

SACE Board of South Australia

Sources to accompany the 2012 Modern History paper

Thursday 8 November: 9 a.m.

‘The Roaring Twenties’

The term ‘The Roaring Twenties’ describes the years 1920–29, a period of social change that arose in response to the devastation of the First World War. The phrase refers to new, permissive attitudes which many countries experienced during the 1920s. However, the carefree lifestyle was only one aspect of a complex society.

SOURCE 1 — A modern historian’s account of the ‘flappers’ in the 1920s

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¹ Short hair
J. Swinton, *USA 1919–45: The Rise to World Leadership*, Longman, Melbourne, 1996, p. 24

SOURCE 2 — An Otto Dix painting, *Big City*, 1927–28. In the 1920s, Dix lived in the German cities of Dresden, Düsseldorf, and Berlin



G. Lacey and K. Shepherd, *Germany 1918–1945*, John Murray, London, 1997, p. 29

SOURCE 3 — A transcript of the television documentary *Legendary Sin Cities*, 2005

... [F]or a time in the twenties and thirties there was one place known as the wickedest city in the world. It was Shanghai ...

The French [in Shanghai] ended up by having their chief detective become the leading racketeer¹ of the French concession² and the leading policeman of the French concession. In Shanghai, police and gangsters were one and the same ...

‘Big Ears’ Du became the godfather of crime in Shanghai, and the money from gambling, prostitution, drug trafficking and protection rackets just kept pouring into the coffers of [his] Green Gang. In the late twenties and early thirties, it was estimated that one-third of China’s entire income was under the control of ‘Big Ears’ Du ...

For many Shanghailester³ women, life revolved around their social clubs, where they could while the day away with their tennis, horseback riding and mahjong⁴. Pink gins in the afternoon and champagne at night completed a fruitful day.

¹ Someone who makes money by illegal means
² An area of Shanghai under French control
³ Western people living in Shanghai
⁴ A popular Chinese card game
Legendary Sin Cities: Paris, Berlin, Shanghai, television program, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005

SOURCE 4 — A front-page article from *The New York Times* reporting on the Valentine’s Day Massacre in Chicago, 1929

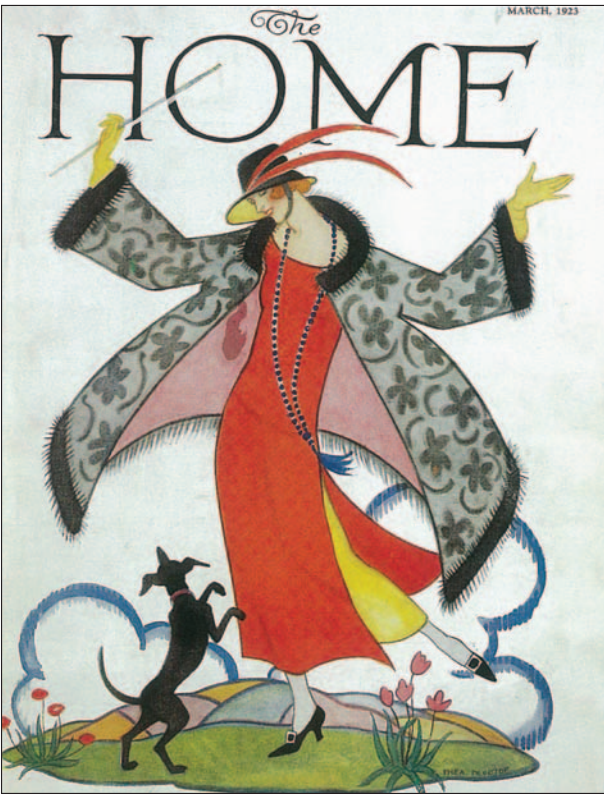
7 Chicago Gangsters Slain By Firing Squad of Rivals, Some in Police Uniforms ...

Chicago, Feb. 14 -- Chicago gangland leaders observed Valentine’s Day with machine guns and a stream of bullets and as a result seven members of the George (Bugs) Moran-Dean O’Banion, North Side Gang are dead in the most cold-blooded gang massacre in the history of this city’s underworld ...

The killings have stunned the citizenry¹ of Chicago as well as the Police Department, and while tonight there was no solution, the one outstanding cause was illicit liquor traffic.

¹ People
The New York Times, 15 February 1929, c 1929
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www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0214.html
viewed on 28 March 2012

SOURCE 5 — A cover from a popular Australian women’s magazine, *The Home*, 1923



R. Darlington and J. Hospodaryk, *A History of Australia since 1901*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1999, p. 65

SOURCE 6 — A historian’s description of the lower classes in England in the 1920s

Besides children and the elderly, the other groups to suffer hardship most persistently were the sick, the widowed, the low-paid and the unemployed. The latter group, however, made up the largest group of poor in only one study. The problems of the chronically sick and the families which lost their male wage-earner had changed little since the years before the Great War. Prolonged illness in a working-class family, especially a large family, usually meant a bitter struggle against poverty. Moreover, it was still true that for many women widowhood meant not only the loss of a husband but also poverty. Normally, if they earned more than a small amount they forfeited their widow’s pension. Frequently this condemned them to eking out a poverty-stricken existence on the pension or accepting low-paid, menial work.

J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914–45*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1984, p. 136