during it due to mob violence between white and black Americans. The Jim Crow era continued and so did the lynchings. Many of the crimes were caused by the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan disappeared for awhile but by 1924 it had a total Klan membership of 4 million. The Klan changed and

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now did not only discriminate against African Americans but against any group that seemed to them un-American.

Klan members carried out many crimes against African Americans, Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and others. They worked at night beating, whipping, and even killing victims (F). The Klan thrived until 1927. That's when police stepped up enforcement because of a case involving the Klan that shocked the nation. Despite that they were constantly being discriminated, some blacks, like the ones involved in the Harlem Renaissance, made some gains (D). Writers of this awakening wrote about their views on being black and living amongst whites. They believed the two worlds, one white and one black, could live in harmony. The 1920s was an era of progressive change. To illustrate, women were changing roles, the consumer economy was developing, and Ford's automobile showed this progressiveness. At the same time, the 1920s was home to organized crime and racial tension.