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Warmest Wishes,
Joan

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Roaring Twenties

The 1920s was for many an optimistic time, a period of prosperity and exciting social change, leading to the nickname the "Roaring Twenties." It was not good for everyone, and the good times overall would come to an end with a crash.

Back to Normal

After World War I and an early "Red Scare" including an operation by the Attorney General against accused radicals (Palmer Raids), the nation was ready to go back to normal. An industrial boom, including mass production of consumer products such as cars (such as the Model T by Henry Ford) and radios allowing the average person to purchase them, helped a pro-business sentiment.

This provided an opening for Warren Harding to win the presidency on a platform of going back to "normalcy," bringing the country back to normal. The Republican Party's pro-business message also was a fit for the times. After Harding died in office of natural causes, Vice President Coolidge followed, winning election on his own in 1924. And, a third Republican administration followed after Herbert Hoover won in 1928. It would take the economy going bad for a change of political guard.

Flappers and Speakeasies

The 1920s was a time of great cultural excitement for a variety of reasons. Peace and prosperity led to the spreading of culture, including the Harlem Renaissance in New York City. This was an intellectual, social and artistic movement in black culture. Radio and the movies also reached more and more people, "talkies" (sound) coming to films at the end of the decade.

The 1920s was also nicknamed the "Jazz Age" after a feel-good music craze. *The Great Gatsby*, a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a leading portrait of the culture of the times. Two cultural standouts in this period are found in this work. Flappers were women of the 1920s who behaved and dressed in what was seen as a radical fashion. This includes a short hair style named the "bob," short skirts and smoking. It was an early form of feminism and sexual freedom, one which would arise again.



Speakeasies were places where alcoholic beverages were sold illegally, the Eighteenth Amendment (1919) outlawing alcohol (Prohibition). Alcohol was seen as a dangerous threat to society, including threatening the well being of women and families. People that made alcohol and smuggled it into cities or to bars were called "bootleggers." Alcohol was still greatly popular and organized crime (including Al Capone) thrived, bringing violence and disrespect of the law. Prohibition ended in 1933 with the passage of the Twenty-First Amendment.

Scopes Trial

Various cultural highlights of the 1920s stand out, including Charles Lindbergh's first solo transatlantic flight and the Scopes Trial. This was a court battle receiving national attention arising in a small town in Tennessee to test a state law banned the teaching of evolution. Evolution was seen by some as anti-biblical and threatening traditional values in favor of unwholesome science. The teacher involved, John Scopes, eventually won on a technicality, allowing the ban to stand.

Not All Bright

The 1920s was not great all around, including the success of the racist Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and problems for American farmers with falling farm prices and the need to purchase expensive machinery. The purchase of things on credit, growing debt and stock speculation also increased the possibility of things turning badly.

On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed. This day is known as Black Tuesday and turned out to be the start of a long economic collapse, the Great Depression. The Roaring Twenties were over.



Flapper