# The Roaring Twenties

The 1920s went by such names as:

**the Roaring Twenties:** The United States' overall success in World War I, the survival of the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918, and an apparently strong economy led to a period of strong optimism and a new fun-seeking attitude.

**the Jazz Age:** The popularity of the new Jazz music of New Orleans and Chicago, dances like the Charleston, combined with the relaxing moral code and the general feeling of optimism created the feeling of a never-ending social party.

**the Age of Intolerance:** The losses—both financial and in human—associated with World War I left the United States unwilling to entangle itself again into the affairs of foreign nations. The U.S. refusal to join the League of Nations was evidence of this new isolationist policy. Immigration rules and quotas were tightened. There was also a concerted effort to pursue and unmask spies, usually Communists or "Reds." The "us and them" mentality resulted in the revitalizing of such supremacist organizations as the KKK.

**the Age of Wonderful Nonsense:** It was the age of flappers and bathtub gin, an age of prosperity, and a time of moral and sexual revolution.

Much of what was considered "roaring" about "The Roaring Twenties," however, contained the seeds of the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression of the 1930's.

## Consumerism:

- mass-production and chain stores drove down prices and encouraged consumers to spend
- the concept of credit was being used to help more Americans buy durable goods such as cars and stoves. The lenders, of course, charged interest so that the total cost of the item was far more in the end than if it had been purchased for cash.
- runaway consumer credit was part of the overload that resulted in the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- Americans were also spending more money on entertainment, especially the movies. The technology that made the "talkies" possible (Phonofi lm) became commercially available in 1922. President Calvin Coolidge and several famous vaudeville performers appeared in these early sound-films. In 1927, Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, the first commercially-released "talkie," changed the motion picture industry forever.

## Economic Policies:

- In 1920, for the first time in United States history, more people were living in cities than on farms. Presidents Warren G. Harding (1921 – 1923), Calvin Coolidge (1923 – 1929), and Herbert Hoover (1929 – 1933) supported big business and passed legislation that benefited large corporations, often at the expense of small businesses and farmers.
- Harding's "return to normalcy" after World War I did little to address social and economic problems facing thousands of Americans.
- The Harding Administration's Teapot Dome Scandal illustrated the extent to which greed and the desire to accumulate wealth quickly were the governing principals of post-World-War I America.
- Calvin Coolidge especially favored a *laissez faire* attitude toward big business, thus allowing for credit and investment abuses that would lead to the 1929 crash.