



CHAPTER 7 | POSTWAR AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

This week we start learning about the Roaring Twenties, a fascinating period when a lot of changes were going on in America. Woodrow Wilson was still the President, although he became very sick after a stroke in October 1919. With the help of his wife and closest advisors, Wilson continued to function – barely – as president.

During this era, two important amendments to the Constitution were adopted, ratified, and put into effect. They were the Eighteenth Amendment (commonly known as Prohibition, which banned the drinking of alcohol such as wine or whiskey) and the Nineteenth Amendment (which gave the right to vote – known as suffrage – to women). Both amendments were the result of long fights by politically active women. It was the Women's Christian Temperance Union that really got the ball rolling to ban alcohol, and the Seneca Fall Convention that started the drive for a woman's right to vote.

After the Great War, Americans tried to get back to everyday life, but there were some major economic hiccups before things really settled down. Remember that America's economy, government, and society had been running full speed to support the war for about eighteen months at this point. Plus, there were over a million soldiers in Europe on Armistice Day (November 11, 1918). Prices spiked as businesses tried to get a government-regulated economy back under private control where each business could set its own price based on what it believed customers were willing to pay.

It was hard for many people to make ends meet, especially workers. Business leaders wanted to get back to their pre-war profits, so they kept workers' wages low even though prices were rising. During the war, however, workers had experienced the power of collective bargaining, and when they perceived that management was not going to work with them, laborers used strikes.

Unfortunately, because of recent events in Russia and on the European continent, it was easy for Americans to fear that violent socialists were seeking to take over America. After all, Lenin's Bolsheviks took over Russia after a three-year civil war that was filled with horrific atrocities. In many other European countries as well, socialism was on the rise as Europeans confronted high inflation, the devastation that the war had wreaked on their homelands, and the disillusionment that many felt with traditional capitalist and democratic systems. Americans found it easy to fear that they were next.

RED SCARE

As you may recall, there were two revolutions in Russia in 1917. The first, the February Revolution, was a broad revolt by the common people against Tsar Nicholas II. It ended with Nicholas abdicating his throne and the Duma (the Russian version of Congress) taking over the government. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 5, the Germans had provided money for Lenin (head of the violent communist Bolsheviks) to go to Russia and try to take it over. Lenin was more successful than most people dreamed possible: in October 1917, he and his comrades seized control of the Russian government.

In March 1919, after World War I had ended, Lenin created a new organization: Communist International. This group was intended to fight for Communism around the world; Lenin said they would do so, "by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State."



All around the world, communists in various countries—including America—formed groups dedicated to Lenin's dream of global communist control as Europeans confronted high inflation, the devastation that the war had wreaked on their homelands, and the disillusionment that many felt about traditional capitalist and democratic systems.

As a result, peace-loving people everywhere were deeply concerned (even terrified) that the bloody, violent revolution in Russia could be repeated in their countries. They were afraid that Marx's predicted worldwide communist revolution was beginning to take place. In America, these fears were somewhat grounded in the reality of serious labor problems.

You see, the labor movement in America had gained strength during the months that America was at war. The government had encouraged collective bargaining and elevated the roles of moderate labor leaders like Samuel Gompers who supported the war effort. Thus, when the war ended and prices were inflated, laborers hoped for a reasonable attitude towards their needs and grievances on the part of their employers.

Instead of addressing the labor problems, President Wilson went off to the Paris peace talks. He left labor unions unprotected and the American government leaderless. Big businessmen—tired of being regulated by the government—were eager to get back to pre-war profits, which meant squeezing laborers' wages and hours as hard as they could.

In response to worsening economic conditions in postwar days, when inflation made shrinking wages go less and less far towards meeting their expenses, laborers around the nation called strikes in almost all heavy industries because they saw strikes as their only path to a better life. Socialist ideas gained ground among a vocal minority, so some labor leaders and liberal intellectuals wanted even more than traditional demands (better pay, conditions, and working hours). They wanted a new industrial order. They really were socialists.

Some of these leaders and thinkers wanted the government to control mines, railroads, and even farms, with labor having a voice in how such industries were run. These ideas were not all that crazy compared to the hard-core communists and anarchists who demanded an immediate, violent, and permanent overthrow of the American government. They wanted a soviet government like the one in Russia to replace the Constitution and the three branches of the federal government.

Present, too, in the country were hard-core socialists, communists, and anarchists—many of whom were foreign-born immigrants—who, emboldened by Russia's experiences, talked and wrote of the need for an imminent, violent, and sudden overthrow of the American government. These radicals made up a tiny percentage of the American population, but thanks to free speech, their views were spoken and printed publicly. Americans who read were concerned about them added momentum to the "Big Red Scare" (the name given to the widespread worry that the Communists were actually gaining power and were about to take try and take over America).

To make matters worse, some of these more dangerous protestors—the anarchists—began using violence. In 1919, a series of bombs were packaged and mailed to government officials. Happily, almost all were discovered and diffused before they did harm. Later that year, more bombs were exploded in several isolated incidents outside officials' private houses. For example, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, Wilson's Attorney General, survived an attack on his own home: a radical anarchist blew up his porch while Palmer, his wife, and child were inside.



As matters fell out, it didn't ultimately require an anarchist to strike fear into American hearts. An ordinary labor strike (by an unordinary group of workers) unleashed panic on the people of Boston. You see, it was the *police force* that went on strike! They were sorely in need of raises in order to survive in the post-war economy. Unfortunately, when the police went on strike, criminals seized the opportunity: looting, violence, and vandalism broke out.

As a result, people in Boston and around the nation were frightened into siding with city officials rather than the struggling policemen. The governor of Massachusetts, a man named Calvin Coolidge, called out the National Guard to restore order and fired nineteen suspended police officers. Coolidge said nobody ever had the right to endanger the public safety through a strike.

Big business leaders learned from the Boston police strike that, if they associated ordinary strikers with Bolshevik revolutionaries (whether or not any true association actually existed), they would gain public and governmental support. Naturally, they began to tar all striking workers with the Bolshevik label. Thus, the fear was elevated, since strikes kept coming and businessmen kept using this technique—successfully—to win the day.

To be clear, most of the strikers were just ordinary American workmen who wanted better working conditions. Their union leaders didn't let lies about Bolsheviks stop them from striking, and, since the public didn't know exactly what to believe, tensions grew. The overall struggle between workers and owners turned into a national crisis.

Attorney General Palmer, the one whose porch was blown up, hired a young law student named J. Edgar Hoover to help fight the "Reds" (as communists were then called because it was the color the Bolsheviks adopted in Russia). Palmer mounted a series of raids on "radicals" when he noted that this kind of action made him popular with the American press and public. His actions heightened everyone's anxiety.

When the hysteria was at its height, American civil rights and freedoms were violated. For example, Attorney General Palmer misused the Sedition Act, a law passed at the height of World War I, to authorize police agents to make arrests without a warrant signed by a judge in a coal workers strike.

The United States Department of Justice targeted so-called radicals who were fighting against industries for the rights of workers to form unions and better their working conditions. The panic that Americans felt about communists during this time was called the "Red Scare" because these labor organizers were associated with those who had established communist rule in the Soviet Union.

Enjoying public acclaim, Palmer directed police agents to round up over 6,000 suspected communists and communist leaders as they met in halls around the country on January 1, 1920 (or just in their homes).

Palmer had the suspected communists jailed against a pending wholesale deportation from America to Russia without any specific warrants for arrest. Hundreds of American immigrants were deported back to their homelands because of the public's fear that they were a threat to America.

Following this raid, Palmer issued further inflammatory statements, and hysteria ensued. Allen says that "College graduates were calling for the dismissal of professors suspected of radicalism; school-teachers were being made to sign oaths of allegiance; business men with unorthodox political or economic ideas were learning to hold their tongues if they wanted to hold their jobs. . . . A cloud of suspicion hung in the air and intolerance became an American virtue."¹

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 51.



Groups that had formed to work for the improvement of American society—such as the National League of Women Voters, the Federal Council of Churches, and the Foreign Policy association—were publicly accused of having revolutionary associations or intentions. “There was hardly a liberal civic organization in the land at which these protectors of the nation did not bid the citizenry to shudder.”¹

All artists and writers came under strict scrutiny, as either promoting socialist ideas or agitating for revolution. Dance troupes, movies, and books (especially school books) were all examined for Bolshevik connections. Allen writes that, “The effect of [it all] was oppressive. The fear of the radicals was accompanied and followed by a fear of being thought radical.”² Oppressive conformity to a narrow set of Americanized ideals became imperative in virtually every walk of American life: people looked over their shoulders as they worked, socialized, or relaxed.

It was a time of suspicion and uncertainty. People began suspecting everyone, including teachers, artists, writers, and anyone who disturbed the status quo in any way. Neighbors suspected neighbors, businessmen had to make it crystal clear that they were not inclined towards communism, professors and intellectuals were often accused of supporting Marxist ideas, and federal leaders took strong measures—sometimes unjust ones—as they tried to protect the government from being overthrown. No one knew exactly who a secret red agent might be, an anarchist or communist living in disguise among them, and that was probably the scariest thing for people.

Ku Klux Klan

Blind panic is bad for democracies. Americans found it all too easy to leap from the threat of Marxist revolutionaries to a fear of anything un-American. Since most Americans were white, Protestant, and capitalists, that was what they considered to be normal and American. Thus, the Red Scare affected more than just “Red Communists.”

First, Jews and Roman Catholics also experienced a renewed hostility at the hands of their white, Protestant neighbors. Jews were linked by some with Bolsheviks because many Russian Jews had fled to America to escape Christian persecution between 1880 and 1921. It was assumed that, coming from Russia, these Jews might be communists, and they were openly accused of secretly forming an international organization bent on taking over the world.

Roman Catholics were known to be “foreigners” themselves, and even if they were not, it was pointed out that they had questionable loyalties to a “foreign leader”—the pope. The Ku Klux Klan, which had been destroyed by federal prosecution in 1871, made a comeback in 1915. Men and women in the South wanted to protect their way of life from what they saw as threats. Thus, the Ku Klux Klan became newly popular.

The Klan persecuted those who challenged their white Protestant view of America in general and black Americans in particular. The Klan grew rapidly. Soon, they marched openly in parades and worked on the political side to elect friendly politicians. Using Jim Crow laws as a guide, the Klan worked to pass other laws. In Oregon, for example, they tried to make a law that would ban all private schools, which this especially targeted schools run by the Roman Catholic church. The Klan wanted to keep Roman Catholics and foreigners from teaching children any “un-American ideas.”

There were also violent members of the Klu Klux Klan who attacked opponents under the cover of darkness. One of their most terrifying warnings was a gathering of Klan members in front of a person’s home to burn a cross on the lawn as a warning.

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 52.

2. *Ibid.*, 53.



Racism was not limited to Klu Klux Klan strongholds in the South. Many black Americans had moved to Northern cities during World War I and now competed with returning white veterans for jobs, houses, and government-based support. Increased postwar racial oppression caused tensions.

Eventually, an incident in the Chicago area started six days of rioting, looting, and lynching. The National Guard was called in to restore order, as many whites attacked and burned black homes across the city. Other cities with large black populations also experienced riots, increased intolerance, and increasing racial tensions or even racial oppression.

End of the Red Scare

Nobody knows how long the Red Scare might have lasted, but Attorney General Palmer, who had fanned the flames of fear, unintentionally helped to put them out in the end. In May of 1920, Attorney General Palmer announced that May Day “had been selected by the radicals as the date for a general strike and for assassinations” but nothing happened.¹ Palmer and his police units—mobilized and ready to resist the Reds—were left looking very foolish.

As the summer of 1920 unfolded, people found other things to think about besides the Red Scare, and they stopped being so afraid. You might ask, what could be more interesting than communists lurking in the neighborhood, just waiting for the opportunity to blow something up? The answer turns out to be all sorts of things.

For instance, who would be chosen to run in the upcoming elections, and who would win women’s votes now that women had the right to vote in federal elections? Also, where did all the drinks go? Prohibition banned alcohol such as beer, wine, and whiskey, which left a lot of people feeling pretty thirsty. And, as always, there were various scandals that were much more interesting to talk about than a few communists supposedly hiding in the shadows.

As the Big Red Scare wore off, Allen, writes about the general mood of the country. He says, “The temper of the aftermath of war [a fighting one that had sought to strike down at all threatening things, like socialists, black Americans, Jews, labor agitators, and Roman Catholics] was at last giving way to the temper of peace. Like an overworked business man beginning his vacation, the country had to go through a period of restlessness and irritability, but was finally learning how to relax and amuse itself once more.”²

PROHIBITION

The Eighteenth Amendment, passed on January 16th, 1919, gave Congress (and the states) specific authority to ban alcohol.

The Bible clearly teaches that being drunk with much wine is something that we should not do. There are many examples of drunkenness leading to sin and evil. But it also says that God gives us wine to gladden the heart of man, and it can be healthy (especially if the drinking water is bad), so the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy not to only drink water but to have a little wine for the sake of his stomach. Throughout history, people have struggled to rightly balance how much alcohol to drink.

Some believe that one should never drink any alcohol. Others see no problem with drinking so long as one uses self-control and does not become drunk. This is what we call a matter of conscience; each person

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 69.

2. *Ibid.*, 67.



must read their Bible, pray, listen to the Holy Spirit, and do their best to obey God while walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus, who is our Lord.

America was a country in which the command against drunkenness was rarely honored. In fact, Americans—men, women, and even children—routinely drank huge amounts of alcohol in a given year. Partly, this was for medical reasons. We talked last year about the killer diseases: cholera, typhoid, and dysentery, which are spread through unclean water. Diarrhea and various kinds of parasites are also water-borne dangers. Prior to the discovery of germs, people didn't know why drinking plain water was bad for them, but they had realized that if they mixed water with alcohol then they wouldn't get sick. This is because alcohol kills germs.

Not getting sick was only one reason to drink alcohol. It was very easy for many to slip across the line from a little wine for the sake of their stomachs over to open drunkenness. And once drunk, people spent their money foolishly so that they couldn't buy food for their children, they lost their jobs, or they got into fights and hurt others – to name a few of the evils of drunkenness.

Many women—especially Christian women—wanted to ban all alcohol. They couldn't vote, but they worked hard to convince politicians to pass laws and their fellow Americans to change their ways. This struggle was called the Temperance movement.

Following the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, Congress passed the Volstead Act to enforce it, making the sale, manufacture, or transportation of alcoholic beverages illegal everywhere in the United States. The Act introduced the era of American history now known as Prohibition. President Wilson vetoed the Act because he thought prohibiting alcohol would create a nation of lawbreakers, but he was overruled.

Wilson turned out to be absolutely correct. Instead of increasing self-control and morality and removing the use of alcohol, the Act tempted many upper-class and middle-class American citizens to become lawbreakers. Thus, the 1920's became one of the most corrupt and lawless eras in American history. We'll cover this in more detail in week 10. For now, it's enough to say that many ordinary, law-abiding people rebelled against Prohibition. Men and women who never cared about getting drunk or even drinking in general were not about to let the government push them around and order them NOT to drink.

This led to lawlessness of many kinds. First, people home-brewed alcohol (known as Bathtub Gin) for themselves. Second, bootleggers (those who sold illegal alcohol) began to sell all kinds of alcohol (gin, whiskey, rum, moonshine, beer, and wine) through local stores such as ice cream parlors and grocery stores. Third, many policemen were corrupted; they were bribed with cash or given alcohol to look the other way.

Although these underhanded, illegal practices seemed trivial at first, they opened the door for criminal gangs (sometimes known as mobs) to commit other kinds of violence, crime, and corruption. Once the mob had corrupted a policeman, they could force him to keep looking the other way as they did more wicked things, or else he would lose his job and go to jail. The criminal mobs became a serious threat to the rule of law in America.



SUFFRAGETTES

Phase One

The 18th Amendment (Prohibition) wasn't the only big change for the Constitution in the years immediately after World War I. The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, gave American women the right to vote (known as suffrage) in federal elections.¹ The term "suffragette" was coined during this time to describe a woman who seeks voting rights for women.

Women had been working towards the 19th Amendment since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, which was the first public conference for women's rights in American history. About 300 people were in attendance, including some men.

In that year (the same year that Karl Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto*), two of the conference leaders (Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott) drew up a document that they called the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which stated that men and women were created equal and listed eighteen grievances to bring to the public's attention. The document also included a series of resolutions by which these grievances could be repaired.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton firmly believed that women should receive the right to vote. The ninth resolution of the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which requested the right to vote for women, was her idea. She believed that the right to vote would make women equal in the eyes of the people who made the decisions.

Many people believed that this ninth resolution was too radical and would make their convention look foolish. They thought it would discredit their views and cause them not to be taken seriously by the public. The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions was barely passed at the conference because of disagreement over this resolution about a woman's right to vote. Nevertheless, the Convention itself marked the beginning of the women's rights movement that would transform women's roles in the home and workplace.

Stanton was not the only women's leader who believed in voting rights for women. Susan B. Anthony was a single woman who grew up in a Quaker home. As a female school teacher, she was paid only one-fifth of a male teacher's salary in the same position. She was troubled by the inequality she saw between men and women. Anthony became a friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and grew determined to change the culture of inequality that she experienced.

In 1863, Anthony and Stanton led a group of women to form a petition that asked for a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery. After the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in 1865 (which freed the slaves), Anthony and Stanton formed the American Equal Rights Association to help both freed slaves and women gain voting rights.

After Anthony and Stanton established the American Equal Rights Association, some of the members believed that by pushing for both women and former slaves to receive the vote, they were hurting the chance of former slaves to receive the right to vote. This belief led to a split in the women's movement, so Anthony and Stanton established a new group, called the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA).

1. Note: "Suffrage" means "the right to vote" for men or women. It is from the Latin word *suffragari*, meaning "to express support."



The Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868, states that all citizens must receive equal protection under the law. Anthony reasoned that because women are citizens, they should be able to vote as well. In the presidential election of 1872, Anthony and fifteen other women openly challenged the status quo by voting. Within weeks, Anthony, the fifteen women, and the men who had allowed them to vote were arrested. Anthony, however, was the only person put on trial.

At her trial, Anthony was found guilty and fined \$100. Anthony not only refused to pay the fine, but her lawyer protested for her that the “crime” for which she was condemned was an act that was illegal solely because she was female instead of male. Anthony’s protest increased the interest in the suffrage movement and inspired other women to follow her example and vote.

The NWSA opposed the Fifteenth Amendment because it gave blacks the right to vote but made no mention of giving the same right to women. The NWSA wanted an amendment which would guarantee universal suffrage—that is, one that would ensure that everyone had the right to vote. This amendment would also create more fair divorce laws and unions that would ensure higher salaries for female workers, because NWSA leaders believed that money and freedom had a strong connection. It was reasoned that if women could earn more money, they could be independent of men.

Lucy Stone, another young leader of the women’s movement, did not agree with Anthony and Stanton. Stone formed a less radical group called the American Woman Suffrage Association, which was focused primarily on the right of women to vote, but also supported the Fifteenth Amendment.

As years passed, the passionate leaders of the suffrage movement grew older. They recognized that the struggle would go on beyond their lifetimes. They wanted to ensure that the next generation of suffragettes would prosper, so they joined together the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) with the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) in 1890, hoping that the next generation would have more power to succeed.

The new organization was called the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). This first phase of the women’s suffrage movement came to a close in the first few years of 1900 after the death of several of the most prominent leaders: Lucy Stone (1893), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1902), and Susan B. Anthony (1906).

Phase Two

As the first generation of women’s activists passed away, new women rose to lead the movement. Many of these had been active in the Populist Party, which held that America needed to fend off the corrupting influences of the big cities with the virtues of the countryside. As you may recall from Book Three of the *Warp* series, the Populist Party collapsed after only a few years, but people kept working towards the goals it had set.

The Populist Party supported several issues that were important to women, such as Temperance (working against drunkenness) and women’s suffrage. The Populists argued that women should be allowed to vote because they were better than men—more civilized, more public-spirited, more virtuous. The suffragettes believed and argued that their vote would keep the United States pure. This proved to be a powerful argu-



ment. Although the Populists never won a presidential election, many of their ideas remained important political issues, especially Temperance and a woman's right to vote. In 1914, although some states had granted women the right to vote, the suffragettes knew that an amendment was needed to ensure that all women could cast their vote in the national election.

This second phase had new leaders. For example, Carrie Chapman Catt followed Susan B. Anthony in becoming the president of the NAWSA. In 1902, she also established the International Woman's Suffrage Association because she knew that the suffrage issue was not limited to the United States. Catt had an inclusive vision; for example, she wanted to reach out to all classes of women in American society.

For each of the social classes in America, the idea of votes for women offered different benefits: the hope of either better pay and fewer working hours, the opportunity to rise up in their professions, or to gain independence from their father's or husband's money. (Incidentally, Catt was aided in her efforts to reach all classes of American women by Harriot Stanton Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Harriot was especially known for her work among working-class women.)

Alice Paul, another second-generation suffragette leader, had views very different to those of Carrie Chapman Catt. Born into a Quaker family, Paul had earned two degrees from two excellent colleges. She had also spent time in England, where she became involved in the British fight for women's suffrage. The women in England were much more emphatic in their fight for equality. They formed parades, picket lines, and some were even imprisoned for their actions. When she returned to the United States, Paul brought a more radical mindset to the American suffrage movement. She and her friend Lucy Burns joined the NAWSA and set up a special unit of the organization called the Congressional Union.

Other leaders within the women's rights movement, such as Carrie Chapman Catt, did not agree with Alice Paul's methods. Among other things, Catt believed strongly that compromise was needed in order to achieve her goals. She wanted Americans to see that the suffragette cause could benefit all of American society. In 1916, therefore, Alice Paul and her supporters left NAWSA and established a more radical organization called the National Woman's Party (NWP).

Let me explain what I mean about these leaders and their different methods: Carrie Chapman Catt and her supporters visited congressmen, gave talks and wrote articles about women's suffrage, and volunteered to help with the war effort. Catt herself also made a personal appeal to President Wilson on behalf of the women of America. Meanwhile, Alice Paul and her friend Lucy Burns organized protests and picketed outside the White House.

For months, suffragettes stood on the sidewalk in front of the White House, peacefully pleading for women's freedom. However, when the U.S. entered World War I, suffragettes who picketed in front of the White House were seen as traitors for picketing during wartime. The suffragettes, however, stood firm because they believed that it was not right for men to be fighting overseas to "make the world safe for democracy" when there was no democracy for women at home. In July of 1917, many of these picketers were arrested and sent to jail.

While in jail, the suffragettes started a hunger strike by refusing to eat. They argued that they were political prisoners who were not jailed for breaking laws but for wanting the freedom to vote. The women in jail were treated terribly by the prison officials, who attempted to end the hunger strikes by force-feeding the women through tubes that were forced up their noses or down their throats. When the public heard about these events, they were outraged, and many people began to favor the cause of the women in jail. Embarrassed, President Wilson was forced to release the women as the public outcry grew strong.



The Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, gave women the ability to vote. It had several unexpected results. For instance, because women's suffrage had been identified with liberal and radical causes, most people thought that once women received the vote, they would vote for liberals. Men and women were surprised, however, when women did not vote as a unified group, but rather as either liberals or conservatives. In fact, President Harding, the first president elected after women could vote, was a conservative.

CHANGES IN MANNERS AND MORALS

In *Only Yesterday*, a book written in the 1930's about the 1920's, Frederick Allen tells the story of America's "revolution" in manners and morals during the decade after World War I ended. I must warn you, at the last, you will not like the picture I am about to paint; it becomes a sad one in many ways.

Was it avoidable? Well, you must judge for yourself. Allen believes that "a number of forces were working together and interacting upon one another to make this revolution inevitable."¹ For myself, I disagree. I think the Bible speaks truly when it says that temptation can be resisted (think of 1 Peter 5:8-9 and Ephesians 6:12-13). However, before such a question can begin to be answered, I must tell you what happened.

Changes in the Home

"The revolution was accelerated by the growing independence of American women,"² says Allen. Though many women were uninterested in politics in 1920, the victory of the women's suffrage movement in that year, marked by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, also gave women the impetus to push for even greater freedoms. Those who wanted equality with men in other arenas found validation in this new legal status.

Before World War I, Americans believed that the natural sphere for almost all women was marriage and childbearing. As such, women were best suited to be the keepers of their homes. Their unchallenged domain was the domestic realm; a man's place was out in the world earning a living and running the affairs of the world.

After the war, new electric-powered machines in the homes of the wealthy and middle-class families freed women from much of the work of keeping the home. They could turn their energies to other pursuits. Furthermore, more and more housework was outsourced, as evidenced by the growing number of bakeries, laundromats, canned goods, and ready-made dresses, to name a few examples.

Naturally, the outsourcing of housework to machines or service industries led to a growing lack of knowledge about basic household management skills, such as cooking, sewing, teaching, gardening, etc. Having women out in the workforce meant home duties often began to be neglected.

Women had proven during the war that they could hold a variety of jobs that had previously been held only by men. In the Twenties, it became fashionable for a young single woman of good family to take a job rather than marry young. (Mothers with children still did not tend to work outside the home, though.) With the independence of jobs and living situations came a lessening of fatherly or husbandly authority.

By nature, women were believed to be more pure and moral than men; indeed, they had been entrusted with the guardianship of morality. (Women of the suffrage movement had made this argument for years.)

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 81.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.



For example, while a well-brought up young man might be expected to have had sexual experiences before marriage (and was unfortunately excused for the same), young women were required to be sexually pure on their wedding night. There was a double standard at work in part because of the belief in women's innate moral superiority.

Prohibition helped blur the distinctions between sexes and bring about changes in morality because both men and women drank illegally. In pre-war days, drinking was a male activity, especially when in company or public. During Prohibition, men and women who drank illegally did so together. Speakeasies often included women's smoking rooms, lavatories, changing rooms, and live music for dancing.

Even when public, lower- or middle-class pubs were converted to non-alcoholic beverages, women accompanied their husbands for a time outside the home to enjoy socializing and music. Ironically, rather than joining to purify America, women and men often joined each other in a drunkenness that led to wrong conversations and behaviors.

Effects of the War and Freud

Remember that people in 1920 had definite attitudes about the war and its conclusion. First, many of the younger generation felt that the older one had made a mess of the world and then handed it to them. This left them feeling hopeless, overwhelmed, and helpless, as well as disillusioned. Not surprisingly, they began to question the reasons behind all traditional ways.

Second, there were numerous sudden war marriages during war years, and also many hurried fornications before shipping out to war—in case “he never came back.” Before the war, boys and girls had been “permitted large freedom to work and play together, with decreasing and well-nigh nominal chaperonage, but only because the code worked so well on the whole that a sort of honor system was supplanting supervision by their elders; it was taken for granted that if they had been well brought up they would never take advantage of this freedom.”¹

Of course, as Allen points out, many young people were violating the code and engaged in unchaperoned “petting parties” (kissing, etc.) since 1916, well before the war ended. The rise of the closed automobile (those with tops, as opposed to the open Model T cars) also gave young people more independence from their parents' supervision. The car was often treated as a portable living room that allowed all kinds of illegal and wrong behavior to be carried out in private. Closed cars enabled people of all ages to travel secretly to speakeasies or other illicit rendezvous.

Magazines and movies with illicit content became very popular as well. Allen explains that “as the revolution began, its influence fertilized a bumper crop of sex magazines, confession magazines, and lurid motion pictures [for movies had just been invented], and these in turn had their effect on a class of readers and movie-goers who had never heard and never would hear of Freud and the libido” (87). As with today, printed and visual resources were powerful temptations to throw off the restraints of biblical (and to many, traditional) wisdom.

Yet another reason for the changing attitudes towards standards of biblical morality was the influence of Sigmund Freud's ideas, which linked every human action to sexual desires, leading to an obsession with the topic of sex and with sexual experimentation. Referring to Freud, Allen says that, “Like all revolutions, this one was stimulated by foreign propaganda.”² Though Freud was published in Europe before the war, he gained a widespread following in America only after it ended, in the Twenties.

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 77.

2. *Ibid.*, 85.



Freud theorized that all of human behavior was motivated or influenced by latent sexual desires, dreams, or experiences. To Freud, writes Allen, “Sex . . . was the central and pervasive force which moved mankind.”¹ The result of Freud’s influence was an obsession with the topic and with sexual experimentation.

In Europe, prostitution was rampant during trench warfare far from home and safety, and many young men developed a taste for it. More broadly, many of the soldiers wanted to forget what they had seen during the war, and so became committed to pleasure in order to wipe out bad memories. The immorality experienced and brought back from Europe would prove destructive to many an American home. Meanwhile, growing statism and proliferating government programs continued to whittle away at the family’s sphere of authority and responsibility.

Third, many young men who traveled overseas in the war years acquired a taste for danger and zesty life that was hard to domesticate once they returned home. To cap that, many also returned with a sense of fatalism and the belief that it was best to “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Likewise, American girls who went overseas as nurses and aides were introduced to European manners and standards, but without their safeguards. Often, the returning men and women wanted to forget their European experiences and have a good time.

Disillusionment

I have now seen enough of life and of the world to be unsurprised by what Allen writes next, and perhaps you have too? He says that Americans’ attempts to “eat, drink, and be merry” turned out badly for them:

“A sense of disillusionment remained; like the suddenly liberated vacationist, the country felt that it ought to be enjoying itself more than it was, and that life was futile and nothing mattered much. But in the meantime it might as well play—follow the crowd, take up the new toys that were amusing the crowd, go in for the new fads, savor the amusing scandals and trivialities of life. By 1921 the new toys and fads and scandals were forthcoming, and the country seized upon them feverishly.”²

Do you wonder what these new toys and fads might have been? This is a short list:

- Radio, which came on in a rush in the winter of 1921-22, allowed a new, cheap form of entertainment and spread news rapidly throughout the country.
- Sports continued to obsess the public: fights, college football, horse racing, and tennis gained new fervor. Babe Ruth began his baseball career.
- Food fads surfaced.
- The bathing beauty and beauty pageants became popular.
- Tabloids gave all the lurid details concerning sports, crime, and sex scandals in the news.
- Readers of “serious literature” had their diversions as well; Frost, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and other great writers were alive and producing poetry or novels during this time.
- Mah Jong was a new game from China that was beginning its sweep of the country.
- Emil Coué spread the power of positive thinking, and millions chanted, “Day by day in every way I am getting better and better.”³

1. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (Perennial, 2000), p. 85.

2. *Ibid.*, 67.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 72.



- ❑ The discovery of the Egyptian tomb of Tutankhamen spurred fashion designers to sport Egyptian fashions for the following season (fashions which would heavily influence the “flapper” style that I will tell you of in a moment).

The Flappers

Clothing tells us a great deal about the people who wear it. For example, before the 1920s, children wore much the same kinds of clothes as their parents. They were expected to look and behave like little grownups in many ways. During the 1920s, however, new fashions started, and people began making clothes only for children.

These clothes were designed to be comfortable and last for a long time, so that little brothers and sisters could wear them once they got big enough. Girls mostly wore dresses and boys wore a kind of short pants called knickerbockers. When the weather was colder, both boys and girls would wear jackets or sweaters as well as thick socks to keep warm.

Fashions are always changing throughout history, but if you look at what people were wearing during the 1900s, you’ll find that their clothes look more and more familiar as the decades pass. Ladies still wore dresses every day and no one was wearing blue jeans or sweatpants yet. However, as women began to vote, work outside the home, and gain greater independence to do as they liked, their new attitudes were reflected in the kinds of clothing they wore.

Prior to the 1920s, modesty was a priority for most women, whether lower, middle, or upper-class. That began to change with the rise of the “flapper.” A flapper was the label for a woman who loved having a good time, was independent of men, and who was sexually “liberated” in the sense that she wore clothing which was considered generally indecent at the time.

I told you that the discovery of Tutenkhamen’s tomb and its treasures inspired a craze for Egyptian fashions. Imagine a very up-to-date version of an Egyptian lady, and you will have some idea of a flapper’s style. She typically wore thin, straight, sleeveless (and sometimes backless in an evening gown) dresses, heavy makeup with deep red lips and thick eyeliner, and bobbed hair. “Bobbed” was the name for a new hairstyle. Instead of long hair elaborately arranged, bobbed hair was cut short—sometimes as short as the hair of a boy.

Flappers typically listened to the latest jazz music, danced the latest (scandalous) dances with men in their new, thin, often sleeveless and backless dresses, drove automobiles, smoked cigarettes in their homes and in public, drank prohibited alcohol in illegal speakeasies with men even after Prohibition began (as did many women in the middle and upper classes), and otherwise did anything or everything that horrified respectable folk.

That’s not to say that men didn’t also drink, dance, smoke, or break the law. The 1920’s were known as the “Roaring 20’s” because many of those who survived World War I treated their lives as one big opportunity to roar around in their cars and party. Remember, they had escaped death (often seeing many of their friends die) and were determined to live like there was no tomorrow. The flappers loved to dance and drink all night with such men.

Just as dances grew more daring and required greater freedom of movement, and women began to engage in new work and sports, so too dress hems rose to show first ankles, then shins, and (by the end of the



decade) knees! Petticoats and other bulky underclothes were eliminated or made of thinner materials. Fashion houses had the bright idea of advertising their clothes by having movie stars wear them in the newly-invented motion pictures, so the fashion for slinkily sleeveless evening gowns and many other smart skimpy outfits were seen everywhere as they had not been before.

Increasingly, even respectable women's dresses were made of thinner cloth and cut straighter with shorter sleeves. Women also gradually abandoned their corsets in an attempt to mimic the underdeveloped figures of youth in contrast to the corset-induced accentuation of feminine features that were well-suited to motherhood. Thick cotton stockings (colored black, typically) were replaced (for those who could afford them) with thin silk stockings in flesh color.

More and more women chose to wear cosmetics openly and boldly. This was a shock to the older generation because, in earlier years, women wore "paint" only if they were prostitutes or attempting to discreetly hide major flaws without seeming to wear any makeup.

Reactions

Leaders denounced certain aspects of modern girls' behavior, such as their choices in fashion, or the style of dance they had adopted, as offenses "against womanly purity, the very fountainhead of our family and civil life" (79). Mothers and sisters were called upon to admonish and better instruct these girls who were going astray.

Church officials and influential church members wrote or spoke against the modern trends in strong terms, and sought to form societies that would stop them where they could (which, practically speaking, was nowhere). In fact, Allen says that, "Not content with example and reproof, legislators in several states introduced bills to reform feminine dress once and for all" (81). You can imagine how well that worked.

Some of the more progressive "force of morality" (liberal clergymen and teachers) explained that "young people were at least franker and more honest than their elders had been; having experimented for themselves, would they not soon find out which standards were outworn and which represented the accumulated moral wisdom of the race? Perhaps this flareup of youthful passion was a flash in the pan, after all" (81). (A clue: they were wrong.)

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Childhood

In Chapter 8, you will read about America's next significant president: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (often called by his initials: FDR). You may be wondering whether Franklin was a cousin of Theodore Roosevelt? Yes, he was a fifth cousin of the former president. He also married Theodore's niece, Eleanor Roosevelt.

As we close out this chapter, I want to tell you a bit about Franklin's childhood. He was born into a wealthy, upper-class family and grew up as an only child on a country estate. At an early age, he understood that he was born to privilege and was different from other boys. Roosevelt rarely interacted with other children. He was not allowed to mingle with children below his class, and thus most of his time was spent around his parents' friends and other adults. Franklin was educated at home by his mother and a succession of governesses until he was fourteen.

Although Roosevelt's life was scheduled for him, and his mother was particularly strict, he usually managed to get his own way. He was sometimes deceitful and selfish, but he was not openly rebellious. Like



his distant cousin Teddy Roosevelt, FDR loved nature and pursued naturalist hobbies. Also like his cousin, he became well-traveled and had visited much of the United States and Europe by the time he was fourteen. At that age, Franklin was sent to boarding school.

At first, FDR was intimidated by his new school, especially since he arrived two years later than most boys. He was not an exceptional athlete, but soon found his niche as a champion high kicker. Professors and the headmaster, Reverend Endicott Peabody, taught FDR the importance of social responsibility. He was taught that, because of his wealth and privilege, it was his duty to become a respected leader in American society. Although he was an average student, FDR soon became self-confident and popular.

While at Harvard from 1900-1904, young Franklin's days were filled with a little studying, riding, parties, and other social events. He worked for the undergraduate daily newspaper, the *Crimson*, and became the editor-in-chief during in his senior year. (Later in life, Roosevelt believed that he could empathize with newspaper reporters because he had been one himself.) Roosevelt became well known and popular at college not only because of his personality, but because of his relationship with Theodore Roosevelt, who was on his road to becoming president of the United States.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the years after WWI in America were revolutionary – changes came from every direction. Looking back, it's easy to see where some people went wrong. But we should be careful how we judge since it was such a troubled time. When something is new, people make mistakes while they figure out how to handle it correctly – that's true whether one is rich, poor, young, old, liberal, conservative, white, black, male, female, Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jew. May God teach us how to study other people's mistakes so that we can learn from them without judging them!

