



The 1920s and the Great Depression

Debrief Presentation



The 1920s- Innovations in Communications and Technology

- The automobile gave Americans the freedom to move as a family or as an individual. For the first time families could take vacations, or travel long distances on their own or with just a few friends. It gave rise to new industries in paint, glass, upholstery, and advertising.
- How did the following innovations change American life?
- - Refrigerators- allowed for the preservation of food and made it easier to eat and cook healthy foods in the home.
- - Vacuum Cleaners- allowed for homes to be cleaned more quickly and efficiently, saving women time to enjoy leisure activities outside the home.
- - Washing Machines- allowed for families to have more leisure time outside of the home by taking away one of the most time-intensive activities.
- Radio- radio was so important because it provided both the news and entertainment on the one hand, but also a shared experience on the other with Americans around the country.
- Film- gave audiences the opportunity to escape from their everyday lives and to enjoy a shared entertainment experience.

The 1920s- Cultural and Political Controversies

- There was a fear of communism due to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The fear of communism led the U.S. Department of Justice to jail and deport suspected radicals who might have sympathized with the communist revolution, the labor union movement, or any group which might have voiced opposition to or hindered the war effort. These feelings heightened after the bombing of Wall Street in 1920, which led to the Palmer Raids and the creation of the FBI.
- The Immigration Act of 1924 for the first time created a quota system which limited the number of immigrants that could come into America from Europe, virtually banned Asian immigration, but did allow immigrants from Latin America to come into the country. Americans viewed immigrants- especially in the wake of World War I with suspicion. The fear of radical ideas led most Americans to fear immigrants during the period.
- The Great Migration which brought African-Americans out of the South and into northern cities led to the development of an urban popular culture– the Harlem Renaissance which featured black music (Jazz from New Orleans, Blues from Memphis and Chicago and Swing from New York City), literature, and art. Later, the Great Migration would have a tremendous impact in the world of popular entertainment, sports, and politics.
- Conflicts erupted over rural vs. urban values (Flappers– women who rebelled against the Victorian fashions and manners that had been important before the war, vs. Traditionalists- who believed in the values of the church and small community); Religion vs. Science– the teaching of science vs. religion (particularly over the issue of human creation and development).

The Great Depression

- The rapid build-up in agricultural and industrial production during World War I was a major factor in the onset of the Great Depression. Once the war came to an abrupt conclusion, overextended farmers and manufacturing companies could not obtain the same level of income.
- Overproduction (agriculture and industry), the lack of a throw-away society, poor banking practices, the misuse of credit (buying stocks on margin), a lack of government regulation, and high tariffs (gross levels of socio-economic inequality was also a major issue).
- At first, he did nothing at all, but during his final year in office, his administration created the RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation) and public works programs— but his ideals of volunteerism and asking business to continue to employ people despite dropping incomes did not work and prolonged the agony of the experience.
- It was an election year and business closures, bank failures, farm and home foreclosures, and the fact that many American families were barely surviving, led him to finally abandon his conservative business and economic philosophies— but, it was too little, too late, as FDR beat him in a landslide to win the presidency in 1932.

The New Deal

- It instituted emergency relief measures for America's banking system in the First 100 Days— shutting down the banks, infusing them with cash, and then insuring the money that had been injected into them, to restore confidence in the system.
- Relief Programs- gave direct aid and were most often public works programs (ex. CCC and WPA)
- Recovery Programs- tried to shore up the economy and restart consumer demand (NIRA and AAA)
- Reform Programs- were designed to deal with current crisis and to prevent another depression from occurring. (FDIC and Social Security)
- The criticisms of the New Deal were twofold- first, some thought it went too far in regulating big business, others felt that it did not invest enough into its public works programs. While it did fail to end the depression, it did create a social safety net for the neediest Americans— particularly the aged, indigent and disabled.
- The Dust Bowl started because of poor farming practices and a series of droughts which plagued the Great Plains region. It led to the mass migration of Americans from the Great Plains to California.