

THE CENTURY: AMERICA'S TIME BOOM AND BUST

BOOM AND BUST

The 1920s ushered in an era of great social change, general prosperity, Prohibition and what historians refer to as “modernity.” This episode examines these great cultural changes and their affects on the nation. The 1920s, in stark contrast to the Victorian era, “roared,” as bathtub gin flowed and more and more Americans moved to urban areas. But the decade also saw limited prosperity for many, especially farmers, and the unrest and discord between the values of small town America and the rapid pace of science and technology. The optimism of the decade would end in the most severe economic depression in American history. Episode 3 presents some of the major events that shaped the decade including The Scopes Monkey Trial, Prohibition, the rise of leisure pastimes, and the impact of inventions such as the automobile, radio, movies and electricity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Broadway is one of the most famous boulevards in American. Why is Broadway known as the “Great White Way?”
2. How did Prohibition help increase the presence of organized crime in America?
3. Discuss how the culture of the 1920s broke and transgressed different boundaries in American society, especially the accepted roles for women.
4. The media has had a tremendous influence on the twentieth century. What were the effects of the mass media on the 1920s?

5. The 1920s saw a burgeoning of African-American culture and talent, centered in the Harlem section of New York City. Discuss the contribution of the Harlem Renaissance to American art and literature.
6. Discuss some of the social tenets of the Harlem Renaissance.
7. In the 1920s, for the first time in the country's history, more Americans lived in an urban setting than a rural one. Discuss the process of urbanization and how it affected the country.
8. Compare rural and urban areas in the 1920s.
9. Discuss the role of advertising in the 1920s.
10. Discuss some of the changes for women in the 1920s.
11. How did the Scopes trial illustrate the clash between science and religion that was a hallmark of the early century?