The 1920s were an age of dramatic social and political change. For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. The nation's total wealth more than doubled between 1920 and 1929, and this economic growth swept many Americans into an affluent but unfamiliar "consumer society." People from coast to coast bought the same goods (thanks to nationwide advertising and the spread of chain stores), listened to the same music, did the same dances and even used the same slang! Many Americans were uncomfortable with this new, urban, sometimes racy "mass culture"; in fact, for many–even most–people in the United States, the 1920s brought more conflict than celebration. However, for a small handful of young people in the nation's big cities, the 1920s were roaring indeed.

The Roaring 1920's: The Effects of the Automobile on American Life

By Sam Elliott

The 1920's were America's last glory days between WWI and The Great Depression.

Consumerism describes humanity's desire to consume or purchase material things to achieve happiness.

The twenties were a time of celebration. Having just come out of a war the nation was literally torn over, a whole generation was thankful to be at peace. The 1920's were ruled by the youth of the country, fashions and fads leaned in favor of the youthful glow of America. During this time prohibition was instituted, and prohibition was ineffective. Everything about the 1920's symbolized an intense feeling of rebellion and breaking away from society's boundaries. The 1920's was simply an explosion of self expression, the automobile being one of the biggest.

In a world where heading to the grocery store is 3 miles east and 30 minutes away, the need for improved transportation was in demand. The first automobile, however, was not invented in the 1920's. In a world where heading to the grocery store is 3 miles east and 30 minutes away, the need for improved transportation was in demand. In 1866 Richard Dudgeon, native to New York, invented the first automobile powered on steam. Its effects paled in comparison to the force of the gasoline powered automobile on American society.

When Henry Ford introduced the world to the Model T, the wheels on innovation began to churn. Throughout the early 21st century, the Model T dropped from its original price of $825 to $360 8 years later. Because of its ease to operate, low cost, and simplicity in repair, the Model T sold like hotcakes. By 1918, half of all cars in America were Model T's. By the mid-1920's sales began to decline steadily due to fierce competition.

The American people themselves were greatly affected by the automobile, in negative ways as well as positive. The insititution of the automobile heavily affected family life among the establishment of a more mobile society. Rural Americans could drive around freely and examine the world around them and were known as "Sunday Drivers", whereas more urban Americans would drive into the hustle and bustle of the city. Because of this increased sense of personal freedom without reprocussions, many American families fell apart. Individual family members could act upon their own wishes rather than the dictation of the family as a whole, children could escape their "opressed" homelife and act upon foolish wishes. Women, along with their newly aquired right to vote, could escape the tedial tasks of home management and slip into the cultural scene.

Consumerism was a popular term to describe the typical American mindset during this time period. It is the idea that humans equate the purchasing of material goods and consumption of said goods to their own feeling of happiness. The automobile during this period was not simply an invention, it was a social status, the "cool" thing if you will. America's seemingly selfish desires, under this theory, attribute to the rise of sales in automobiles.

America, as it is today, has spawned from a society that has been able to travel upon reliable and speedy transportation methods. Throughout the latter 20th century and early 21st century methods of travel quickly evolved away from the traditional horse and buggy. Unfortunately the new modern convenience brought with it many new troubles to the American way of life; traditional moral beliefs disregarded and the ease of escape from ones immediate surrounding lead to the increased business into the cities, the supposed spawn of America's evil. Regardless of whether good or bad, each individual in the country was affected by a century that was greatly influenced by the automobile.