

# The key features of the 'roaring twenties' in american during the 1920s



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During the 1920's America went through an important social and economical change. They were enjoying a 'boom' which is a time of prosperity and there were many key features that gave the 'Roaring Twenties' their historical character. These were the production line, the new music and media scene and family life (the role of women in society in particular). These key features modernised the way and attitudes of living that we share today. One feature of the 'Roaring Twenties' was that America's cities were growing due to an increase in population and development. The increased population was caused by urban migration.

America was viewed as the 'Land of opportunity' and many people were migrating there in the hopes of getting a second chance in a better standard of living. People were migrating to the cities because of the appeal and image that was built around the new skyscrapers. Skyscrapers were being built which gave much more space than ever before for offices as the area was built up in levels rather than being spread out. The skyscrapers also added to the symbolisation of the cities being the power and strength of America. It seemed that everything was happening in the cities and a lot of people wanted to be part of it.

The increased amount of space for offices and business meant that businesses could expand and there was therefore an increase in job availability (this was another reason why many people migrated to the cities). Suburbs were also expanding due to the car. More people could afford cars which meant that they could live further from the big cities. This meant that the towns close to cities were expanding because the people could live in a nice, quiet and often more family friendly neighbourhood

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rather than the hustle and bustle of city life. Henry Ford introduced the idea of mass production in 1913.

He used the idea of the 'assembly line' to reduce the time of production. Other companies soon caught on and began to mass produce their products also. New inventions such as the fridge, washing machine and radio were mass produced and could be bought at a lower price. These new lower prices meant that the working class could enjoy these new luxuries. For those who still couldn't afford to buy all the products in one payment, buying on credit was used. This increased the consumerism in the country as more people could afford to buy products.

Electricity was also being connected to houses firstly in cities and in surrounding areas, this meant electrical appliances could be used and it also meant that a working day could be longer due to the longer hours created by the light the electricity could provide whereas before the working day was more based on the hours of daylight. Because of the availability of electricity, offices could be open longer which meant workers could earn more money by working for longer. Families could use their houses electricity to power fridges (which meant food could be kept for longer and less shopping would need to be done) and washing machines (which meant it didn't all have to be washed by hand and the washer could put the clothes in and leave the machine to do the work). These new electrical appliances gave families more time and money to spend on leisure activities and entertainment, but there was a reason why consumerism increased in the 1920's.

The industry that increased the consumerism in America was the advertising industry. Closely linked with the entertainment industry, adverts were being put up on posters, in newspapers, in magazines, on the radio and especially in the cinemas. They manipulated people into buying their products and making the consumers want and think they needed the product. The commercial advertising industry would pay to have their product promoted this way and as you can see by today's advertising industry, it worked ! So now with all this spare time and money to spend, the Americans began to spend more money the entertainment industries such as film, music and dancing. In the 1920s the film industry kicked off.

Hollywood as we know it today was developing outside of Los Angeles and actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton kept people rolling with laughter in the aisles. Although the first film with sound was later in 1927, the film industry became a multi-billionaire industry selling 100 million tickets each week! Advertising companies used films as a way of selling their product to the young or impressionable audience of the cinema. The 1920s were also seen as the 'Jazz age'. Many black people who were working in demeaning positions turned to the music industry as a refuge from hard labour for low wages.

They were the main influence of the jazz and blues music that the younger generation loved dance to. New dances were invented such as the 'Charleston' and 'flappers' (young women who danced and dressed in a particular and modern way) were critically judged by the older generations who thought jazz was a corrupting influence. The new image or trend set by the younger generation caused much controversy and many magazines

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analysed the influence of jazz and the effects it was having on young people in their articles. People were spending more on entertainment than they ever had done because they could afford to.

Though the young women were becoming more flamboyant and much criticised, it paid off, as the length of hair and hemlines went up so did the political and social stance of the 'modern day woman'. There were many reasons as to why the role of women changed during the 1920s. One of which is directly linked to the aforementioned features. Women had been given the vote, but their rights were still not exactly the same as men's. For instance their work wages were lower and more often than not in clerical jobs, more women were hired as it was cheaper for the company concerned yet the woman could still do the job the same as any man. This meant that the women of America were finally able to support themselves financially and did not need to rely on a husband so much as it was traditionally viewed she would do, this is proved by the fact that during this period there was twice as many divorces as before.

This also meant that the women had more money to spend on the new mass of products available. In many cases this actually gave the woman even more free time as she could spend less time doing the washing and more time working, or dancing. Politically, women were also making a stand, although not quite a radical one. Women's votes were valued by the government but they were still thought to be unelectable and not desired as political candidates. Only a handful had been elected by 1929 but many of them had a high public standing such as Eleanor Roosevelt.

The role of women led to much controversy as already mentioned but some started to blame the morality of the cities for it. Many of those who lived in the country thought the cities to be full of sex, crime and lack of religion. They thought that the film industry had publicly influenced sex and crime through its new and radical films which pictured men half naked and were more often than not about gangsters and love stories. The problem was that these films were what sold 100 million tickets each week (the equivalent of a whole year's tickets today in Britain).

The once taboo subject of sex was being virtually sold across the films, the first 'It' girl Clara Bow and Rudolph Valentino (who appeared half naked in 1921's 'The Sheik') were thought to be influencing the young minds. The more southern states who were very strict on religion and their views passed censorship laws in their states but the film industry, to be pragmatic and keep their audiences but also keep the peace, passed their own law that films would be shown but any sexual references made by characters meant that those characters would be punished for them in the film. In the 1920's the prohibition of alcohol had been passed as a law. Gangsters such as the famous Al Capone were smuggling alcohol into states and making a massive profit off it. Although the alcohol smuggling was known to be going on, the police force couldn't quite catch the main culprits which caused public outrage.

Here this outrage links back to the fact that the cities were expanding and modernising and would continue to do so due to new technology and the changing attitudes towards the lifestyle's and needs of people in the new modern era. The major feature which led to all these products, increased <https://assignbuster.com/the-key-features-of-the-roaring-twenties-in-american-during-the-1920s/>

consumerism, women's role, entertainment and morality was the fact that America's wealth had allowed it to happen. These features all combined together though, gave us the 'Roaring Twenties' which modernised the way we live today.