The Historical Background of the Roaring Twenties


INTRODUCTION

he decade between the end of the Great War (1919) and the beginning of the Great Depression (1929) occupies a special place in the American imagination. Mention of it is likely to conjure up the image of a pleasure-seeking, iconoclastic society. The image includes flappers dancing Charleston, affluent young men racing around in sleek roadsters, and jazz musicians performing in clubs or speakeasies in which booze flowed freely despite prohibition.

Roaring Twenties is a phrase used to describe the 1920s that emphasises the period’s social, artistic and cultural dynamism. Normalcy returned to politics, jazz music blossomed, the flapper redefined modern womanhood, and art deco peaked. Although the decade was associated with economic prosperity, many social groups and areas missed out. African Americans were treated as second-class citizens across the USA. They also received the lowest paid jobs. Farmers also suffered.

Rejecting what they perceived as the blue-nose Victorianism of their elders, those included among the flaming youth are often remembered primarily for their devil-may-care spirit and shocking sexual behaviour. Although relatively few Americans conformed to such an image, those who did succeeded in winning for the post-war era labels such as “Roaring Twenties” or “Jazz Age”.

This period was one of rapid change. After a short economic recession following World War I, the decade was associated with lively economic growth. The USA became the world’s first consumer society. The product most closely associated with the 1920s is the motor car. The growth of the car industry stimulated other industries, such as electrics, rubber, and engineering. It also led to the development of the US modern road system.