

# The twenties



## Area One-Politics and Government-The Harding Scandals and the Bonus Bill veto

The presidency of Harding was filled with continuous scandal. Many compare the Harding to Grant has both being postwar presidents marked by scandals and corruption. Having appointed several excellent officials, Harding also appointed a number of incompetent and dishonest men to fill important positions, including the Secretary of Interior, Albert B. Fall and Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty.

The Secretary of Interior, Albert B. Fall, in 1921, secured the transfer of several naval oil reserves to his jurisdiction. In 1922, Fall secretly leased reserves at Teapot Dome in Wyoming to Harry F. Sinclair of Monmouth Oil and at Elk Hills in California to Edward Doheny of Pan-American Petroleum. A Senate investigation later revealed that Sinclair had given Fall \$305, 000 in cash and bonds and a herd of cattle, while Doheny had given him a \$100, 000 unsecured loans. Sinclair and Doheny were acquitted in 1927 of charges of defrauding the government, but in 1929 Fall was convicted, fined, and imprisoned for bribery.

Another scandal involved Charles R. Forbes, appointed by Harding to head the new Veteran's Bureau. He seemed energetic and efficient in operating the new hospitals and services for veterans. It was later estimated that he had stolen or squandered about \$250 million in Bureau funds.

Scandal also tainted Attorney General Daugherty who, through his intimate friend Jessie Smith, took bribes from bootleggers, income tax evaders, and others in return for protection from prosecution. When the scandal became

to come to light, Smith committed suicide in Daugherty's Washington apartment in May 1923. There was also evidence that Daugherty received money for using his influence in returning the American Metal Company, seized by the government during the war, to its German owners.

### Area Two-Economics-Prosperity and Innovation

Though overall the economy was strong between 1922 and 1929, certain segments of the economy, especially agriculture, did not share in the nation's general prosperity. Improved industrial efficiency, which resulted in lower prices for goods, was primarily responsible. Manufacturing output increased about 65%, and productivity, or output per hour increased by about 45%. The numbers of industrial workers actually decreased from 9 million to 8.8 million during the decade. The increased productivity resulted from improved machinery, which in turn came about for several reasons. Industry changed from steam to electric power, allowing the design of more intricate machines and replaced the work of human hands. By 1929, 70% of industrial power came from electricity. The moving assembly line was widely adopted by companies, along with scientific management. Larger firms, for the first time, began to fund major research and development activities to find new and improved products, reduce production costs, and the utilization of by-products.

The demand for power for industrial machinery as well as for business and some lighting increased dramatically, and a host of electrical appliances such as stoves, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, toasters, and radios became available. About two-thirds of American homes had electricity by 1929,

leaving only those in rural areas without it. Homes and business construction also experienced a boom from 1922 until 1928. Other large industries, which grew rapidly, were chemicals and printing. The movie industry expanded rapidly, especially after the introduction of sound films, and employed about 325, 000 people by 1930. New industries that began in the period were radio and commercial aviation.

### Area Three-Cultural Clashes-KKK/Garveyism

The most extreme expression of nativism in the 1920s was the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Unlike the original Klan of the 1860s and 1870s, the new Klan founded in 1915 was as strong in the Midwest as in the South. Northern branches of the KKK directed their hostility not only against the blacks but also against the Catholics, Jews, foreigners, and suspected Communists. The new Klan used modern advertising techniques to grow to 5 million members by 1925. It drew most of its support from the lower middle class in small cities and towns.

The Klan employed various methods for terrorizing and intimidating anyone targeted as " un-American." Dressed in white hoods to disguise their identity, Klan members would burn crosses and apply vigilante justice, punishing their victims with whips, tar and feathers, and even the hangman's noose. In its heyday in the early 1920s, the Klan developed strong political influence. In Indiana and Texas, its support became crucial for candidates hoping to win election to state and local offices.

An opponent to the KKK was a man named Marcus Garvey. A native of Jamaica, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914. After moving to New York in 1916, he advocated black racial pride and separatism rather than integration, and a return of blacks to Africa. Some of his ideas soon alienated the older black organizations. He developed a large following especially among southern blacks, but his claim of 6 million members in 1923 may be inflated. An advocate of black economic self-sufficiency, he urged his followers to buy only from blacks, and founded a chain of business, including grocery stores, restaurants, and laundries. In 1921 he proclaimed himself the provisional president of an African empire, and sold stock in the Black Star Steamship Line, which would take migrants to Africa. The line went bankrupt in 1923; Garvey was convicted and imprisoned for mail fraud in the sale of the line's stock, and then deported. His legacy was an emphasis on black pride and self-respect.

#### Area Four-Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs-Disarmament

The Republican presidents of the 1920s tried to promote peace and also scale back expenditures on defense by arranging treaties of disarmament. The most successful disarmament conference, and the greatest achievement of Harding's presidency, was held in Washington D. C. in 1921. Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, initiated talks on naval disarmament, hoping to stabilize the size of the U. S. Navy relative to that of other powers and to resolve conflicts in the Pacific. Representatives to the Washington Conference came from Belgium, China, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, the

Netherlands, and Portugal. Three agreements to relative tensions resulted from the discussions.

The Five-Power Treaty consisted of the nations with the five largest navies. The nations agreed to maintain the following ratio with respect to their largest warships, or battleships; the United States, 5; Great Britain, 5; Japan, 3; France, 1.67; Italy, 1.67. Britain and the United States also agreed not to fortify their possessions in the Pacific, while no limit was placed on the Japanese. The Four-Power Treaty consisted of the United States, France, Great Britain, and Japan agreeing on respecting one another's territory in the Pacific. The Nine Power Pact consisted of all nine nations of the conference agreeing to respect the Open Door Policy by guaranteeing the territorial integrity of China.

#### Area Five-Mass Culture-Creation of Mass Culture

The trend whereby entertainment shifted from the home and small social groups to commercial profit-making activities had begun in the late 19th century and reached maturity in the 1920s. Spending for entertainment in 1929 was \$4.3 billion. The movies attracted the most consumer interest and generated the most money. Movie attendance averaged 40 million a week in 1922 and 90 million a week in 1929. Introduction of sound with *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 generated even more interest. Americans spent ten times more on movies than all sports, the next attraction in popularity. It was called the golden age of major-league baseball, with an attendance increase of over fifty percent during the decade.

Commercial radio began when station KDKA in Pittsburgh broadcasted the election results in November 1920. By 1929 over ten million families, over one-third of the total, had radios. National network broadcasting began when the National Broadcasting Company was organized in 1926, followed by the Columbia Broadcasting System in 1927. Radio was free entertainment, paid for by advertising. Despite the many new diversions, Americans continued to read, and millions of popular magazines were sold each week. Popular books of the period included the Tarzan series and Zane Grey's Westerns, as well as literary works.