

Question 1

The 1920's in America are often referred to as the 'The Jazz Age' and the 'Roaring Twenties' as this was a period of riotous fun, loud music and wild enjoyment. A period when everyone was having a good time.

Whilst this is perhaps not how everyone saw this decade, America in the 1920's was a time of turmoil for many Americans. It was a time of liberation and rebellion against traditional values.

In 1920 for the first time ever more Americans lived in towns and cities than in the country. Throughout the 1920's cities were growing fast. Skyscraper skylines were emerging and this became one of the most powerful symbols of 1920's America. Most cities built skyscrapers to show that they were sharing in the boom.

During the 1920's the entertainment industry grew dramatically. The average working week fell from 47.4 to 44.2 hours and this gave people more leisure time. Added to this wages generally rose by 11% giving workers more disposable income. With more spare time and money available people spent more on entertainment.

Most American families listened to the radio. In August 1921 there was only one licensed radio station in America. By the end of 1922 there were 508. By 1929 the new NBC network was making \$150 million a year.

Radio gave access to new music. At this time Jazz music became an obsession among young people. The 1920's became known as the 'Jazz Age' and such was the popularity of Jazz music at this time. With Jazz came new dances such as the Charleston and new styles of behaviour, which were summed up in the image of the flapper, a woman who wore short dresses and make-up and who smoked in public. It is however fair to say that the older generation Americans saw Jazz as a corrupting influence on the young people of America.

In Hollywood a major film industry was developing. New stars like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were making audiences roar with laughter, while Douglas Fairbanks thrilled them in daring adventure films. Until 1927 all movies were silent. During the 1920's movies became a multi-billion dollar business and it was estimated that a hundred million cinema tickets were being sold each week.

The 1920's saw a gulf emerging between generations of people in America. Young men who had fought in the trenches felt that they knew a reality that their elders could not even imagine. Young girls no longer modelled themselves on their mothers whose ideas now seemed somehow 'old fashioned.'

This gulf was most obvious in sexual morals. In the generation before the war, sex had been a taboo subject. After the war it was talked about more openly, in newspapers, films and in everyday conversation. The cinema quickly discovered the selling power of sex. Cinema stars who had real sex appeal were popular at this time, like Thedra Bara, Clara Bow and Rudolph Valentino. By today's standards these films

would seem very tame, but in 1920's America they were considered very daring. Nevertheless it was true that sex outside marriage became much more common at this time than in the past.

The emergence of Motor Car was also a key factor in 1920's America. It gave people a great deal of freedom. It helped cities to grow by opening up the suburbs – people could now commute by car. It allowed people to drive to cinemas and other entertainment sites. It allowed the younger generation to escape the gaze of their parents. It took Americans to an increasing range of sporting events, beach holidays, shopping trips, picnics in the country, or simply on visits to their friends and family.