

# **BBC Bitesize**

**Narrator:** Welcome to America in the 1920s, a land of opportunity... and inequality. While some Americans enjoy very comfortable lives, many others live in poverty, and face discrimination and prejudice in a deeply divided society. For African Americans, racial discrimination is a fact of life. In the former slave-holding states of the South, Jim Crow laws segregate black people from their white neighbours – everything from housing, public transportation and education; to drinking fountains and restaurants is separate and unequal.

These laws also deny African Americans access to their right to vote. The price of defying them is extreme. African Americans face severe, often brutal, punishments from the authorities, as well as violence from white members of the public.

In the community, white supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, used violence to terrorize black people and immigrants.

During the 1920s hundreds of African Americans are lynched - killed publicly, without trial, by racist mobs.

At the same time, many African Americans are working hard to end segregation and racial terror, through civil rights organisations.

But racist policies continue, and in response, hundreds of thousands of African Americans migrate from the southern states to the industrial north, attempting to escape the most extreme forms of racial segregation. Racism, however, is found everywhere.

Internationally, communism is spreading, following the Russian Revolution of 1917. This prompts fears that communist 'red' ideas might also take hold in the US. Unfounded suspicion is cast on European immigrants.

In 1919 and 1920, thousands of suspected communists are arrested in raids across the US, but little evidence of communist plots is uncovered. This fear becomes known as The Red Scare.

Distrust of immigrants is widespread and in 1921, limits on the number coming into the country are introduced. A 1924 immigration act effectively bars almost all immigrants from Asia, while Western Europeans are still permitted to enter.

Meanwhile, from 1920, there is a dramatic spike in organised crime as a result of Prohibition which bans the production, sale and transportation of alcohol. It is now hugely profitable for criminal gangs to smuggle and supply alcohol.

The 1920s are a time of challenge and change. Racial, political, social and economic divisions fracture US society. Corruption and organised crime are rife. But more changes are yet to come when the economy is hit with what will become known as 'The Wall Street Crash'.