**America 1920-1973 Opportunity and Inequality**

**Revision Guide 1: The American People and the Boom**

**Government:** Federal System – 50 states. President in overall charge, elected every 4 years. Congress is made up of 2 houses – the Senate and the House of Representatives. 2 main parties: Republican and Democrat.

**Why was there an economic boom in the 1920s?**

Number of reasons:

1. **Wealth & Resources** – USA rich in raw materials, new technology and skilled inventors
2. **First World War** – great boost to supply Br and Fr with armaments and food. Also able to trade with the rest of the world while others were fighting. US involvement in the war not long enough to drain their resources.
3. **Republican Policies** – believed in ’Isolation‘(High tariffs to protect US industry from foreign competition), ‘Laissez-faire’ (no government interference in business and peoples’ lives), low taxes on high incomes.
4. **The car industry (e.g. Henry Ford)**

Led the boom: New assembly line + mass production techniques created ever cheaper cars fuelling sales. Thousands of jobs created and jobs in other industries (suppliers of tyres, windscreens, road making, petrol production etc)

1. **New Methods –** Mass production (assembly line) helped created a boom in affordable consumer goods like radios and vacuum cleaners + new nationwide advertising campaigns encouraged sales + hire purchase and credit schemes also boosted sales = Boom
2. **State of Mind** – most Americans believed it was right to spend money and desire for consumer goods was helped by credit. There was also confidence in investing in the stock markets as people saw they could make money. This gave companies lots of (shareholder’s ) money to invest.

BUT not everyone prospered…….

More than half of all Americans were living on the breadline…

* Immigrants and black Americans (see later)
* Farmers were overproducing and as a result prices of farm produce was low. Farmers were some of the poorest Americans.
* Workers in older industries e.g coal, leather and and textiles could not compete with new industries and technology and so did not share prosperity. Textiles industry saw cheaper and more popular rayon take the place of traditional materials. Coal was less popular as electricity and the oil industries grew. Workers were on low waged.
* Unemployment began to grow as mechanisation meant less workers needed.

This would cause problems in the late 20s as the consumer-led boom started to run out of buyers.

**Social and cultural developments**

‘The Roaring Twenties’: Name given to faster pace of life in USA – many changes for prosperous Americans (mainly in the cities)

1. **Entertainment**

Shown by trends in entertainment (in urban America) – 11% av. rise in real wages in the 20s and shorter working hours meant there was more time and money for leisure activities:

1. ***Cars:*** Many more Americans bought cars – changed lifestyle (leisure, places to live and work). Advantage of more freedom and creation of jobs but crashes, traffic jam, getaway cars etc.
2. ***Radio:*** 700+ stations broadcast popular music and adverts & sporting events & political broadcasts. Almost everyone listened to the radio.
3. ***Cinema:*** Industry developed in Hollywood first with silent movies & then talkies. By 1930 100m+ went to the cinema each week – escapism, fashions, behaviour. Cinema blamed for the decline in sexual morals. Hays Office set rules of conduct.
4. ***Jazz:*** new music made popular by black musicians in night clubs with new dances like the Charleston. Older generations appalled.
5. ***Sport:*** Became mass entertainment. More leisure time. Baseball (New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox), boxing – popular world champion Jack Dempsey.
6. ***Settlement:*** Growing population – by 1930 more than half in cities. Tension between rural and urban America.
7. **The position of women in society**

Before the 1WW women led restricted lives – housewives and in rural areas, religion made restrictions tight. Chaperones and strict rules about dating, make-up and fashion. No vote. Some working but low paid jobs

1917: During war increasing numbers of women worked (new independence?)

1920: Women got the right to vote

Modern well-off women (middle class)

* Flappers: drank, smoked, wore short skirts. Advertisers targeted women and films provided role models. Flapper = ‘expensive and 19’.
* Labour saving devices changed domestic life. More women began working. The car offered new freedoms.

**But** many women (working class/rural) continued in their same traditional role. Immigrant and black women often the lowest paid faced discrimination. No equal pay. They may have the vote but stood for political office.

**A divided Society: The causes and consequences of tension**

1. **Prohibition (1920-1933)**

Prohibition means a ban on the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol.

***Causes (Why was it introduced?)***

1. **Religious reasons**: pressure from Temperance (don’t drink) groups & Christian groups to ban alcohol because it was sinful.
2. **Social reasons**: Same groups also argued alcohol destroyed families and caused poverty and crime
3. **Economic reasons**: Workers would be healthier and more reliable.
4. **Patriotic reasons**: Brewers were often of German origin so during the 1WW drinking alcohol helped the enemy! Bolshevism (communism) was said to thrive on drink!

By the 1916 21 states had already introduced Prohibition.

***1917 – 18th Amendment introduced Prohibition. Made law by the Volstead Act in 1920***

***How was Prohibition enforced?***

Levels of alcohol consumption fell by 30% in the early 20s and was quite popular in rural America. Urban areas were less keen.

The govt. ran information campaigns and Prohibition agents arrested offenders (Izzy and Moe made 4392 arrests!)

***What were the consequences or effects?***

Opposite of those intended. Made consumption of alcohol more attractive. Turned ordinary Americans into criminals.

1. Not enough Prohibition agents so many got away with breaking the law
2. Moonshine – illegal alcohol brewed in home stills and by gangs. Dangerous, could lead to poisoning or death.
3. Bootlegging – making or importing illegal alcohol e.g. from Canada. Impossible to seal US borders
4. Speakeasies – bars in cellars and backstreets where illegal alcohol sold. Became fashionable. NY had 32,000.
5. Organised Crime – Gangs organised bootlegging and made fortunes. Al Capone made $60m p.a. Rivalry caused increase in violence e.g. St Valentine’s Day Massacre.1926: 130 gangland murders
6. Corruption: Gangsters like Al Capone became powerful figures and this led to corruption of the police and local politicians who were bribed by the gangsters.

***Boost to organised crime was the most important long-term effect of Prohibition.***

**Why was Prohibition repealed in 1933?**

\*Drinking continued \* Enforcement impossible \* Brought law into disrepute

\* Concern about violence and gangsters \* 1929 Depression meant too expensive to enforce

\* Could create jobs & tax revenue if alcohol made legal.

**1933: 21st Amendment repeals the 18th. Prohibition ends.**

1. **Racial Tension**

Widespread discrimination against Blacks:Especially in the Southern States – Segregation (legal system in S. States that separated blacks from whites), poverty, worse jobs, houses etc, lynchings and extreme racism. NAACP campaigned for help but fed. govt refused.

1. ***Some improvements:*** Blacks migrated to northern cities where still experienced racism (but not segregation), some education and black universities. Growth of black middle class, fame from jazz, development of poetry and literature. UNIA helped black businesses.
2. **Ku Klux Klan** – stirred up racial hatred against blacks and non-WASPS. Disguised and secret, used violence and intimidation. Incl. police and judges as members. Defended white protestant superiority. 19919-1925 300 African Americans murdered by lynching.
3. **The Impact of Immigration**

US had prided itself on being a ‘melting pot’ – immigrants all belended together to become Americans. In fact there were resentment against different types of immigrants. ‘New’ immigrants from S. and E. Europe made worse by 1WW and fear of communism. 1901-1910 US immigration at an all-time high.

***Red Scare***

Russian Revolution and strikes in USA created ‘Red Scare’ – anti-communist hysteria against trade unions, communist and socialist ideas and immigrants. A wave of strikes in 1919 (which were actually about workers being laid off after the war), were seen as evidence that communists were influencing workers in the US.

1920 Palmer Raids – 6,000 arrested and some deported after bomb attacks

Sacco and Vanzetti: executed after unfair trial supposedly for murder and armed robbery but really guilty for being foreign and anarchists.

**Immigration Quotas**

1917: literacy test introduced for immigrants

1921 and 1924: Quotas introduced to limit immigration (to 150,000 a year) particularly immigrants that were not from NE Europe. Protecting jobs and maintaining WASP supremacy.

Many immigrants experienced harsh lives in America: Lowest paid jobs, poor housing, discrimination – meant that many lived close together in immigrant communities (which reinforced perception of them as ‘foreigners’.

**Exam style questions: The American People and the Boom**

**Interpretation A:** America Past and Present by Divine, Breen, Frederickson and Williams (1995)

Advertisers sought out women as buyers of consumer products but wives only bought products their husbands allowed them to buy. Despite the talk of the ‘new woman’, the flappers fell victim to the sex-role conditioning of their parents. Boys continued to play with guns and grew up to head their families and girls played with dolls and looked forward to careers as wives and mothers.

**Interpretation B:** WE Leuchtenberg in the book *‘The Perils of Prosperity’* (1958)

‘There was never a time in American history when youth had had such a special sense of importance as in the years after the First World War.. There was a gulf between the generations. Younger girls no loners consciously modelled themselves on their mothers, whose attitudes seemed irrelevant in the 1920s.’

1. How does Interpretation B differ from Interpretation A about the lives of women in the 1920s?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B. (4 marks)

1. Why might the authors of Interpretation A and B have a different interpretation about the lives of women in the 1920s?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B and your contextual knowledge. (4 marks)

1. Which interpretation do you find the most convincing about the lives of women in the 1920s?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B and your contextual knowledge. (8 marks)

1. Describe the two reasons why some Americans did not benefit from the

boom in America in the 1920s.

(4 marks)

1. In what ways were the lives of immigrants affected by intolerance in US society?

Explain your answer. (8 marks)

1. Which of the following was a more important reason why there was an economic boom in America in the 1920s:

* New methods of marketing and manufacturing
* Republican policies

Explain your answer with reference to both reasons. (12 marks)