

Name _____

Date _____

The Roaring Twenties

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

After World War I ended in 1918, many Americans were ready to take a break from worrying about war and world politics. In 1920, Warren G. Harding won the presidency on a 'return to normalcy' platform. Harding died in office, and Calvin Coolidge was president for most of the decade. Coolidge practiced 'laissez-faire' economics, believing that businesses should be encouraged to operate without much government regulation. His administration slashed income taxes for the wealthiest Americans, and wages for the middle class rose by 20%. At the same time, the stock market grew dramatically. Between 1925 and 1929, the value of the New York Stock Exchange more than tripled, and 25% of American families owned stock by the end of the decade. Americans had more disposable income than ever before. The 'roaring' economy gave the decade its nickname, 'the Roaring Twenties.'

\n'

Notes

2. b'

The 1920s saw the rise of a shared national culture in America for the first time, thanks in large part to the popularization of radio. After being introduced to many Americans during the war, radios became a common household feature. People listened to the same shows and the same music all over the country. Black art, music, and culture, which flourished during the Harlem Renaissance, became popular nationwide. Young people from coast to coast danced the Charleston.

\n

Radio also led to a boom in advertising. Factories that had been built to make weapons and ammunition for the war shifted gears to make consumer products like cars, telephones, refrigerators, and washing machines. Advertisements made these new luxuries seem like necessities for the good life. Cars, especially, made up the biggest part of the economic boom. By 1929, there was one car on the road for every five Americans.

\n'

3. b'

The image of a short-haired, freewheeling \xe2\x80\x99flapper\xe2\x80\x9d often comes to mind when we talk about the 1920s. While most women did not have that experience, they did gain unprecedented freedoms during this decade. In 1920, the 19th Amendment granted White women the right to vote. Many women worked in office jobs, earning money to participate in consumer culture. New household appliances like the washing machine also made housework less time-consuming, so women had more time for leisure.

\n'

Notes

Notes

4. b'

Notes

Another important aspect of the Roaring Twenties was the rise of cities. In 1920, the urban population surpassed the rural population in the US. Black Americans and immigrants from other countries settled in cities, creating a diversity of races, religions, and cultures. A cultural divide grew between these fast-growing cities and the rural areas that weren't able to catch up. After World War I ended, farmers had a hard time making money. Other rural industries, like coal mining and shipbuilding, also slowed down. Many rural Americans didn't have electricity, so their families didn't get to participate in consumer culture.

\n'

5. b'

Notes

Not everyone was happy about the urbanization of America. Some rural, working-, and middle-class White people were uncomfortable with the increasing population of immigrants and African Americans. A growing nativist sentiment led to xenophobic policies. The Red Scare, beginning in 1919, led to the arrest of thousands of people accused of harboring communist ideals. Many of those arrested and ultimately deported were immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. That same year, the 18th Amendment prohibited the sale of alcohol. Prohibition was seen by some as a way for the government to assert control over unruly urban immigrants. The 1920s also saw millions of White people join the Ku Klux Klan, hoping to return to what they considered traditional values.

\n'

6. b'

Notes

Even for the people who seemed to benefit from the urban, consumerist lifestyle of the 1920s, things weren't as great as they seemed on the surface. Many Americans had begun to rely on credit to keep up with consumer culture. The income gap was growing, and by the end of the decade, wages started to stagnate. The stock market finally crashed in October 1929, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars. The hidden weaknesses of the Roaring Twenties economy eventually led to the Great Depression that would dominate the next decade.

\n'