

Notes on the USA 1918-1941

1.1 Background Geography – The USA in 1918

- Area- over 9 million square km.
- Borders – north Canada, south- Mexico
- In 1918 the USA was mostly rural, composed of farming communities, but cities and urban areas were rapidly growing.
- Colonies: Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, US Virgin Islands, Cuba (protectorate) and the Panama Canal Zone.
- Population in 1918: Approximately 105 million from different ethnic backgrounds. New immigrants arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia. Population already there was from European settlers, African Americans (descendants of African slaves forcibly taken to America) and Native Americans (aboriginal peoples, or “American Indians”).
- There was often tension between the various social, ethnic and religious groups.
- The USA was divided into 48 states, or provinces.

How the USA is governed and administered: (See figure 1.2 on page 4 of the text)

The USA has a Federal system of government. Power is shared between the central government in Washington, D.C. and the state governments. The **Constitution of the United States**, adopted in 1789, is the Supreme law of the land. The Constitution explicitly spells out the duties and functions of the central government and the duties and powers of the state governments. The Constitution, through the **Bill of Rights**, guarantees every US Citizen specific individual rights and freedoms.

- The United States is a republic which has three branches, or parts, of government. These parts are:
 1. The Executive Branch composed of an elected president who is the head of state, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and sets foreign and domestic policy.
 2. The Legislative Branch, composed of an elected Senate and House of Representatives (Congress), that passes laws, approves all monetary expenditures, approves foreign treaties and has the power to declare war. The Legislative Branch also has the power to remove (impeach) an elected president through a 2/3 majority vote. The Legislative branch is **bicameral**, meaning it has two houses, or parts. It is NOT a parliamentary system. This leads to a two-party system and does not allow for smaller political parties to be viable.
 3. The Judicial Branch. Composed of the Supreme Court and all of the Federal District Courts. Judges on these courts are appointed (selected) by the president and approved by the senate. Judges on these courts can be impeached (removed) by the Legislative branch if they are deemed to be corrupt or treasonous. The Supreme court has the power to decide if any law or action taken by the president or the legislative branch is constitutional (in accordance with the US Constitution). If the Supreme Court determines that a law or action is unconstitutional, it is considered to be invalid, or “null and void”.

This system ensures that no one person or group can get too much power. It is a system of “Checks and balances”

By 1918 two major political parties emerged:

- The Republican Party – Wants a limited role of government in American lives, promotes “Rugged Individualism”, traditional values and religion and is pro-business. Favors low taxes. It is Right-Wing political party. In 1918, the Republican Party was **Isolationist** and **nativist**. (against getting involved in foreign affairs and against allowing any new immigrants into the USA except Christian Northern Europeans).
- The Democratic Party- Wants a larger role for government in American lives to deal with any social problems. The Democratic Party was more in favor of immigration and of taxing wealthy individuals and corporations to pay for services to the poor and needy.

The problem with this system of government is that of one party controls all 3 branches of government they obviously gain more power.

1.2 The Economic Benefits of the First World War.

The impact of the War on US industry:

The USA did not fight in the war until 1917 when the combined issues of the Zimmerman Telegram and unrestricted German submarine warfare that sank many US ships led to the entry of the USA in the war on the side of the Allies. Up until 1917 the US had loaned money to Britain and France and increased their sales of goods to them which increased the demand for American goods in Europe. **European countries fighting in the war could not produce enough food, get enough fuel or coal or produce enough iron and steel so America provided these resources. As a result there was growth in Agriculture, industries involved in natural resources like coal and petrol, shipbuilding industries and the consumer goods industry, especially tobacco.**

Effect of European Food Demand on US Agriculture:

Production of food grew rapidly during WW I especially demand for wheat and cotton for clothes. By the end of the war, the USA alone accounted for 30% of all wheat and 55% of all cotton produced commercially worldwide.

How this changed farmer's lives:

- Prices of goods rose by 25%
- Average incomes rose by 30%
- There was an increase in the use of farm machinery which boosted tractor sales.
- American farmers took out loans to buy more land to expand wheat production.
- Many farmers were able to buy consumer goods that they were not able to buy before.

Effects on industrial workers:

- Unemployment fell as demand for industrial and agricultural goods rose.
- Income increased- Wages increased by 20%.
- More women entered the workforce to replace men who had gone to fight the war. Many of these women became wage earners for the first time.
- African –Americans (Blacks) moved from agricultural jobs in the south to industrial jobs in the north.

Problems created at the end of the war in the US economy and society:

- Agricultural demand dropped as government contracts were cancelled as European farming recovered. Demand for US products decreased.
- Returning soldiers went back to their old jobs, leaving some men, but mostly women, unemployed.
- Black workers lost their jobs in northern industries which led to race riots.
- Farmers who had taken out loans saw production of agricultural products drop so they could not re-pay loans and defaulted on them.

1.3 Reasons for the Economic Boom of the 1920's

Importance of Mass production: After 1922 America had an economic boom because of:

- New production methods that made production faster.
- The introduction of credit (borrowing & money)
- An increase in advertising
- Many ordinary people invested money in stocks and shares spring the development of the stock market and the financial services industry.

Henry Ford produced the first mass-produced car called the Model T. Before mass production it took 12 hours in a workshop to produce 1 car. Mass production changed this to 1 car every 10 minutes by using a conveyor belt and one worker doing one job over and over so production time fell. This resulted in a much cheaper product which led to a huge increase in the demand for cars. This also contributed to the boom as the manufacture of cars requires the products of other industries such as steel, rubber and glass. Henry Ford also established Ford Motor Credit to help people who could never afford a car before, buy his cars.

The importance of hire purchase”

Credit Agencies helped ordinary people get products they could not normally get by the consumer hiring or borrowing the product from the business and paying for it in installments (so much every week or month). When they had covered the full cost of the product (plus interest) the product was theirs. This system of lending and borrowing could only happen with a stable banking and financial system and because people had secure jobs. People kept on buying, so demand rose, so production rose, so factories kept producing.

The importance of Advertising: Advertising became big business in the 1920's. Companies used billboards, big posters, magazines and newspapers to advertise their products. Radio was a main developer of advertising as there were 618 radio stations in by 1929 and most people owned a radio.

Consumerism:

People were led to believe that it was good to buy and use a lot of goods and services and were encouraged to buy a variety of disposable, or throwaway, products which boosted production. Shopping became a leisure time activity and people tried to out do each other by buying more and more goods. This helped to keep the economy growing. Advertising was a very important factor in the growth and development of consumerism. By 1929, \$2 billion a year was spent on advertising and 600,000 people were employed in the industry.

The Stock Market- The Significance on the Economy

(See F. 1.3 P. 10 and F 1.4 on P. 11)

Between 1927-29 one and a half million ordinary Americans began to buy shares in the stock market in Wall Street, N.Y. Many investor new to the stock market bought shares "on the margin", that means only putting a percentage of the value of the stock (10-15%) down in order to buy the stock.

How to buy stocks "on the margin":

1. Take out a loan from a bank.
2. Choose a company you want to buy shares in.
3. When the share price increases, sell your shares.
4. Pay the loan back to the bank and the rest of the money is profit.

Or: Use your own money to buy shares.

These ordinary people became shareholders. This is the same as gambling as shares can increase and you can make a profit or they decrease and you lose money. At this time there was a lot of buying and selling on the stock market which kept share prices rising which boosted the economy. This allowed companies to get money they needed to expand and develop their businesses. They could create more jobs and pay more people who would spend their money on stocks or consumer goods!

1.4 The Social Impact of the Roaring Twenties

Impact on the Leisure Industry:

With more available money and free time, people spent more time on Leisure activities such as sports, cinema, music & dancing, radios and motoring.

Cinema- The movie industry became very popular in the 1920's. They attracted people by developing the industry. In 1922 colour films were produced. The industry developed sound ("talkies") and animated films became popular (Walt Disney- Mickey Mouse). The industry made huge profits and used

advertising to influence customers. The major studios established chains and franchises to distribute and screen their films in cinemas. Cinemas were popularly known as “movie houses” in the USA. These networks spread throughout the country, even in rural areas, and employed large numbers of people to run and manage the cinemas. **In 1924 40 million cinema tickets were sold each week.** By 1929 that figure had doubled. Actors became huge celebrities. One of the best-known actors of this period was Charlie Chaplin.

Jazz and dancing

The 1920's was called the “Jazz Age” – Jazz was a mixture of black and white American folk music. Jazz music became popular worldwide amongst both white and black people. Some people opposed it as they thought it encouraged immoral behavior in young people. It inspired new forms of dancing such as the “Charleston” and “Black Bottom”- fast and energetic dances. These spread to dance halls across the country.

Sports:

Americans spent their extra leisure time watching their favorite sports. Professional sports leagues grew and flourished. Baseball, American football, golf, swimming, tennis and boxing became popular sports. (see fig. 1.5 on p. 14) Sports stadiums and “ball parks” sprang up across the country. Sports became popular among everyday people and young people. A large and profitable sporting goods and sports equipment industry developed during this period. Major sporting events were broadcast live on radio and film clips of sporting events were shown at movie houses and cinemas as “news reels” before the main event (film) or movie.

Radio:

Radio was very popular in the 1920's and nearly every home had one or more. Shows included, variety shows, comedies, sport commentaries, news and live music. Hundreds of small local stations became parts of huge networks in the late 1920's (NBC- National Broadcasting Corporation was set up in 1926). These networks combined material from different stations so people anywhere in the US could hear similar news and views. Radio and advertising helped to spur consumerism. Advertisements on radio influenced listeners as to how to spend their money.

Motoring:

The automobile industry grew rapidly in the USA thanks to mass production techniques used to produce cars and make them less expensive and the availability of consumer credit loans that made cars affordable to average working and middle class Americans. In the beginning of the 1920's 8 Million Americans owned a car. **Henry Ford** introduced Mass Production techniques to the automobile industry in the Early 1920's

By 1929 this had risen to 23 million mostly thanks to Henry Ford's Model T. However, the Model T was 1 design and 1 colour (black) – Henry Ford said of the Model T “You can have it in ANY colour, as long as

its **black**", so other car manufacturers different models and colours of cars like general motors (GM). This turned motoring into a hobby.

The wide availability of cars also led to the growth and development of petrol and service stations (gas stations), car washes and accessories for cars and drivers. Networks of petrol and service stations sprang up across the country to provide fuel for the growing number of automobiles being used by Americans. The hospitality and hotel industry also grew as hotels (called "motels") catering to motorists were built along highways and main roads and diners and roadside restaurants and "drive thru s" sprang up along heavily travelled routes.

With more cars on the roads during the 1920's the country's infrastructure needed to be improved. States, local governments and the Federal (National/central) government invested in building roads bridges and tunnels to make road travel quicker, safer and faster. This provided employment for construction workers and highway and road engineers. This also increased the demand for construction equipment and road building materials.

This large increase in the number of cars in the USA enabled people to:

- Travel greater distances in shorter time sat lower prices.
- To take advantage of The leisure industry as it expanded and made it easier to go on holidays or day trips.
- Visit suburban (out of town) shopping centres in search of cheaper products.
- Travel more. People who lived in rural areas could travel to the "big" cities and take part in social activities.

The Position of Women in 1918 and how things changed during the 1920's

The first World War had enabled more women to work and enter the labour force as they were needed to replace men who had gone to war. Some worked in weapons factories and steel mills, but most still worked in traditional low-paid jobs as secretaries or shop assistants. It was still assumed that women would stop working when they got married. In 1918 the USA was still a conservative society. Women were expected to stay at home, obey their husbands, and behave respectably. If they went out they should dress conservatively, have a chaperone and not smoke or drink.

Women's Right to Vote: Some of the 48 states in 1918 had given women the right to vote in state and local elections, but not all. Voting rights, employment opportunities, equal pay and legal rights were nit the same as for men.

Changes and improvements for women during the 1920's.

Jobs: Their situation improved and changed by:-

- More women being employed (2 million) about 20% of the workforce.
- Access to different types of jobs.
- More married women entering the workforce.

Voting Rights

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1920, gave women the right to vote in local, state and national elections. This led to more laws being passed to protect women's interests, especially in areas such as health care, and to help women become politicians.

Women's lifestyle improved: - The birth rate fell, an increasing number of electrical appliances made household jobs easier, they got divorced instead of being forced to stay in failing relationships, they had more leisure time and some even became Flappers. But there were limits to this in several areas (see fig. 1.6, P.17)

Flappers:

Made up of single working class women, middle class college students and free-spirited upper-class women. They challenged women's traditional roles and image by cutting their hair, colouring it, wearing make-up, short dresses, going to clubs and dancehalls alone, and dancing drinking and smoking. They rejected the values of their parents by challenging traditional attitudes. They acted independently by going out alone and spending time and money on clothes and on their appearance.

Many women like those from racial and ethnic minority groups could not afford this lifestyle and it did not last long. Flappers got older and gave up their freedom and followed the old traditional role of marriage and children.

1.5 Problem Industries

Problems with farming and agriculture. Over- production and mechanization led to American farmers producing huge unsold surpluses and driving prices of agricultural commodities down so farms were operating at a loss and 600,000 farmers lost their farms in 1924, and people lost their homes and their jobs.

Farmers faced less demand for their goods at the same time as production costs rose. Causes for this were:

- New man-made (synthetic) materials, such as polyester and rayon, were replacing cotton.
- Prohibition. Reduced the demand for wheat and rye.
- Mechanisation- Horses replaced by farm tractors- these need fuel to operate- so higher cost.
- Tariffs- The US government introduced the Emergency Tariff Act in 1921 which taxed imports into the USA so they became more expensive. In response, other countries put tariffs on imported goods from the USA, so American goods became more expensive and were difficult to sell in other countries.
- The recovery of Europe. European farms were able to produce their own food by 1921 which reduced demand from the US.

There was increased agricultural production in the 1920's because of these three factors:

1. Easy access to credit. It was easy for farmers to borrow money from banks for expansion
2. Mechanisation. Tractors and other modern farm equipment speeded up food production and farms needed fewer people to work the land.
3. Scientific advances. Modern scientific advances such as new seeds, fertilisers and pesticides increased crop production.

These three changes had the following **effects**:

- Demand dropped but because of these changes in farming, production grew.
- This over-production was damaging because of an over-production of cotton and a drop in world-wide demand caused many farmers in southern states to go bankrupt and agricultural workers and textile workers lost their jobs.
- The number of farmers and agricultural workers in the USA fell by over 1 million in the 10- year period from 1919-1929.

Decline of other industries:

These were older industries such as:

Coal Mining

Oil began to replace coal to heat homes and to generate electricity so coal production fell and miners lost their jobs.

Textile factories

Competition from silk and new synthetic(man-made) materials like rayon and polyester, reduced the demand for cotton and wool, so textile production fell, factories closed, and workers lost their jobs.

The Railroad Industry

Railroads were still used to transport goods and freight, but now there was no need to transport troops and supplies as it did in WW I. Also more people owned cars which affected the numbers of passengers using trains and the improvement of the technology and the cargo-carrying capacity of trucks led to a decrease in revenues and business for railroads.

The effects of Decline:

- Workers lost their jobs and could not find other work in their areas, so they would have to leave their homes to find work.
- They stayed in their area and lived in poverty. (see Fig. 1.7 P. 23 for effects)

BES- Mr. Lohre

Year 11 History – The USA 1918-1941 Unit 1 questions.

Using the accompanying notes AND your Textbook, Chapter 1 pages 2-23:

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What was the land area of the USA in 1918?
2. In 1918, what was the population of the USA?
3. In 1948 how many states were there in the USA?
4. What colonies and protectorates did the USA have in 1918?
5. What system of government does the USA have?
6. What is the United States Constitution?
- 7-9. What are the three branches of the US Federal government?
 - 7.
 - 8.
 - 9.
10. The USA has a **Bicameral** legislature. What does “Bicameral” mean?
11. What is a system of “Checks and Balances”?

12. What were the two major American Political Parties in 1918?

13. -14. Explain the differences between the two political parties:

13.

14.

15. Name three natural resources that were required from the USA to help defeat Germany during the First World War?

16. Who was the famous car manufacturer who used mass production techniques in the 1920's?

17. How much was spent on advertising in 1929?

18. Name two reasons that farmers over-produced what in the 1920's.

19. How many cinema tickets were sold each week in 1924?

20. When was the first radio network set up?

21. When did women from across the USA get the vote?

22. Who were the "Flappers"?

23. What three, older, industries went into decline during the 1920's?

24. Exam-style question (6 points) :

Describe **two** features of the problems faced by US farmers in the 1920's.