

5. THE ROARING TWENTIES

OVERVIEW OF THE VIDEO

Volume Five in the award-winning *America in the 20th Century* series, “The Roaring Twenties,” captures a unique period in American history—from the fun and frivolity for which it’s most known, to the important social and political legacy of the era. Included are discussion of the “return to normalcy”; social tensions and politics; the Red Scare; the presidencies of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge; postwar changes in American business; Garveyism and the Scopes trial; and the significant pop culture of the era.



NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

(From The National Center for History in the Schools, Basic Edition, 1996. Found at: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/>)

U.S. History—Era 7—Standard 3:

How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression

- 3A—The student understands social tensions and their consequences in the postwar era.
- 3B—The student understands how a modern capitalist economy emerged in the 1920s.
- 3C—The student understands how new cultural movements reflected and changed American society.
- 3D—The student understands politics and international affairs in the 1920s.

VOCABULARY

anarchist	fads	mass transit	Red Scare
assembly lines	immigration	nativism	scientific management
communist	installment plan	normalcy	suburbs
doctrine	literacy	Prohibition	tariff

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Review the world events during and directly following World War I that would directly affect the United States in the 1920s before beginning the video.

Emphasize:

- ★ The Russian revolutions of March and November in 1917, and the western world's reaction to the Bolshevik regime.
- ★ The wartime benefits that workers had gained during the war, and which of these were taken away when the war ended.
- ★ How the Immigration Restriction League passed laws during the war that contributed to the peacetime prejudice against immigrants.

DURING THE VIDEO

There are natural PAUSE POINTS within this episode that separate the content into sections. Pause the video at these times for class discussion, using the following questions as springboards.

1. TIME CODE 07:47—Why was Warren G. Harding's campaign promise of a "return to normalcy" just what the American public wanted after World War I?

ANSWER: By the end of the war, many Americans were yearning for the "good old days." They had spent years giving their time, work efforts, hopes, dreams, sons, and daughters to Europe, and they were tired of listening to President Woodrow Wilson's insistence on solving the ills of the entire globe. His "preachings" had begun to pall, and the American people wanted to concentrate on the home front again. Harding's pledges that his interest was in healing, serenity, normalcy, and restoration were exactly what the American public wanted to hear, and his friendly, distinguished, and likeable persona carried him to victory in the election.

2. TIME CODE 13:22—How did the popularity of the automobile contribute to the economic boom times of the 1920s?

ANSWER: The demand for automobiles resulted in increases in the production of many materials (e.g., rubber, steel, glass, gasoline) as well as the development of a road system. Another correlation was the fact that when people became more mobile they were able to live farther from their workplaces, which resulted in the creation of suburbs. This translated into many new jobs, which in turn brought more money to the economy.

3. TIME CODE 22:23—How did the clash between traditionalists and modernists reveal itself in the Scopes Trial?

ANSWER: The 1920s marked a time when more people lived in cities and towns than in rural areas. The new, more permissive moral environment of the cities caused many people to accept theories their former, more religion-based value systems wouldn't have allowed. When Charles Darwin's theories on evolution began to appear in scientific literature, many more "sophisticated" people of the urban com-

"We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States, and you know it, and that is all."

—Clarence Darrow, defense attorney, during his examination of prosecutor William Jennings Bryan in the Scopes Trial, 1925

munities felt that this newest scientific information should be a part of the science curriculum in public schools. An immediate clash with traditionalists from the rural communities was inevitable, and the Scopes trial brought the conflict to the American public.

AFTER THE VIDEO

The episode ends with an on-screen Video Quiz, a series of True/False questions (see page 30). This quiz may be copied for classroom use.

Video Quiz Answer Key

1. *T* 2. *F* 3. *T* 4. *T* 5. *T* 6. *T* 7. *F* 8. *F* 9. *T* 10. *F*

For in-depth discussion:

1. Was President Harding to blame for the scandals that took place during his administration? In what ways might he be considered a victim of these scandals?
2. What were some groups that were persecuted during the 1920s? Why were they singled out, and what caused the “Red Scare” hysteria that launched these persecutions?
3. In what ways did the United States become a consumer economy in the 1920s?

EXTENDING THE LESSON

Research topics for either group or individual study.

1. **Time, Continuity, and Change.** Nativism was popular in the United States following World War I. Is it popular today—after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001? In what ways are attitudes about immigrants similar in both eras? How are they different? What legislation could be compared to the National Origins Act of 1924? Explore examples of discrimination or persecution that could compare to the events of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial and conviction in 1920.
2. **Viewpoints.** The United States went dry early in January of 1920. It has been said that Prohibition was about more than getting Americans to stop drinking. Compare and contrast the viewpoints on the ban on alcohol held by industrialists such as Henry Ford, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the owners of saloons and breweries. Use information about the legislation surrounding this issue in your arguments. Did Billy Sunday’s bombastic preaching style help or hinder the case for the Eighteenth Amendment?
3. **Political Perspectives.** How does the government’s contribution to the boom in business of the 1920s compare to the trust-busting legislation of the Progressive Era? How did American popular opinion following the war contribute to this change? Name significant events that emerged from this climate.

*“Every man
who casts a vote
for the saloons
deserves that his
son shall die a
drunkard, or
that his daugh-
ter should be
consigned to the
tender mercies
of a drunken
husband.”*

—William Ashley
“Billy” Sunday,
Evangelist, during a
tabernacle sermon in
Detroit, Mich., 1916

“America’s president need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution but restoration. . . .”

—Warren G. Harding, 28th President of the United States, 1920

- 4. Presidential Focus.** Compare and contrast Warren G. Harding’s presidency with that of Ulysses S. Grant, another president whose term came at the end of a major war. Focus on both their leadership abilities and their administrations: Were they both plagued by scandal and postwar corruption? What was the nature of the corruption, and what role did each president play in the events? What were some positive actions that came out of each presidency?
- 5. History and Technology.** Why do you think the 1920s spawned so much innovation in the music industry? What inventions may have paved the way for the widespread appeal of American styles of jazz, country, and blues music? What other entertainment fields were sparked or enhanced by new inventions and innovations?
- 6. Signs of the Times.** What is the etymology of the word “fad”—and what does it mean? What were some of the fads introduced in the 1920s? Did any of these short-term amusements withstand the test of time to remain popular beyond the Roaring Twenties? What are some fads that are linked to other decades of the twentieth century? What fads are popular today?
- 7. Curriculum Connections (Language and Word Coinage).** The English language changes every year: Words fall out of favor and are dropped as new words are coined, or invented, and added to the common lexicon. Many people believe that Warren G. Harding coined the word “normalcy” in one of his presidential stump speeches. Research the word and Harding’s use of it. Was he a man ahead of his time, or simply a poor public speaker who mispronounced the word “normality”? Describe the origins of the word *normalcy*, and explain the term “Gamalielese,” first used by political commentator and newspaperman H.L. Mencken to describe Harding’s public speaking quirks.
- 8. Your Region in History.** Investigate and describe the history of Prohibition in your region. How did the local government handle invoking the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act? Were there speakeasies, homemade stills, or other revolts against the amendment in your area?
- 9. Career Exploration (Publishing).** Literacy was on the rise in the Roaring Twenties. Eight million more Americans were reading newspapers—many also enjoying tabloids, magazines, nonfiction books, comic books, and novels—by the mid-twenties. This rise in the reading population sparked an increase in the publishing industry as the demand for literature of all types grew. Investigate the growth of the publishing industry in the 1920s and beyond. What are the different types of publishing houses available today? Describe the education, training, and career opportunities available to people interested in the field of publishing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The letters, speeches, and writings of the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Garveyism, in his own words, and edited by his second wife.

Moran, Jeffrey P. *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents (Bedford Series in History and Culture)*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

(From Amazon.com) In a lively, interpretative introduction to one of the watershed events in American history, Jeffrey P. Moran analyzes the trial and its impact on the moral fiber of the country and the educational system, and examines the race and gender issues that arose from the debate. Political cartoons and photographs add a colorful dimension to this collection.

Stratton, David H. *Tempest over Teapot Dome: The Story of Albert B. Fall (The Oklahoma Western Biographies, Vol. 16)*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

(From front flap) *Tempest over Teapot Dome* describes Albert Fall's role in Harding's administration, his tribulations in court before going to prison in 1931, his freewheeling career in New Mexico politics, his lawyering for underdog ranchers in a bloody range war, and more.

Streissguth, Thomas. *The Roaring Twenties: An Eyewitness History (Facts on File Library of American History)*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2001.

(From front flap) *The Roaring Twenties* recounts this era by examining many of its aspects: Prohibition, political scandal, expatriates, women's suffrage, technological advances, prosperity, trials on evolution and espionage, and finally the stock market crash.

WEB RESOURCES

Note: Teachers should preview all sites to ensure they are age-appropriate for their students. At the time of publication, all URLs were valid.

The Roaring 1920s Concert Extravaganza—Music of the Roaring Twenties Web site offers authentic, primary research audio resources. Sixty-second clips of recordings by such artists as Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson, as well as artists such as Fanny Brice from the Ziegfeld Follies are available for listening in Real Audio 2 sound format, at:

<http://bestwebs.com/roaring1920/>

The National Institute of Standards and Technology offers a narrative on the innovations and inventions from the decade at its 100th anniversary commemorative Web site:

<http://www.100.nist.gov/twenties.htm>

The Westerville Public Library (Ohio) hosts a Web site on the Anti-Saloon League 1893–1933, containing information on the history of this organization, classroom activities, and archived written materials:

<http://www.wpl.lib.oh.us/AntiSaloon/>

The Authentic History Center is independently owned and operated by a high school teacher from Byron Center, Michigan. Designed as a teaching tool, this Web site makes available a host of primary sources from American popular culture. This link will take you to a five-part pictorial exhibit of items of interest from the 1920s:

<http://www.authentichistory.com/1920s.html>

VIDEO QUIZ: THE ROARING TWENTIES

Name _____

Date _____

Read each of the following statements and circle T if it is true, or F if it is false.

- T F 1. More than half of America's riches were owned by only 2 percent of the people.
- T F 2. Boston police and U.S. Steel workers went on strike for higher wages and won.
- T F 3. Low interest rates sparked the construction of plants, homes, office buildings, and skyscrapers.
- T F 4. Scientific Management identified the most time efficient ways to complete a task.
- T F 5. Vacuums, washing machines, irons, and toasters were becoming popular and affordable in most homes.
- T F 6. In the 1920s there were great tensions between Americans regarding social, racial, and moral beliefs.
- T F 7. After President Calvin Coolidge died, Warren Harding became the new president.
- T F 8. Garveyism discriminated against anyone who was not American, not white, and not Protestant.
- T F 9. The Scopes Trial debated whether the Theory of Evolution could be taught in schools.
- T F 10. In the 1920s, many students did not attend high school, because it was only for college-bound students.