



ALL EARS!!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

"OUR EARS SPAN ALL FIELDS"



WILL THE TWENTIES ROAR? As *ALL EARS!!* has said before, in our best *Stengalese*, we refuse to make predictions, especially about the future. But the 1920s are definitely right in the middle of the *ALL EARS!!* wheelhouse, the early & middle of the *Great American Century!* Though we will not make predictions, like Santayana & centuries prior to him, Burke, we do know we can learn much from understanding history! So let's take a look at *that roaring decade*, to see what transpired! G.K. Chesterton warned, "*The disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present!*" Norman Cousins cautioned, "*History is a vast early warning system.*"

THE ROAR: The 1920s roared with euphoric exuberance! A group of young men returned from war & truly believed they had fought the *War to End All Wars!* They had seen the worst that mankind could deliver & believed they had won the peace. Little did they know that the Allied Powers' vengeance & President Woodrow Wilson's utter failure at Versailles would lead to the rise of the National Socialist German Worker's Party, the Nazis, who would bring the world back to war in less than 20 years! Between the Great War, the pogroms, genocide & influenza pandemic that followed, the world had lost more than 50M people in the prior decade, some estimates as high as 100M. So when a new decade arrived on January 1, 1920, a feeling of hopefulness, of a brighter future, filled many people's spirit!

The Roaring Twenties was primarily a big city & town event. Life in rural America did not change much in the 1920s & 1930s. My dad drove a horse drawn milk wagon to town. There were two water pumps in their small village. One pump was by the coal mine where the men tried to wash off the ever-present coal dust before they went home. The other pump was between the Veltri & Abate houses. The women & children would gather between those two houses in the morning & evening to get the water they needed for drinking, cooking & cleaning! Around the clock electrical power was not available until the 1940s. Clothes were washed in a tub. Food was stored in an icebox; in the winter, under the front porch. My 15-year old mom read Margaret Mitchell's 1000-page epic *Gone with the Wind* in three nights, using a kerosene lamp! People didn't care about the Volstead Act; they made their own homemade wine!

But city life changed drastically as the new decade began & the implementation of the 18th amendment, Prohibition, was only part of it. Electricity & the 1916 invention & patent of the ON/OFF toggle safety switch literally turned the power on an age of modern consumerism & convenience! With an economy that was business friendly, that created wealth & increased workers' wages, suddenly people wanted & could afford electric refrigerators, washing machines, irons, toasters, vacuum cleaners, razors, frozen food & more. In 1920, Pittsburgh's *KDKA* became the first regular broadcast radio station. Pittsburgh-based department store *Joseph Horne* advertised amateur radio sets for \$10, to hear *concerts over the air*. Within the next few years, all of America was tuned in to the same news, sports & entertainment! And so was born the media star: singer Rudy Vallee; matinee idol Rudolph Valentino; *The It Girl*, Clara Bow; American Hero Charles Lindbergh; *The Galloping Ghost*, Red Grange & the biggest star of the 1920s, *The Sultan of Swat*, Babe Ruth! Ragtime evolved to jazz & everyone was dancing. George Gershwin's *Swanee*, sung by Al Jolson, became the first million selling piece of sheet music & sold 2M records. The popularity of the cinema grew bigger with Jolson singing in 1927's *The Jazz Singer*, the first talkie. Henry Ford's idea

of putting America on the road with an affordable, well-engineered automobile, the *Model T*, made *Ford Motor* one of America's biggest companies! Then, *General Motors*, emphasizing the era's Art Deco style not engineering, surpassed Ford's sales! This was the beginning of an era that lasts today, where the conveniences of a modern living are available to everyone. This was an era that brought access to knowledge & information to anyone who tuned in. It no longer required education or breeding to grow, learn, earn a living & *get stuff* in America! Our society was prosperous. The middle class was growing.

Of course, all that dancing & nightclubbing made people thirsty. But because of Prohibition (the 18th amendment & the Volstead Act) people could no longer buy alcohol! People went to secret bars & nightclubs to drink & dance. They were told to *speakeasy* upon entering, so no one would get suspicious. Mixed drinks & cocktails became the rage! Why? Illegal, homemade alcohol usually tasted terrible & at its best, was weak & watered down. At its worst, illegal booze could kill you! Sometimes it was the alcohol itself, methyl alcohol distilled from wood or natural gas which is highly poisonous instead of ethyl alcohol, derived from plants, grains & sugars. Besides watering down good alcohol, the bootleggers would add turpentine, paint thinner, even anti-freeze to give their *homemade hooch* a kick! There were mass poisonings reported in several cities & night clubs.

A criminal underworld arose to produce, distribute & sell all that illegal booze. Urban violence rose; *gangs, gangsters & gang wars!* Illegal booze sucked millions upon millions of dollars out of the economy. The bootleggers used ingenious methods to produce & hide their efforts. Alcohol might be transported in gasoline & petroleum tankers or in the bilges of boats (other causes of poisoning). To protect their turf, the gangsters used the submachine gun, the Tommy Gun, as their weapon of choice. The death of a gang leader became a media sensation, with massive funeral displays & processions! Alcohol was not the only illegal activity in which the gangs were involved. They added gambling, drugs & prostitution along the way. There was so much money in these illegal activities, the gangs had massive payrolls to support their businesses. This often including the police, who willingly looked the other way. It was not until 27-year old Elliot Ness & his band of *Untouchables*, T-Men (Treasury Department Agents) who were incorruptible & could not be bribed, did the government hear the public outrage & crackdown on these illegal activities.

Social attitudes also changed during the 1920s. (We will *discerningly* leave it to curious reader to investigate how the invention & patent of commercial-grade latex changed sexual morals during the 1920s.) In a growing economy, more jobs were available to women. Attitudes toward social activities & marriage changed. There was a Lost Generation; a group of people who came of age during WWI & lived through the horrors of that war. They were disillusioned with America & the world, feeling they had lost their youth to war. They saw corruption & commercialization. Their feelings were expressed in the literary works of Hemingway, Stein, Fitzgerald, Pound, Elliot & others.

Is 2020 much different than 1920? Jobs, wages & the economy are booming, driven by consumerism & convenience. There are new media stars every day. Technology quickly advances. Attitudes toward art, music & social activities change constantly. There are illegal drugs, gangs & violence in our cities. There are geopolitical concerns. Some in the younger generations worry about the future. But never in our Great History, certainly not in the last 100 years or in this century, has there been a better opportunity to fulfill the Founding Fathers vision: a *prosperous society of individuals with equal opportunity for all*.

SEEDS, SPROUTS, GROW, HARVEST!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND – *Tom Malenka*

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