

Section 1

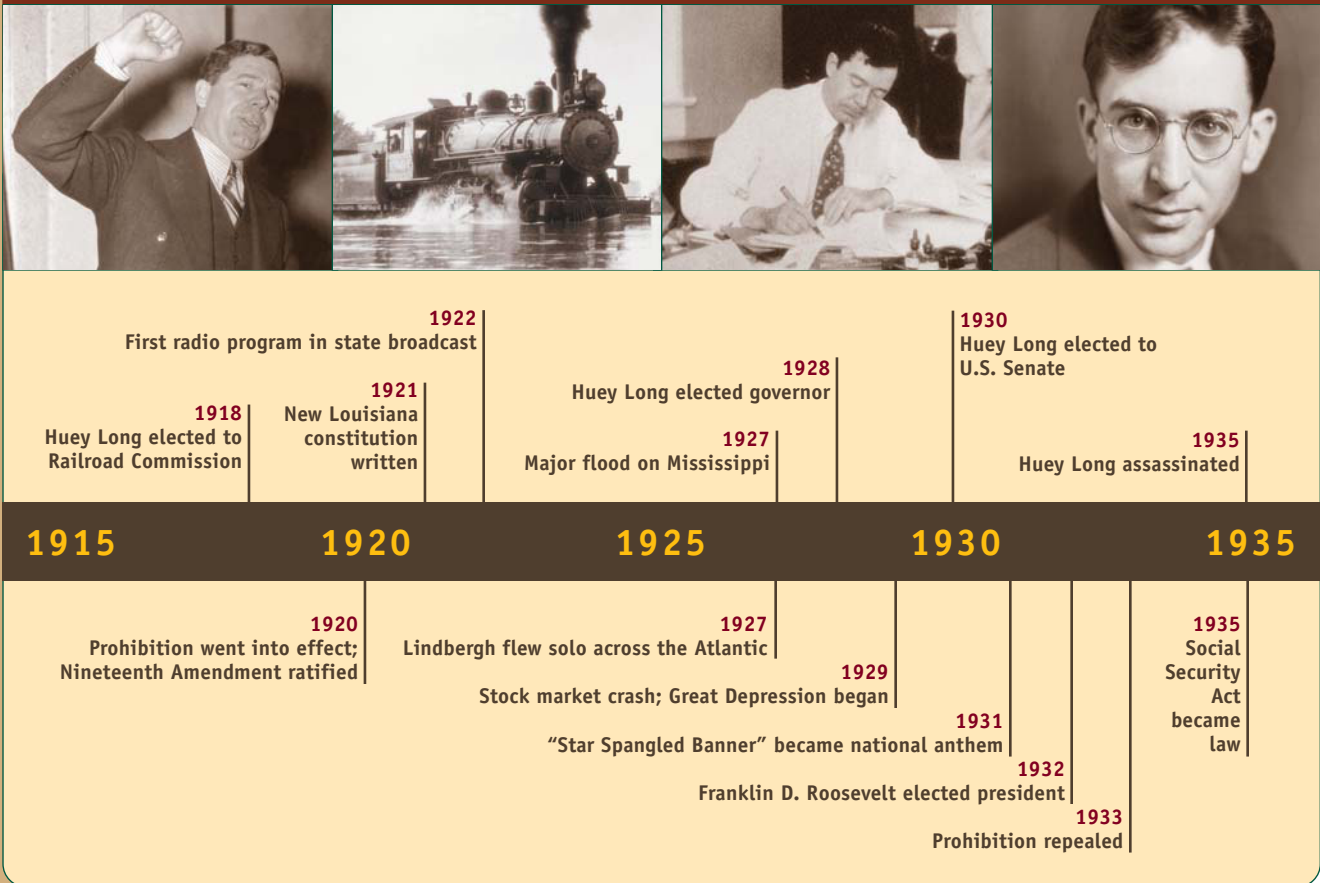
A Time of Changes

As you read, look for:

- the cultural changes of the 1920s,
- the political changes of the 1920s, and
- vocabulary terms **prohibition**, **Women’s Christian Temperance Union**, **severance tax**, **Ku Klux Klan**, and **Public Service Commission**.

The decade after World War I is often referred to as the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age. It was a time of rapid change, as if Americans were trying to make up for the time lost during the war.

Figure 27 Timeline: 1915–1935



Cultural Changes

New Orleans created the music for the Roaring Twenties. Brass bands were popular throughout America at the turn of the century. New Orleans bands developed their own style as they paraded through the streets. The new music was labeled “jazz,” and it soon spread around the world. A popular pastime of the twenties was to ride the steamboats and dance to a jazz band. Two of the more famous jazz musicians were Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton.

That music became part of the new radio broadcasts thrilling America. Louisiana’s first radio station was WWL of New Orleans. The station’s first broadcast was from Loyola University on March 31, 1922. On that first radio program, the college president began with a commercial asking for donations for a building fund. Then the few radio owners heard a piano composition. WWL still broadcasts from New Orleans.

As radios became more common, the broadcasts offered more variety. Baseball games were vividly described by exciting announcers. Continuing dramas called “soap operas” attracted many loyal listeners. They were called soap operas because they were sponsored by soap manufacturers.

Below: The “roaring” 1920s brought great changes. You can see that in this view of Canal Street in New Orleans: Automobiles are much more common and women’s fashions have changed drastically.





Movies brought new entertainment to the twentieth century. The first moving pictures were seen in the state soon after the new century began. In Marksville, “the pictures” or “picture slides” were first shown in a tent on a vacant lot. That type of makeshift theater was also used in other towns and cities. But by 1927, there were fifteen major theaters in New Orleans and fifteen nickelodeon movie houses. The matinees, or afternoon movies, cost 10 cents. The most expensive weekend ticket cost 25 cents.

The first talking movie shown in New Orleans, *The Glorious Betsy*, came to the Tudor Theater in 1928. In 1929, an elaborate new theater in New Orleans, the Saenger, held the premiere of *Evangeline*. That movie, based on the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, told a romantic story based on the Acadian exile.

In the 1920s, women’s clothing and hair styles changed radically. The women who wore the styles of the Roaring Twenties were called “modern” or even *flappers*. Their short skirts and bobbed hair shocked the older generation. Strict rules at the Louisiana State Normal School for teachers now seemed old-fashioned to the students. One young woman was almost expelled from the Natchitoches school because she cut her hair short.

Prohibition

There were many people in the United States who wanted **prohibition**, a ban on the making and selling of alcohol. They blamed society’s problems on liquor and believed that banning it would improve American life.

Above: The Fate Marable Band is shown here playing aboard the riverboat *S.S. Capital* in 1919. The young Louis Armstrong is the third person from the right.

Lagniappe

The first motion picture to feature spoken dialogue was *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson, America’s most popular singer of the time. Warner Bros. released the film in 1927.



Above: Louisiana's coastline made it easy to smuggle illegal whiskey into the state. This fuel truck is being loaded with whiskey in New Orleans.

The antiliquor or prohibition movement started in the late 1800s as part of the early progressive movement. Several organizations formed to work for prohibition; the best known organization was the **Women's Christian Temperance Union**.

In 1917, Congress voted to stop the sale of alcohol. It adopted the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited the manufacture or sale of alcoholic beverages. The amendment was ratified by 1919 and went into effect in 1920. But even before 1920, some parts of Louisiana had made the sale of liquor illegal. A number of towns and parishes had held local elections on banning alcohol. Places where it was still legal to sell liquor were called "wet," and the places that prohibited liquor were called "dry."

The reaction to prohibition was different in each region of the state. Protestant North Louisiana strongly supported prohibition. The Catholics in South Louisiana did not have the same religious restriction against drinking. People in South Louisiana were, therefore, more open in ignoring the law.

Prohibition created problems throughout Louisiana. Buying illegal liquor was not difficult. Speakeasies, moonshiners, and bootleggers operated throughout the state, from New Orleans to the smallest towns. *Speakeasies* were illegal bars, where customers had to speak quietly so the police would not hear them. *Moonshiners* made their own liquor to sell to those who wanted it. *Bootleggers* sold smuggled liquor; the name came from the practice of hiding flasks of whiskey in their boots. Coastal Louisiana offered these new outlaws the same protection that pirates had always found. Thousands of inlets made it easy to bring in a boat filled with liquor.

Political Changes

Prohibition was just one of the important political ideas of this era. These ideas about improving life for Americans were part of the progressive movement. Many of the changes sought by the progressive movement required political action.

Women's Suffrage

Women were active in the progressive movement, particularly in the prohibition movement. They also formed local clubs to help their neighbors and to improve the quality of life. For example, a Shreveport club's speaker discussed the need for pure food standards. The Women's Club of Shreveport was responsible for the city's first park, Princess Park.

Many women also supported the women's suffrage movement, although Louisiana women were generally more conservative about seeking the vote. A few women in Louisiana had spoken out for women's rights when African American men were granted the vote during Reconstruction. But most Louisiana women of the time did not agree. The *New Orleans Times* gave the general nineteenth-century opinion, "Politics is bad enough for men, without drawing ladies into such an atmosphere of corruption and publicity." In 1914, the Louisiana Federation of Women's Clubs would not even agree to take a stand for women's suffrage.

One early supporter of women's rights was Lavinia Egan from Bienville Parish. She attended the Baptist college at Mt. Lebanon in Bienville Parish and later studied in Europe. Ahead of her time and place in the South, she asserted her rights at a young age. At a time when other women still rode a horse side-saddle, she wore pants and sat in a regular saddle. Egan participated in the national woman's suffrage efforts and joined other women in Louisiana who wanted the right to vote.

In 1919, the Nineteenth Amendment, which would give women the right to vote, was passed by the U.S. Congress and sent to the states for ratification. In August 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment. Women in Louisiana were able to vote for the first time the following November.

Progressive Governors

The Bourbons who had controlled the state were replaced by governors who were more progressive. The governors in the early twentieth century made changes that improved life in Louisiana.

John Parker of New Orleans supported the progressive movement. He had even joined Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party and had run for governor as its representative in 1916. Parker returned to the Democratic Party and was elected governor in 1920.



Above: When two men who had criticized the Klan were found murdered, Governor Parker worked to ensure that their killers were found and indicted.

As governor, Parker could not enact all of the progressive changes he wanted. But he was able to move the state in that direction. He recognized the need for a larger university and moved the Louisiana State University campus to its present location in Baton Rouge.

Another change brought by Parker was a tax on natural resources. For the first time, Louisiana established a **severance tax** on resources taken from the land. The severance tax is based on the idea that removing a resource from the environment means that future generations are deprived of its use. The tax is a fee for using this nonrenewable resource. Parker explained that “those who are getting rich from natural resources of the state owe a debt to this and future generations, as they are removing and destroying resources created by the Almighty . . . never again to be replaced.”

Some of the severance tax money went towards improving the roads, with more gravel roads added. Governor J. Y. Sanders had begun the gravel road program, and Governor Parker expanded it. The road construction was done on a pay-as-you-go basis. Because the state could not borrow money to build roads, the road-improvement program was limited.

Governor Parker also faced a problem with the **Ku Klux Klan** during his term. The Klan had been founded in Tennessee in 1865. Originally a club for Confederate veterans, it quickly became a political force that used violence and intimidation, especially against former slaves. The Klan faded in the late 1800s but was revived in the United States after World War I. Terrorism was directed against anyone whose behavior the Klan did not like. Immigrants and

Below: The Ku Klux Klan was not just a force in the South. This march took place in Washington, D.C., in 1926.



minorities were its main targets, with some ugly results. The Ku Klux Klan spread around the country, and violence and lynchings were not limited to the South. States like New York and Ohio reportedly had more than 200,000 members. The Klan even paraded in front of the White House in full regalia (costume).

In Louisiana, the Klan continued to threaten African Americans and commit vigilante actions. A major incident occurred in Morehouse Parish in 1922. Two young white men who had defied the Klan were found tortured and murdered. Governor Parker worked to ensure that the killers were indicted and prosecuted; they were not, however, convicted. Finally, in 1925, Louisiana passed a law that made wearing masks illegal and required members' names to be made known. This law was intended to stop the secret violence carried out by KKK members who hid behind masks.

The Constitution of 1921

The legal structure of the state government faced more revisions during this period. When John Parker became governor, the state was regulated by the constitution of 1913. That constitution had been written because the state's financial structure needed changes. It also included some ideas of the progressive movement, such as juvenile courts.

But by 1921 there were problems with the 1913 constitution; a new one was needed. The constitution of 1921 is described as the most "legislative" of all the constitutions Louisiana has had. That is, it did not serve as a broad framework for government but was very detailed. Because the constitution was so specific, it required frequent changes that could only be made through amendments.

The 1921 constitution did include some positive elements. For the first time, the need to protect the environment was recognized. The Railroad Commission, which had been set up to regulate transportation and communication companies, was given more power and became the **Public Service Commission**. It was on the Railroad Commission that Huey Long developed the power that made him governor.



Above: An early 20th-century locomotive on display in Baton Rouge. The 1921 Constitution gave more power to the Railroad Commission, which was later renamed the Public Service Commission.

Lagniappe

Before the constitution of 1921 was replaced, it had been amended 536 times. In comparison, the U.S. Constitution, written in 1787, has been amended only 27 times.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. What was the music of the Roaring Twenties? Where did it come from?
2. What new entertainment became popular?
3. Why did some people want prohibition?
4. What was the attitude of women in Louisiana about the suffrage movement?
5. What important tax change did Governor Parker push for?
6. What law was passed that was intended to stop the KKK's violence?