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*Women in the 1920s*

Life was quickly changing in American in the 1920s. New technologies were being created, the entertainment business was changing, the First Great War had just come to an end and Major League Sports had started taking liftoff as a popular form of entertainment. But the most significate cultural changes were those that the American Women of the 1920s faced and experienced. American Women, because of World War One, experienced new jobs that previously would never have been thought possible for women. The Nineteenth Amendment had just been passed, granting all American Women the ability to vote in public elections. Women have gained new levels of freedom and empowerment in the 1920s culturally and professionally. They shook cultural and social norms and seized the opportunities given to them to live a better life in American Society. This radical change would fuel a feeling of self-empowerment in these women. Because of these new social movements, if I was a woman in the 1920s and given the opportunity to leave my small western home for a job and a life in New York City, I would take it and reap the benefits of this opportunity.

World War One proved to be an important milestone and turning point for the way women worked. As men left the country to fight in the war, many women would have to step up and take the jobs that these men had left behind at home. This was before unheard of. When this became the norm of the WWI era, society began to allow women to work more jobs that were previously taboo, even after the war. Women before this generally worked jobs that could easily have been associated with jobs a servant of older time would have held such as a seamstress, a nurse, or a secretary. Women of the time began other trades such as factory work and proved to be able to work on the same level as men. There was as much as a 25% increase in employment of American Women in this time. Women were becoming independent, they worked more often and therefore had more money to themselves. This in turn actually sparked advertisement companies to start targeting women more frequently as women became more traditional consumers with this extra money. A job in telecommunications as a phone operator is a stepping stone for a woman from a small farm from the mid-west. Even though this job is far more entry level than that of a factory worker, it still brings more to the table than if a young woman was to stay in the Midwest. She would learn about new technologies, apply thoughts of her own on how to improve them, make more money to help her family and start her new life, influence other young women, and enjoy the newfound lifestyle.

Cultural Societal changes of the time also empowered women to be independent and strong. Many women of the time challenged old fashion “laws” by rebelling against the clothes their mothers wore. The average skirt length became shorter, women adapted different hairstyles and started to use makeup and jewelry more often. Women would take part in nightlife at jazz clubs and dance and sing and even drink illegal alcohol during prohibition at speakeasies. With these new founded ideas about social life and look, a woman who grew up in a small mid-west farm would find much more opportunity professionally and socially in a move to a major city like New York. Many of these cultural shifts did not make it, or at least not at the same rate, to these smaller more rural areas as they tended to stick to old-fashioned norms. A woman of this area may not get to experience the social nightlife and empowerment given to them by the freedom of self-expression. The move would enrich the young women and hopefully incite her to keep breaking boundaries.

The Entertainment industry in the 1920s boomed and watching major league sports became a much more popular leisurely pastime for Americans. For women in the 1920s, although major league sports were mostly male dominated, it became much more acceptable for women to play recreational sports. This was previously thought of to be un-lady-like. Women also became prominent in the film industry. The boom of the Silent Movie introduced the concept of movie stars to the public. With a number of prominent female movie stars, young women across the country had role models they could follow by watching these films. Jazz became prominent in both film and culture as women used jazz to express themselves and move away from rational dances and song. All of these things would not be as widely important or well known to a small farm girl in a small mid-west town. The move to New York City would expose her to all of this outreach and expression where she could blossom and freely express herself.

The 1920s was a cultural and societal shock to those used to and adapted to the status quo. World War One served as the climax point for a societal revelation that began to empower and enable women to be more independent of men. Women were able to work better and more skilled jobs than before. Young women rebelled against old fashion norms and began to freely express what they wanted to wear, even though the older generations may disapprove. Women also took part in the freedom of expression through nightlife, music and jazz. Breaking dancefloor norms showed how these women could evolve the public scene. Movie and entertainment stars gave women a voice and a screen across the country. All of these changes proved that the 1920s was a place for change for the better. Not every place in the country experienced these changes the same however. A young woman in a small town farm in the mid-west may not get the full extent of these movements as they are not as prominent in less social areas. Should I place myself in the shoes of one of these rural young women, given the opportunity to move to New York in search of new work, I would take it every time to experience these new changes firsthand and to help continue to break boundaries for American Women everywhere.

Works Cited

“Changes in American Culture and Society 1910-1929 - Revision 1 - GCSE History - BBC Bitesize.” BBC News, BBC, 2019, www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/zp9ftyc/revision/1.