CHAPTER 24

The Jazz Age: Redefining the Nation, 1919-1929

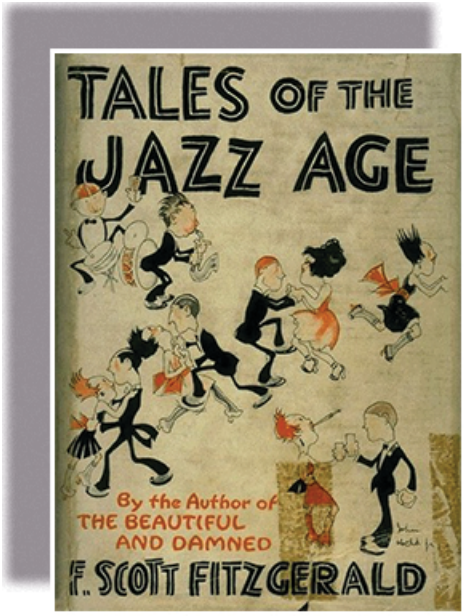


Figure 24.1 The illustrations for F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age*, drawn by John Held, Jr., epitomized the carefree flapper era of the 1920s.

Chapter Outline

Introduction

Following the hardships of the immediate postwar era, the United States embarked upon one of the most prosperous decades in history. Mass production, especially of the automobile, increased mobility and fostered new industries. Unemployment plummeted as businesses grew to meet this increased demand. Cities continued to grow and, according to the 1920 census, a majority of the population lived in urban areas of twenty-five hundred or more residents.

Jazz music, movies, speakeasies, and new dances dominated the urban evening scene. Recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, many of them Catholic, now participated in the political system. This challenged rural Protestant fundamentalism, even as quota laws sought to limit new immigration patterns. The Ku Klux Klan rose to greater power, as they protested not only the changing role of African Americans but also the growing population of immigrant, Catholic, and Jewish Americans.

This mixture of social, political, economic, and cultural change and conflict gave the decade the nickname the "Roaring Twenties" or the "Jazz Age." The above illustration (**Figure 24.1**), which graced the cover of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age*, embodies the popular view of the 1920s as a nonstop party, replete with dancing, music, flappers, and illegal drinking.

24.1 Prosperity and the Production of Popular Entertainment

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss the role of movies in the evolution of American culture
- Explain the rise of sports as a dominant social force
- Analyze the ways in which the automobile, especially the Model T, transformed American life

In the 1920s, prosperity manifested itself in many forms, most notably in advancements in entertainment and technology that led to new patterns of leisure and consumption. Movies and sports became increasingly popular and buying on credit or "carrying" the debt allowed for the sale of more consumer goods and put automobiles within reach of average Americans. Advertising became a central institution in this new consumer economy, and commercial radio and magazines turned athletes and actors into national icons.

MOVIES

The increased prosperity of the 1920s gave many Americans more disposable income to spend on entertainment. As the popularity of "moving pictures" grew in the early part of the decade, "movie palaces," capable of seating thousands, sprang up in major cities. A ticket for a double feature and a live show cost twenty-five cents; for a quarter, Americans could escape from their problems and lose themselves in another era or world. People of all ages attended the movies with far more regularity than today, often going more than once per week. By the end of the decade, weekly movie attendance swelled to ninety million people.

The silent movies of the early 1920s gave rise to the first generation of movie stars. Rudolph Valentino, the lothario with the bedroom eyes, and Clara Bow, the "It Girl" with sex appeal, filled the imagination of millions of American moviegoers. However, no star captured the attention of the American viewing public more than Charlie Chaplin. This sad-eyed tramp with a moustache, baggy pants, and a cane was the top

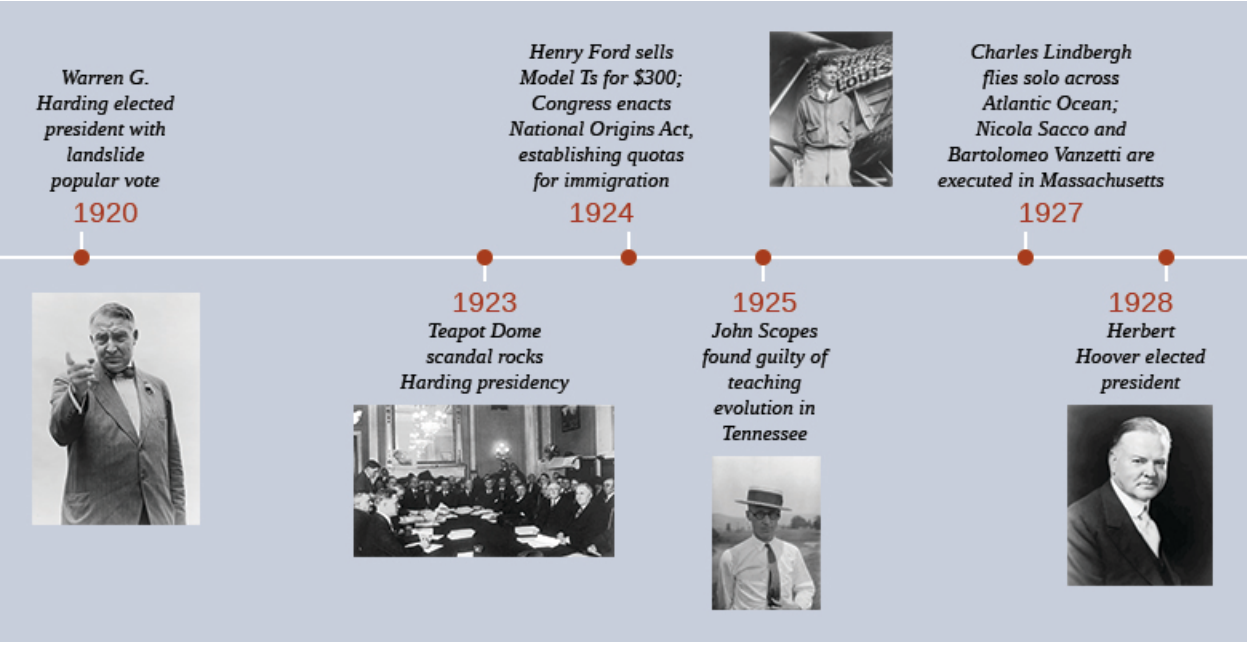


Figure 24.2

box office attraction of his time (**Figure 24.3**).

Figure 24.3 Charlie Chaplin's nickname "The Tramp" came from the recurring character he played in many of his silent films, such as 1921's *The Kid*, which starred Jackie Coogan in the title role.

In 1927, the world of the silent movie began to wane with the New York release of the first "talkie": *The Jazz Singer*. The plot of this film, which starred Al Jolson, told a distinctively American story of the 1920s. It follows the life of a Jewish man from his boyhood days of being groomed to be the cantor at the local synagogue to his life as a famous and "Americanized" jazz singer. Both the story and the new sound technology used to present it were popular with audiences around the country. It quickly became a huge hit for Warner Brothers, one of the "big five" motion picture studios in Hollywood along with Twentieth Century Fox, RKO Pictures, Paramount Pictures, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Southern California in the 1920s, however, had only recently become the center of the American film industry. Film production was originally based in and around New York, where Thomas Edison first debuted the kinetoscope in 1893. But in the 1910s, as major filmmakers like D. W. Griffith looked to escape the cost of Edison's patents on camera equipment, this began to change. When Griffith filmed *In Old California* (1910), the first movie ever shot in **Hollywood**, California, the small town north of Los Angeles was little more than a village. As moviemakers flocked to southern California, not least because of its favorable climate and predictable sunshine, Hollywood swelled with moviemaking activity. By the 1920s, the once-sleepy village was home to a majorly profitable innovative industry in the United States.

AUTOMOBILES AND AIRPLANES: AMERICANS ON THE MOVE

Cinema was not the only major industry to make great technological strides in this decade. The 1920s opened up new possibilities of mobility for a large percentage of the U.S. population, as automobile manufacturers began to mass produce what had once been a luxury item, and daring aviators both demonstrated and drove advancements in aircraft technology. The most significant innovation of this era was Henry Ford's **Model T** Ford, which made car ownership available to the average American.

Ford did not invent the automobile—the Duryea brothers in Massachusetts as well as Gottlieb W. Daimler and Karl Friedrich Benz in Germany were early pioneers. By the early twentieth century, hundreds of car manufacturers existed. However, they all made products that were too expensive for most Americans. Ford's innovation lay in his focus on using mass production to manufacture automobiles; he revolutionized industrial work by perfecting the assembly line, which enabled him to lower the Model T's price from $850 in 1908 to $300 in 1924, making car ownership a real possibility for a large share of the population (**Figure 24.4**). As prices dropped, more and more people could afford to own a car.

Soon, people could buy used Model Ts for as little as five dollars, allowing students and others with low incomes to enjoy the freedom and mobility of car ownership. By 1929, there were over twenty-three million automobiles on American roads.

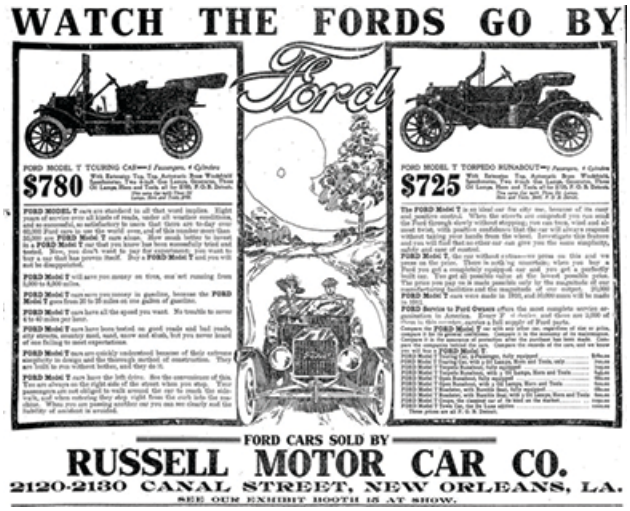


Figure 24.4 This advertisement for Ford's Model T ran in the New Orleans *Times Picayune* in 1911. Note that the prices have not yet dropped far from their initial high of $850.

The assembly line helped Ford reduce labor costs within the production process by moving the product from one team of workers to the next, each of them completing a step so simple they had to be, in Ford's words, "no smarter than an ox" (**Figure 24.5**). Ford's reliance on the **moving assembly line**, scientific management, and time-motion studies added to his emphasis on efficiency over craftsmanship.

Figure 24.5 In this image from a 1928 *Literary Digest* interview with Henry Ford, workers on an assembly line produce new models of Ford automobiles.

Ford's emphasis on cheap mass production brought both benefits and disadvantages to its workers. Ford would not allow his workers to unionize, and the boring, repetitive nature of the assembly line work generated a high turnover rate. However, he doubled workers' pay to five dollars a day and standardized the workday to eight hours (a reduction from the norm). Ford's assembly line also offered greater equality than most opportunities of the time, as he paid white and black workers equally. Seeking these wages, many African Americans from the South moved to Detroit and other large northern cities to work in factories.

Ford even bought a plot of land in the Amazonian jungle twice the size of Delaware to build a factory town he called Fordlandia. Workers there rejected his midwestern Puritanism even more than his factory discipline, and the project ended in an epic failure. In the United States, however, Ford shaped the nation's

mode of industrialism—one that relied on paying decent wages so that workers could afford to be the consumers of their own products.

The automobile changed the face of America, both economically and socially. Industries like glass, steel, and rubber processing expanded to keep up with auto production. The oil industry in California, Oklahoma, and Texas expanded, as Americans' reliance on oil increased and the nation transitioned from a coal-based economy to one driven by petroleum. The need for public roadways required local and state governments to fund a dramatic expansion of infrastructure, which permitted motels and restaurants to spring up and offer new services to millions of newly mobile Americans with cash to spend. With this new infrastructure, new shopping and living patterns emerged, and streetcar suburbs gave way to automobile suburbs as private automobile traffic on public roads began to replace mass transit on trains and trolleys.

The 1920s not only witnessed a transformation in ground transportation but also major changes in air travel. By the mid-1920s, men—as well as some pioneering women like the African American stunt pilot Bessie Coleman (**Figure 24.6**)—had been flying for two decades. But there remained doubts about the suitability of airplanes for long-distance travel. Orville Wright, one of the pioneers of airplane technology in the United States, once famously declared, "No flying machine will ever fly from New York to Paris [because] no known motor can run at the requisite speed for four days without stopping." However, in 1927, this skepticism was finally put to rest when Charles Lindbergh became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, flying from New York to Paris in thirty-three hours (**Figure 24.6**).

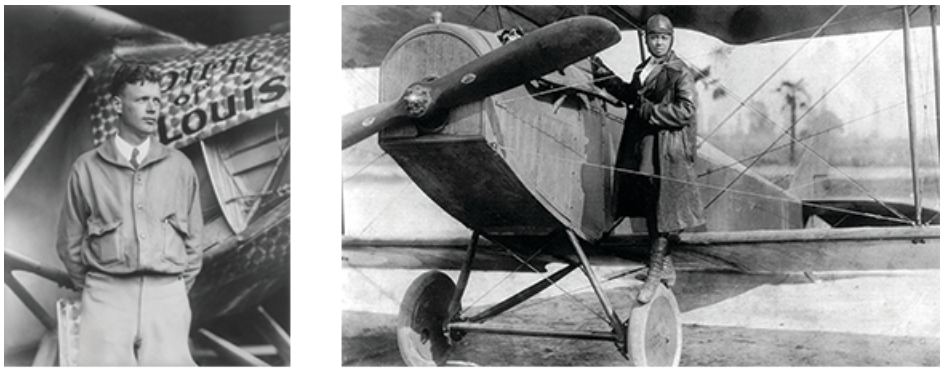


Figure 24.6 Aviator Charles Lindbergh stands in front of the *Spirit of St Louis* (a), the plane in which he flew from New York to Paris, France, in 1927. Because American flight schools barred black students, stunt pilot Bessie Coleman (b), the daughter of Texas sharecroppers, taught herself French to earn her pilot's license overseas.

Lindbergh's flight made him an international hero: the best-known American in the world. On his return, Americans greeted him with a ticker-tape parade—a celebration in which shredded paper thrown from surrounding buildings creates a festive, flurry effect. His flight, which he completed in the monoplane *Spirit of St. Louis*, seemed like a triumph of individualism in modern mass society and exemplified Americans' ability to conquer the air with new technology. Following his success, the small airline industry began to blossom, fully coming into its own in the 1930s, as companies like Boeing and Ford developed airplanes designed specifically for passenger air transport. As technologies in engine and passenger compartment design improved, air travel became more popular. In 1934, the number of U.S. domestic air passengers was just over 450,000 annually. By the end of the decade, that number had increased to nearly two million.

Technological innovation influenced more than just transportation. As access to electricity became more common and the electric motor was made more efficient, inventors began to churn out new and more complex household appliances. Newly developed innovations like radios, phonographs, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and refrigerators emerged on the market during this period. While expensive, new consumer-purchasing innovations like store credit and installment plans made them available to a larger segment of the population. Many of these devices promised to give women—who continued to have

primary responsibility for housework—more opportunities to step out of the home and expand their horizons. Ironically, however, these labor-saving devices tended to increase the workload for women by raising the standards of domestic work. With the aid of these tools, women ended up cleaning more frequently, washing more often, and cooking more elaborate meals rather than gaining spare time.

Despite the fact that the promise of more leisure time went largely unfulfilled, the lure of technology as the gateway to a more relaxed lifestyle endured. This enduring dream was a testament to the influence of another growing industry: advertising. The mass consumption of cars, household appliances, ready-to-wear clothing, and processed foods depended heavily on the work of advertisers. Magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Saturday Evening Post* became vehicles to connect advertisers with middle-class consumers. Colorful and occasionally provocative print advertisements decorated the pages of these publications and became a staple in American popular culture (**Figure 24.7**).

Figure 24.7 This advertisement for Palmolive soap, which appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1922, claimed that the soap's "moderate price is due to popularity, to the enormous demand which keeps Palmolive factories working day and night" and so "the old-time luxury of the few may now be enjoyed the world over."

The form of the advertisements, however, was not new. These colorful print ads were merely the modern incarnations of an advertising strategy that went back to the nineteenth century. The new medium for advertisers in the 1920s, the one that would reach out to consumers in radically new and innovative ways, was radio.

THE POWER OF RADIO AND THE WORLD OF SPORTS

After being introduced during World War I, radios became a common feature in American homes of the 1920s. Hundreds of radio stations popped up over the decade. These stations developed and broadcasted news, serial stories, and political speeches. Much like print media, advertising space was interspersed with entertainment. Yet, unlike magazines and newspapers, advertisers did not have to depend on the active participation of consumers: Advertisers could reach out to anyone within listening distance of the radio. On the other hand, their broader audience meant that they had to be more conservative and careful not to offend anyone.

Click and Explore

Listen to a recording of a **broadcast (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Showboat)** of the "WLS Showboat: "The Floating Palace of Wonder," a variety show from WLS Chicago, a radio station run by Sears Roebuck and Co. What does the clip tell you about the entertainment of the 1920s?

The power of radio further sped up the processes of nationalization and homogenization that were previously begun with the wide distribution of newspapers made possible by railroads and telegraphs. Far more effectively than these print media, however, radio created and pumped out American culture onto the airwaves and into the homes of families around the country. Syndicated radio programs like *Amos 'n' Andy*, which began in the late 1920s, entertained listeners around the country—in the case of the popular *Amos 'n' Andy*, it did so with racial stereotypes about African Americans familiar from minstrel shows of the previous century. No longer were small corners of the country separated by their access to information. With the radio, Americans from coast to coast could listen to exactly the same programming. This had the effect of smoothing out regional differences in dialect, language, music, and even consumer taste.

Radio also transformed how Americans enjoyed sports. The introduction of play-by-play descriptions of sporting events broadcast over the radio brought sports entertainment right into the homes of millions. Radio also helped to popularize sports figures and their accomplishments. Jim Thorpe, who grew up in the Sac and Fox Nation in Oklahoma, was known as one of the best athletes in the world: He medaled in the 1912 Olympic Games, played Major League Baseball, and was one of the founding members of the National Football League. Other sports superstars were soon household names. In 1926, Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel. Helen Wills dominated women's tennis, winning Wimbledon eight times in the late 1920s (**Figure 24.8**), whereas "Big Bill" Tilden won the national singles title every year from 1920 to 1925. In football, Harold "Red" Grange played for the University of Illinois, averaging over ten yards per carry during his college career. The biggest star of all was the "Sultan of Swat," Babe Ruth, who became America's first baseball hero (**Figure 24.8**). He changed the game of baseball from a low-scoring one dominated by pitchers to one where his hitting became famous. By 1923, most pitchers intentionally walked him. In 1924, he hit sixty homeruns.

(a) (b)

Figure 24.8 Babe Ruth (a) led the New York Yankees to four World Series championships. In this 1921 photograph, he stands outside of the New York Yankees dugout. Helen Wills (b) won a total of thirty-one Grand Slam titles in her career, including eight singles titles at Wimbledon from 1927 to 1938. (credit a: modification of work by Library of Congress)

24.2 Transformation and Backlash

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define nativism and analyze the ways in which it affected the politics and society of the 1920s
- Describe the conflict between urban Americans and rural fundamentalists
- Explain the issues in question in the Scopes trial

While prosperous, middle-class Americans found much to celebrate about the new era of leisure and consumption, many Americans—often those in rural areas—disagreed on the meaning of a "good life" and how to achieve it. They reacted to the rapid social changes of modern urban society with a vigorous defense of religious values and a fearful rejection of cultural diversity and equality.

NATIVISM

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, immigration into the United States rocketed to never-before-seen heights. Many of these new immigrants were coming from eastern and southern Europe and, for many English-speaking, native-born Americans of northern European descent, the growing diversity of new languages, customs, and religions triggered anxiety and racial animosity. In reaction, some embraced **nativism**, prizing white Americans with older family trees over more recent immigrants, and rejecting outside influences in favor of their own local customs. Nativists also stoked a sense of fear over the perceived foreign threat, pointing to the anarchist assassinations of the Spanish prime minister in 1897, the Italian king in 1900, and even President William McKinley in 1901 as proof. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in November 1917, the sense of an inevitable foreign or communist threat only grew among those already predisposed to distrust immigrants.

The sense of fear and anxiety over the rising tide of immigration came to a head with the trial of Nicola

Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (**Figure 24.9**). Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian immigrants who were accused of being part of a robbery and murder in Braintree, Massachusetts, in 1920. There was no direct evidence linking them to the crime, but (in addition to being immigrants) both men were anarchists who favored the destruction of the American market-based, capitalistic society through violence. At their trial, the district attorney emphasized Sacco and Vanzetti's radical views, and the jury found them guilty on July 14, 1921. Despite subsequent motions and appeals based on ballistics testing, recanted testimony, and an ex-convict's confession, both men were executed on August 23, 1927.

Figure 24.9 Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco (a) sit in handcuffs at Dedham Superior Court in Massachusetts in 1923. After the verdict in 1921, protesters demonstrated (b) in London, England, hoping to save Sacco and Vanzetti from execution.

Opinions on the trial and judgment tended to divide along nativist-immigrant lines, with immigrants supporting the innocence of the condemned pair. The verdict sparked protests from Italian and other immigrant groups, as well as from noted intellectuals such as writer John Dos Passos, satirist Dorothy Parker, and famed physicist Albert Einstein. Muckraker Upton Sinclair based his indictment of the American justice system, the "documentary novel" *Boston*, on Sacco and Vanzetti's trial, which he considered a gross miscarriage of justice. As the execution neared, the radical labor union Industrial Workers of the World called for a three-day nationwide walkout, leading to the Great Colorado Coal Strike of 1927. Protests occurred worldwide from Tokyo to Buenos Aires to London (**Figure 24.9**).

One of the most articulate critics of the trial was then-Harvard Law School professor Felix Frankfurter, who would go on to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1939. In 1927, six years after the trial, he wrote in *The Atlantic*, "By systematic exploitation of the defendants' alien blood, their imperfect knowledge of English, their unpopular social views, and their opposition to the war, the District Attorney invoked against them a riot of political passion and patriotic sentiment; and the trial judge connived at—one had almost written, cooperated in—the process."

To "preserve the ideal of American homogeneity," the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 introduced numerical limits on European immigration for the first time in U.S. history. These limits were based on a quota system that restricted annual immigration from any given country to 3 percent of the residents from that same country as counted in the 1910 census. The National Origins Act of 1924 went even further, lowering the level to 2 percent of the 1890 census, significantly reducing the share of eligible southern and eastern Europeans, since they had only begun to arrive in the United States in large numbers in the 1890s. Although New York congressmen Fiorello LaGuardia and Emanuel Celler spoke out against the act, there was minimal opposition in Congress, and both labor unions and the Ku Klux Klan supported the bill. When President Coolidge signed it into law, he declared, "America must be kept American."

Click and Explore

The Library of Congress's **immigration collection (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Immigration)** contains information on different immigrant groups, the timelines of their immigration, maps of their settlement routes, and the reasons they came. Click the images on the left navigation bar to learn about each group.

THE KU KLUX KLAN

The concern that a white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon United States was under siege by throngs of undesirables was not exclusively directed at foreigners. The sense that the country was also facing a threat from within its borders and its own citizenry was also prevalent. This sense was clearly reflected in the popularity of the 1915 motion picture, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (**Figure 24.10**). Based on *The Clansman*, a 1915 novel by Thomas Dixon, the film offers a racist, white-centric view of the Reconstruction Era. The film depicts noble white southerners made helpless by northern carpetbaggers who empower freed slaves to abuse white men and violate women. The heroes of the film were the Ku Klux Klan, who saved the whites, the South, and the nation. While the film was reviled by many African Americans and the NAACP for its historical inaccuracies and its maligning of freed slaves, it was celebrated by many whites who accepted the historical revisionism as an accurate portrayal of Reconstruction Era oppression. After viewing the film, President Wilson reportedly remarked, "It is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."

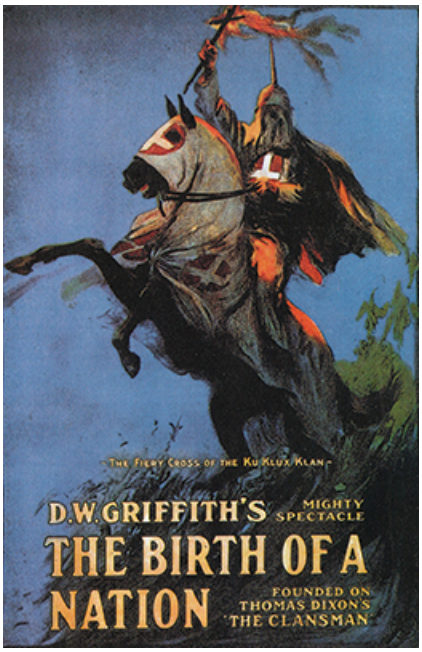


Figure 24.10 A theatrical release poster for *The Birth of a Nation*, in 1915. The film glorified the role of the Ku Klux Klan in quelling the threat of black power during Reconstruction.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

Artistic License and the Censor

In a letter dated April 17, 1915, Mary Childs Nerney, a secretary of the NAACP, wrote to a local censor to request that certain scenes be cut from *The Birth of a Nation*.

> My dear Mr. Packard:
> I am utterly disgusted with the situation in regard to "The Birth of a Nation." As you will read in the next number of the Crisis, we have fought it at every possible point. In spite of the promise of the Mayor [of Chicago] to cut out the two objectionable scenes in the second part, which show a white girl committing suicide to escape from a Negro pursuer, and a mulatto politician trying to force marriage upon the daughter of his white benefactor, these two scenes still form the motif of the really unimportant incidents, of which I enclose a list. I have seen the thing four times and am positive that nothing more will be done about it. Jane Addams saw it when it was in its worst form in New York. I know of no one else from Chicago who saw it. I enclose Miss Addam's opinion.
> When we took the thing before the Police Magistrate he told us that he could do nothing about it unless it [led] to a breach of the peace. Some kind of demonstration began in the Liberty Theatre Wednesday night but the colored people took absolutely no part in it, and the only man arrested was a white man. This, of course, is exactly what Littleton, counsel for the producer, Griffith, held in the Magistrates' Court when we have our hearing and claimed that it might lead to a breach of the peace.
> Frankly, I do not think you can do one single thing. It has been to me a most liberal education and I purposely am through. The harm it is doing the colored people cannot be estimated. I hear echoes of it wherever I go and have no doubt that this was in the mind of the people who are producing it. Their profits here are something like $14,000 a day and their expenses about $400. I have ceased to worry about it, and if I seem disinterested, kindly remember that we have put six weeks of constant effort of this thing and have gotten nowhere.
> Sincerely yours,
> —Mary Childs Nerney, Secretary, NAACP

On what grounds does Nerney request censorship? What efforts to get the movie shut down did she describe?

The Ku Klux Klan, which had been dormant since the end of Reconstruction in 1877, experienced a resurgence of attention following the popularity of the film. Just months after the film's release, a second incarnation of the Klan was established at Stone Mountain, Georgia, under the leadership of William Simmons. This new Klan now publicly eschewed violence and received mainstream support. Its embrace of Protestantism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism, and its appeals for stricter immigration policies, gained the group a level of acceptance by nativists with similar prejudices. The group was not merely a male organization: The ranks of the Klan also included many women, with chapters of its women's auxiliary in locations across the country. These women's groups were active in a number of reform-minded activities, such as advocating for prohibition and the distribution of Bibles at public schools. But they also participated in more expressly Klan activities like burning crosses and the public denunciation of Catholics and Jews (**Figure 24.11**). By 1924, this **Second Ku Klux Klan** had six million members in the South, West, and, particularly, the Midwest—more Americans than there were in the nation's labor unions at the time. While the organization publicly abstained from violence, its member continued to employ intimidation, violence, and terrorism against its victims, particularly in the South.

Figure 24.11 In this 1921 image from the *Denver News*, three Ku Klux Klan members (two women and one man) stand in front of a burning cross.

The Klan's newfound popularity proved to be fairly short-lived. Several states effectively combatted the power and influence of the Klan through anti-masking legislation, that is, laws that barred the wearing of masks publicly. As the organization faced a series of public scandals, such as when the Grand Dragon of Indiana was convicted of murdering a white schoolteacher, prominent citizens became less likely to openly express their support for the group without a shield of anonymity. More importantly, influential people and citizen groups explicitly condemned the Klan. Reinhold Niebuhr, a popular Protestant minister and conservative intellectual in Detroit, admonished the group for its ostensibly Protestant zealotry and anti-Catholicism. Jewish organizations, especially the Anti-Defamation League, which had been founded just a couple of years before the reemergence of the Klan, amplified Jewish discontent at being the focus of Klan attention. And the NAACP, which had actively sought to ban the film *The Birth of a Nation*, worked to lobby congress and educate the public on lynchings. Ultimately, however, it was the Great Depression that put an end to the Klan. As dues-paying members dwindled, the Klan lost its organizational power and sunk into irrelevance until the 1950s.

FAITH, FUNDAMENTALISM, AND SCIENCE

The sense of degeneration that the Klan and anxiety over mass immigration prompted in the minds of many Americans was in part a response to the process of postwar urbanization. Cities were swiftly becoming centers of opportunity, but the growth of cities, especially the growth of immigrant populations in those cities, sharpened rural discontent over the perception of rapid cultural change. As more of the population flocked to cities for jobs and quality of life, many left behind in rural areas felt that their way of life was being threatened. To rural Americans, the ways of the city seemed sinful and profligate. Urbanites, for their part, viewed rural Americans as hayseeds who were hopelessly behind the times.

In this urban/rural conflict, Tennessee lawmakers drew a battle line over the issue of evolution and its contradiction of the accepted, biblical explanation of history. Charles Darwin had first published his theory of natural selection in 1859, and by the 1920s, many standard textbooks contained information about Darwin's theory of evolution. Fundamentalist Protestants targeted evolution as representative of all that was wrong with urban society. Tennessee's Butler Act made it illegal "to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) hoped to challenge the Butler Act as an infringement of the freedom of speech. As a defendant, the ACLU enlisted teacher and coach John Scopes, who suggested that he may have taught evolution while substituting for an ill biology teacher. Town leaders in Dayton,

Tennessee, for their part, sensed an opportunity to promote their town, which had lost more than one-third of its population, and welcomed the ACLU to stage a test case against the Butler Act. The ACLU and the town got their wish as the **Scopes Monkey Trial**, as the newspapers publicized it, quickly turned into a carnival that captured the attention of the country and epitomized the nation's urban/rural divide (**Figure 24.12**).

Figure 24.12 During the Scopes Monkey Trial, supporters of the Butler Act read literature at the headquarters of the Anti-Evolution League in Dayton, Tennessee.

Fundamentalist champion William Jennings Bryan argued the case for the prosecution. Bryan was a three-time presidential candidate and Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of State until 1915, at which point he began preaching across the country about the spread of secularism and the declining role of religion in education. He was known for offering $100 to anyone who would admit to being descended from an ape. Clarence Darrow, a prominent lawyer and outspoken agnostic, led the defense team. His statement that, "Scopes isn't on trial, civilization is on trial. No man's belief will be safe if they win," struck a chord in society.

The outcome of the trial, in which Scopes was found guilty and fined $100, was never really in question, as Scopes himself had confessed to violating the law. Nevertheless, the trial itself proved to be high drama. The drama only escalated when Darrow made the unusual choice of calling Bryan as an expert witness on the Bible. Knowing of Bryan's convictions of a literal interpretation of the Bible, Darrow peppered him with a series of questions designed to ridicule such a belief. The result was that those who approved of the teaching of evolution saw Bryan as foolish, whereas many rural Americans considered the cross-examination an attack on the Bible and their faith.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

H. L. Mencken on the Scopes Trial

H. L. Mencken covered the trial for Baltimore's The Evening Sun. One of most popular writers of social satire of his age, Mencken was very critical of the South, the trial, and especially Bryan. He coined the terms "monkey trial "and "Bible belt." In the excerpt below, Mencken reflects on the trial's outcome and its overall importance for the United States.

> The Scopes trial, from the start, has been carried on in a manner exactly fitted to the anti-evolution law and the simian imbecility under it. There hasn't been the slightest pretense to decorum. The rustic judge, a candidate for re-election, has postured the yokels like a clown in a ten-cent side show, and almost every word he has uttered has been an undisguised appeal to their prejudices and superstitions. The chief prosecuting attorney, beginning like a competent lawyer and a man of self-respect, ended like a convert at a Billy Sunday revival. It fell to him, finally, to make a clear and astounding statement of theory of justice prevailing under fundamentalism. What he said, in brief, was that a man accused of infidelity had no rights whatever under Tennessee law. . . .
>
> Darrow has lost this case. It was lost long before he came to Dayton. But it seems to me that he has nevertheless performed a great public service by fighting it to a finish and in a perfectly serious way. Let no one mistake it for comedy, farcical though it may be in all its details. It serves notice on the country that Neanderthal man is organizing in these forlorn backwaters of the land, led by a fanatic, rid of sense and devoid of conscience. Tennessee, challenging him too timorously and too late, now sees its courts converted into camp meetings and its Bill of Rights made a mock of by its sworn officers of the law. There are other States that had better look to their arsenals before the Hun is at their gates.
>
> —H. L. Mencken, *The Evening Sun*, July 18, 1925

How does Mencken characterize Judge Raulston? About what threat is Mencken warning America?

Indicative of the revival of Protestant fundamentalism and the rejection of evolution among rural and white Americans was the rise of Billy Sunday. As a young man, Sunday had gained fame as a baseball player with exceptional skill and speed. Later, he found even more celebrity as the nation's most revered evangelist, drawing huge crowds at camp meetings around the country. He was one of the most influential evangelists of the time and had access to some of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the country (**Figure 24.13**). Sunday rallied many Americans around "old-time" fundamentalist religion and garnered support for prohibition. Recognizing Sunday's popular appeal, Bryan attempted to bring him to Dayton for the Scopes trial, although Sunday politely refused.

(a) (b)

Figure 24.13 Billy Sunday, one of the most influential evangelists of his day, leaves the White House on February 20, 1922 (a). Aimee Semple McPherson, shown here preaching at the Angelus Temple in 1923 (b), founded the Foursquare Church. (credit a: modification of work by Library of Congress)

Even more spectacular than the rise of Billy Sunday was the popularity of Aimee Semple McPherson, a Canadian Pentecostal preacher whose Foursquare Church in Los Angeles catered to the large community of midwestern transplants and newcomers to California (**Figure 24.13**). Although her message promoted the fundamental truths of the Bible, her style was anything but old fashioned. Dressed in tight-fitting clothes and wearing makeup, she held radio-broadcast services in large venues that resembled concert halls and staged spectacular faith-healing performances. Blending Hollywood style and modern technology with a message of fundamentalist Christianity, McPherson exemplified the contradictions of the decade well before public revelations about her scandalous love affair cost her much of her status and following.

24.3 A New Generation

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the factors that shaped the new morality and the changing role of women in the United States during the 1920s
- Describe the "new Negro" and the influence of the Harlem Renaissance
- Analyze the effects of prohibition on American society and culture
- Describe the character and main authors of the Lost Generation

The 1920s was a time of dramatic change in the United States. Many young people, especially those living in big cities, embraced a new morality that was much more permissive than that of previous generations. They listened to jazz music, especially in the nightclubs of Harlem. Although prohibition outlawed alcohol, criminal bootlegging and importing businesses thrived. The decade was not a pleasure cruise for everyone, however; in the wake of the Great War, many were left awaiting the promise of a new generation.

A NEW MORALITY

Many Americans were disillusioned in the post-World War I era, and their reactions took many forms. Rebellious American youth, in particular, adjusted to the changes by embracing a **new morality** that was far more permissive than the social mores of their parents. Many young women of the era shed their mother's morality and adopted the dress and mannerisms of a **flapper**, the Jazz Age female stereotype, seeking the endless party. Flappers wore shorter skirts, shorter hair, and more makeup, and they drank and smoked with the boys (**Figure 24.14**). Flappers' dresses emphasized straight lines from the shoulders to the knees, minimizing breasts and curves while highlighting legs and ankles. The male equivalent of a flapper was a "sheik," although that term has not remained as strong in the American vernacular. At the time, however, many of these fads became a type of conformity, especially among college-aged youths, with the signature bob haircut of the flapper becoming almost universal—in both the United States and overseas.

Figure 24.14 The flapper look, seen here in "Flapper" by Ellen Pyle for the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* in February 1922, was a national craze in American cities during the 1920s.

As men and women pushed social and cultural boundaries in the Jazz Age, sexual mores changed and social customs grew more permissive. "Petting parties" or "necking parties" became the rage on college campuses. Psychologist Sigmund Freud and British "sexologist" Havelock Ellis emphasized that sex was a natural and pleasurable part of the human experience. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, launched an information campaign on birth control to give women a choice in the realm in which suffrage had changed little—the family. The popularization of contraception and the private space that the automobile offered to teenagers and unwed couples also contributed to changes in sexual behavior.

Flappers and sheiks also took their cues from the high-flying romances they saw on movie screens and confessions in movie magazines of immorality on movie sets. Movie posters promised: "Brilliant men, beautiful jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, petting parties in the purple dawn, all ending in one terrific smashing climax that makes you gasp." And "neckers, petters, white kisses, red kisses, pleasure-mad daughters, sensation-craving mothers . . . the truth: bold, naked, sensational."

Click and Explore

Could you go “on a toot” with flappers and sheiks? Improve your chances with this **collection (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15JazzSlang)** of Jazz Age slang.

New dances and new music—especially jazz—also characterized the Jazz Age. Born out of the African American community, jazz was a uniquely American music. The innovative sound emerged from a number of different communities and from a number of different musical traditions such as blues and ragtime. By the 1920s, jazz had spread from African American clubs in New Orleans and Chicago to reach greater popularity in New York and abroad. One New York jazz establishment, the Cotton Club, became particularly famous and attracted large audiences of hip, young, and white flappers and sheiks to see black entertainers play jazz (**Figure 24.15**).

Figure 24.15 Black jazz bands such as the King and Carter Jazzing Orchestra, photographed in 1921 by Robert Runyon, were immensely popular among white urbanites in the 1920s.

THE “NEW WOMAN”

The Jazz Age and the proliferation of the flapper lifestyle of the 1920s should not be seen merely as the product of postwar disillusionment and newfound prosperity. Rather, the search for new styles of dress and new forms of entertainment like jazz was part of a larger women’s rights movement. The early 1920s, especially with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteeing full voting rights to women, was a period that witnessed the expansion of women’s political power. The public flaunting of social and sexual norms by flappers represented an attempt to match gains in political equality with gains in the social sphere. Women were increasingly leaving the Victorian era norms of the previous generation behind, as they broadened the concept of women’s liberation to include new forms of social expression such as dance, fashion, women’s clubs, and forays into college and the professions.

Nor did the struggle for women’s rights through the promotion and passage of legislation cease in the 1920s. In 1921, Congress passed the Promotion of the Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy Act, also known as the Sheppard-Towner Act, which earmarked $1.25 million for well-baby clinics and educational programs, as well as nursing. This funding dramatically reduced the rate of infant mortality.

Two years later, in 1923, Alice Paul drafted and promoted an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that promised to end all sex discrimination by guaranteeing that "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction."

Yet, ironically, at precisely the time when the Progressive movement was achieving its long-sought-after goals, the movement itself was losing steam and the Progressive Era was coming to a close. As the heat of Progressive politics grew less intense, voter participation from both sexes declined over the course of the 1920s. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, many women believed that they had accomplished their goals and dropped out of the movement. As a result, the proposed ERA stalled (the ERA eventually passed Congress almost fifty years later in 1972, but then failed to win ratification by a sufficient number of states), and, by the end of the 1920s, Congress even allowed funding for the Sheppard-Towner Act to lapse.

The growing lethargy toward women's rights was happening at a time when an increasing number of women were working for wages in the U.S. economy—not only in domestic service, but in retail, healthcare and education, offices, and manufacturing. Beginning in the 1920s, women's participation in the labor force increased steadily. However, most were paid less than men for the same type of work based on the rationale that they did not have to support a family. While the employment of single and unmarried women had largely won social acceptance, married women often suffered the stigma that they were working for pin money—frivolous additional discretionary income.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND THE NEW NEGRO

It wasn't only women who found new forms of expression in the 1920s. African Americans were also expanding their horizons and embracing the concept of the "new Negro." The decade witnessed the continued Great Migration of African Americans to the North, with over half a million fleeing the strict Jim Crow laws of the South. Life in the northern states, as many African Americans discovered, was hardly free of discrimination and segregation. Even without Jim Crow, businesses, property owners, employers, and private citizens typically practiced *de facto* segregation, which could be quite stifling and oppressive. Nonetheless, many southern blacks continued to move north into segregated neighborhoods that were already bursting at the seams, because the North, at the very least, offered two tickets toward black progress: schools and the vote. The black population of New York City doubled during the decade. As a result, Harlem, a neighborhood at the northern end of Manhattan, became a center for Afro-centric art, music, poetry, and politics. Political expression in the Harlem of the 1920s ran the gamut, as some leaders advocated a return to Africa, while others fought for inclusion and integration.

Revived by the wartime migration and fired up by the white violence of the postwar riots, urban blacks developed a strong cultural expression in the 1920s that came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. In this rediscovery of black culture, African American artists and writers formulated an independent black culture and encouraged racial pride, rejecting any emulation of white American culture. Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die" called on African Americans to start fighting back in the wake of the Red Summer riots of 1919 (discussed in a previous chapter, **Figure 24.16**). Langston Hughes, often nicknamed the "poet laureate" of the movement, invoked sacrifice and the just cause of civil rights in "The Colored Soldier," while another author of the movement, Zora Neale Hurston, celebrated the life and dialect of rural blacks in a fictional, all-black town in Florida. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was only published posthumously in 1937.

Figure 24.16 The Jamaican-born poet and novelist Claude McKay articulated the new sense of self and urban community of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance. Although centered in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, this cultural movement emerged in urban centers throughout the Northeast and Midwest.

The new Negro found political expression in a political ideology that celebrated African Americans distinct national identity. This **Negro nationalism**, as some referred to it, proposed that African Americans had a distinct and separate national heritage that should inspire pride and a sense of community. An early proponent of such nationalism was W. E. B. Du Bois. One of the founders of the NAACP, a brilliant writer and scholar, and the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, Du Bois openly rejected assumptions of white supremacy. His conception of Negro nationalism encouraged Africans to work together in support of their own interests, promoted the elevation of black literature and cultural expression, and, most famously, embraced the African continent as the true homeland of all ethnic Africans—a concept known as Pan-Africanism.

Taking Negro nationalism to a new level was Marcus Garvey. Like many black Americans, the Jamaican immigrant had become utterly disillusioned with the prospect of overcoming white racism in the United States in the wake of the postwar riots and promoted a "Back to Africa" movement. To return African Americans to a presumably more welcoming home in Africa, Garvey founded the Black Star Steamship Line. He also started the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which attracted thousands of primarily lower-income working people. UNIA members wore colorful uniforms and promoted the doctrine of a "negritude" that reversed the color hierarchy of white supremacy, prizing blackness and identifying light skin as a mark of inferiority. Intellectual leaders like Du Bois, whose lighter skin put him low on Garvey's social order, considered the UNIA leader a charlatan. Garvey was eventually imprisoned for mail fraud and then deported, but his legacy set the stage for Malcolm X and the Black Power movement of the 1960s.

PROHIBITION

At precisely the same time that African Americans and women were experimenting with new forms of social expression, the country as a whole was undergoing a process of austere and dramatic social reform in the form of alcohol prohibition. After decades of organizing to reduce or end the consumption of alcohol in the United States, temperance groups and the Anti-Saloon League finally succeeded in pushing through the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which banned the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors (**Figure 24.17**). The law proved difficult to enforce, as illegal alcohol soon poured in from Canada and the Caribbean, and rural Americans resorted to home-brewed "moonshine." The result

was an eroding of respect for law and order, as many people continued to drink illegal liquor. Rather than bringing about an age of sobriety, as Progressive reformers had hoped, it gave rise to a new subculture that included illegal importers, interstate smuggling (or **bootlegging**), clandestine saloons referred to as "speakeasies," hipflasks, cocktail parties, and the organized crime of trafficking liquor.

(a) (b)

Figure 24.17 While forces of law and order confiscated and discarded alcohol when they found it (a), consumers found ingenious ways of hiding liquor during prohibition, such as this cane that served as a flask (b).

Prohibition also revealed deep political divisions in the nation. The Democratic Party found itself deeply divided between urban, northern "wets" who hated the idea of abstinence, and rural, southern "dries" who favored the amendment. This divided the party and opened the door for the Republican Party to gain ascendancy in the 1920s. All politicians, including Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Robert La Follette, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, equivocated in their support for the law. Publicly, they catered to the Anti-Saloon League; however, they failed to provide funding for enforcement.

Prohibition sparked a rise in organized crime. "Scarface" Al Capone (**Figure 24.18**) ran an extensive bootlegging and criminal operation known as the Chicago Outfit or Chicago mafia. By 1927, Capone's organization included a number of illegal activities including bootlegging, prostitution, gambling, loan sharking, and even murder. His operation was earning him more than $100 million annually, and many local police were on his payroll. Although he did not have a monopoly on crime, his organizational structure was better than many other criminals of his era. His liquor trafficking business and his Chicago soup kitchens during the Great Depression led some Americans to liken Capone to a modern-day Robin Hood. Still, Capone was eventually imprisoned for eleven years for tax evasion, including a stint in California's notorious Alcatraz prison.

Figure 24.18 Al Capone, pictured here in his U.S. Department of Justice mug shot, was convicted of tax fraud and sent to prison in 1931.

THE LOST GENERATION

As the country struggled with the effects and side-effects of prohibition, many young intellectuals endeavored to come to grips with a lingering sense of disillusionment. World War I, fundamentalism, and the Red Scare—a pervasive American fear of Communist infiltrators prompted by the success of the Bolshevik Revolution—all left their mark on these intellectuals. Known as the **Lost Generation**, writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Edith Wharton, and John Dos Passos expressed their hopelessness and despair by skewering the middle class in their work. They felt alienated from society, so they tried to escape (some literally) to criticize it. Many lived an **expatriate** life in Paris for the decade, although others went to Rome or Berlin.

The Lost Generation writer that best exemplifies the mood of the 1920s was F. Scott Fitzgerald, now considered one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. His debut novel, *This Side of Paradise*, describes a generation of youth "grown up to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken." *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, exposed the doom that always follows the fun, fast-lived life. Fitzgerald depicted the modern millionaire Jay Gatsby living a profligate life: unscrupulous, coarse, and in love with another man's wife. Both Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda lived this life as well, squandering the money he made from his writing.

MY STORY

F. Scott Fitzgerald on the 1920s

In the 1920s, Fitzgerald was one of the most celebrated authors of his day, publishing *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, and *The Great Gatsby* in quick succession. However, his profligate lifestyle with his wife Zelda sapped their funds, and Fitzgerald had to struggle to maintain their lavish lifestyle. Below is an excerpt from "The Crack-Up," a personal essay by Fitzgerald originally published in *Esquire* in which he describes his "good life" during the 1920s.

> It seemed a romantic business to be a successful literary man—you were not ever going to be as famous as a movie star but what note you had was probably longer-lived; you were never going to have the power of a man of strong political or religious convictions but you were certainly more independent. Of course within the practice of your trade you were forever unsatisfied—but I, for one, would not have chosen any other.
>
> As the Twenties passed, with my own twenties marching a little ahead of them, my two juvenile regrets—at not being big enough (or good enough) to play football in college, and at not getting overseas during the war—resolved themselves into childish waking dreams of imaginary heroism that were good enough to go to sleep on in restless nights. The big problems of life seemed to solve themselves, and if the business of fixing them was difficult, it made one too tired to think of more general problems.
>
> —F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up," 1936

How does Fitzgerald describe his life in the 1920s? How did his interpretation reflect the reality of the decade?

Equally idiosyncratic and disillusioned was writer Ernest Hemingway (**Figure 24.19**). He lived a peripatetic and adventurous lifestyle in Europe, Cuba, and Africa, working as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I and traveling to Spain in the 1930s to cover the civil war there. His experiences of war and tragedy stuck with him, emerging in colorful scenes in his novels *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). In 1952, his novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, won the Pulitzer Prize. Two years later, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature for this book and his overall influence on contemporary style.

Figure 24.19 Ernest Hemingway was one of the most prominent members of the Lost Generation who went to live as expatriates in Europe during the 1920s.

Click and Explore

Listen to an **audio (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Hemingway)** of Hemingway's Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Not all Lost Generation writers were like Fitzgerald or Hemingway. The writing of Sinclair Lewis, rather than expressing a defined disillusionment, was more influenced by the Progressivism of the previous generation. In *Babbitt* (1922), he examined the "sheep following the herd" mentality that conformity promoted. He satirized American middle-class life as pleasure seeking and mindless. Similarly, writer Edith Wharton celebrated life in old New York, a vanished society, in *The Age of Innocence*, in 1920. Wharton came from a very wealthy, socialite family in New York, where she was educated by tutors and never attended college. She lived for many years in Europe; during the Great War, she worked in Paris helping women establish businesses.

24.4 Republican Ascendancy: Politics in the 1920s

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss Warren G. Harding's strengths and weaknesses as president
- Explain how Calvin Coolidge was able to defeat the Democratic Party
- Explain what Calvin Coolidge meant by "the business of America is business"

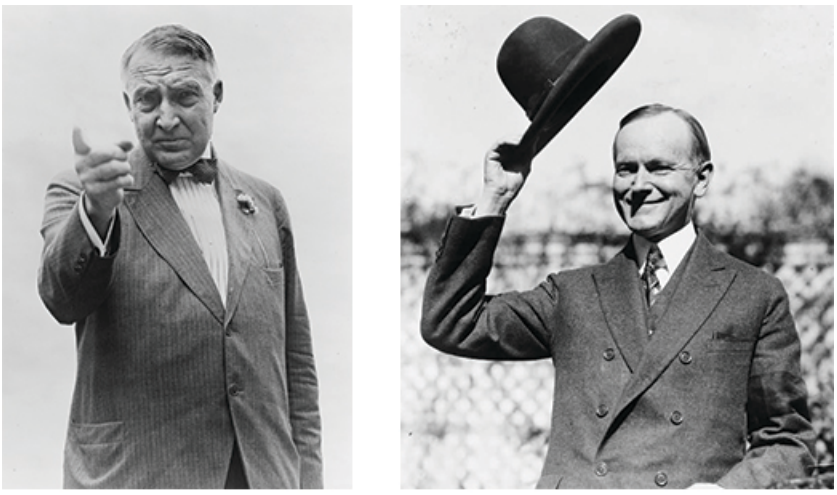
The election of 1920 saw the weakening of the Democratic Party. The death of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson's ill health meant the passing of a generation of Progressive leaders. The waning of the Red Scare took with it the last vestiges of Progressive zeal, and Wilson's support of the League of Nations turned Irish and German immigrants against the Democrats. Americans were tired of reform, tired of witch hunts, and were more than ready for a return to "normalcy."

Above all, the 1920s signaled a return to a pro-business government—almost a return to the laissez-faire politics of the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century. Calvin Coolidge's statement that "the chief business of the American people is business," often rendered as "the business of America is business" became the dominant attitude.

WARREN HARDING AND THE RETURN TO NORMALCY

In the election of 1920, professional Republicans were eager to nominate a man whom they could manage and control. Warren G. Harding, a senator from Ohio, represented just such a man (**Figure 24.20**). Before his nomination, Harding stated, "America's present need is not heroics but healing; not nostrums but normalcy; not revolution but restoration." Harding was genial and affable, but not everyone appreciated his speeches; Democratic presidential-hopeful William Gibbs McAdoo described Harding's speeches as "an army of pompous phrases moving across the landscape in search of an idea." H. L. Mencken, the great social critic of the 1920s, wrote of Harding's speaking, "It drags itself out of the dark abysm of pish, and crawls insanely up to the top-most pinnacle of posh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash."

Harding was known for enjoying golf, alcohol, and poker (not necessarily in that order). Although his critics depicted him as weak, lazy, or incompetent, he was actually quite shrewd and politically astute. Together with his running mate, Calvin Coolidge, the governor of Massachusetts, they attracted the votes of many Americans who sought Harding's promised **return to normalcy**. In the election, Harding defeated Governor James Cox of Ohio by the greatest majority in the history of two-party politics: 61 percent of the popular vote.



(a) (b)

Figure 24.20 Warren Harding (a) poses on the campaign trail in 1920. His running mate, Calvin Coolidge (b), would go on to become president in 1923, when Harding died suddenly while touring the United States.

Harding's cabinet reflected his pro-business agenda. Herbert Hoover, a millionaire mechanical engineer and miner, became his Secretary of Commerce. Hoover had served as head of the relief effort for Belgium during World War I and helped to feed those in Russia and Germany after the war ended. He was a very effective administrator, seeking to limit inefficiency in the government and promoting partnerships between government and businesses. Harding's Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, was also a pro-business multimillionaire with a fortune built in banking and aluminum. Even more so than Hoover, Mellon entered public service with a strong sense that government should run as efficiently as any business, famously writing that "the Government is just a business, and can and should be run on business principles."

Consistent with his principles of running government with business-like efficiency, Harding proposed and signed into law tax rate cuts as well as the country's first formal budgeting process, which created a presidential budget director and required that the president submit an annual budget to Congress. These policies helped to reduce the debt that the United States had incurred during World War I. However, as Europe began to recover, U.S. exports to the continent dwindled. In an effort to protect U.S. agriculture and other businesses threatened by lower-priced imports, Harding pushed through the Emergency Tariff of 1921. This defensive tariff had the effect of increasing American purchasing power, although it also inflated the prices of many goods.

In the area of foreign policy, Harding worked to preserve the peace through international cooperation and the reduction of armaments around the world. Despite the refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, Harding was able to work with Germany and Austria to secure a formal peace. He convened a conference in Washington that brought world leaders together to agree on reducing the threat of future wars by reducing armaments. Out of these negotiations came a number of treaties designed to foster cooperation in the Far East, reduce the size of navies around the world, and establish guidelines for submarine usage. These agreements ultimately fell apart in the 1930s, as the world descended into war again. But, at the time, they were seen as a promising path to maintaining the peace.

Despite these developments, the Harding administration has gone down in history as one that was especially ridden with scandal. While Harding was personally honest, he surrounded himself with politicians who weren't. Harding made the mistake of often turning to unscrupulous advisors or even his "Ohio Gang" of drinking and poker buddies for advice and guidance. And, as he himself recognized, this group tended to cause him grief. "I have no trouble with my enemies," he once commented. "I can take care of my enemies in a fight. But my friends, my goddamned friends, they're the ones who keep me walking the floor at nights!"

The scandals mounted quickly. From 1920 to 1923, Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall was involved in a scam that became known as the **Teapot Dome scandal**. Fall had leased navy reserves in Teapot Dome, Wyoming, and two other sites in California to private oil companies without opening the bidding to other companies. In exchange, the companies gave him $300,000 in cash and bonds, as well as a herd of cattle for his ranch. Fall was convicted of accepting bribes from the oil companies; he was fined $100,000 and sentenced to a year in prison. It was the first time that a cabinet official had received such a sentence.

In 1923, Harding also learned that the head of the Veterans' Bureau, Colonel Charles Forbes, had absconded with most of the $250 million set aside for extravagant bureau functions. Harding allowed Forbes to resign and leave the country; however, after the president died, Forbes returned and was tried, convicted, and sentenced to two years in Leavenworth prison.

Although the Harding presidency had a number of large successes and variety of dark scandals, it ended before the first term was up. In July 1923, while traveling in Seattle, the president suffered a heart attack. On August 2, in his weakened condition, he suffered a stroke and died in San Francisco, leaving the presidency to his vice president, Calvin Coolidge. As for Harding, few presidents were so deeply mourned by the populace. His kindly nature and ability to poke fun at himself endeared him to the public.

Click and Explore

Listen to some of **Harding's speeches (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Harding)** at The University of Virginia's Miller Center's website.

A MAN OF FEW WORDS

Coolidge ended the scandals, but did little beyond that. Walter Lippman wrote in 1926 that "Mr. Coolidge's genius for inactivity is developed to a very high point. It is a grim, determined, alert inactivity, which keeps Mr. Coolidge occupied constantly."

Coolidge had a strong belief in the Puritan work ethic: Work hard, save your money, keep your mouth shut and listen, and good things will happen to you. Known as "Silent Cal," his clean image seemed capable of cleaning up scandals left by Harding. Republicans—and the nation—now had a president who combined a preference for normalcy with the respectability and honesty that was absent from the Harding administration.

Coolidge's first term was devoted to eliminating the taint of scandal that Harding had brought to the White House. Domestically, Coolidge adhered to the creed: "The business of America is business." He stood in awe of Andrew Mellon and followed his fiscal policies, which made him the only president to turn a legitimate profit in the White House. Coolidge believed the rich were worthy of their property and that poverty was the wage of sin. Most importantly, Coolidge believed that since only the rich best understood

their own interests, the government should let businessmen handle their own affairs with as little federal intervention as possible. Coolidge was quoted as saying, "The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there worships there."

Thus, silence and inactivity became the dominant characteristics of the Coolidge presidency. Coolidge's legendary reserve was famous in Washington society. Contemporaries told a possibly apocryphal story of how, at a dinner party at the White House, a woman bet her friends that she could get Coolidge to say more than three words. He looked at her and said, "you lose."

The 1924 election saw Coolidge win easily over the divided Democrats, who fought over their nomination. Southerners wanted to nominate pro-prohibition, pro-Klan, anti-immigrant candidate William G. McAdoo. The eastern establishment wanted Alfred E. Smith, a Catholic, urban, and anti-prohibition candidate. After many battles, they compromised on corporation lawyer John W. Davis. Midwesterner Robert M. La Follette, promoted by farmers, socialists, and labor unions, attempted to resurrect the Progressive Party. Coolidge easily beat both candidates.

THE ELECTION OF 1928

This cultural battle between the forces of reaction and rebellion appeared to culminate with the election of 1928, the height of Republican ascendancy. On August 2, 1927, Coolidge announced that he would not be participating in the 1928 election; "I choose not to run," was his comment (**Figure 24.21**). Republicans promoted the heir apparent, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. The Democrats nominated Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York. Smith represented everything that small-town, rural America hated: He was Irish, Catholic, anti-prohibition, and a big-city politician. He was very flamboyant and outspoken, which also did not go over well with many Americans.

Figure 24.21 In this cartoon, Clifford Berryman lampoons Coolidge's laid-back attitude as he chooses "not to run" in 1928.

Republican prosperity carried the day once again, and Hoover won easily with twenty-one million votes over Al Smith's fifteen million. The stock market continued to rise, and prosperity was the watchword of the day. Many Americans who had not done so before invested in the market, believing that the prosperous times would continue.

As Hoover came into office, Americans had every reason to believe that prosperity would continue forever. In less than a year, however, the bubble would burst, and a harsh reality would take its place.

Key Terms

bootlegging a nineteenth-century term for the illegal transport of alcoholic beverages that became popular during prohibition

expatriate someone who lives outside of their home country

flapper a young, modern woman who embraced the new morality and fashions of the Jazz Age

Hollywood a small town north of Los Angeles, California, whose reliable sunshine and cheaper production costs attracted filmmakers and producers starting in the 1910s; by the 1920s, Hollywood was the center of American movie production with five movie studios dominating the industry

Lost Generation a group of writers who came of age during World War I and expressed their disillusionment with the era

Model T the first car produced by the Ford Motor Company that took advantage of the economies of scale provided by assembly-line production and was therefore affordable to a large segment of the population

moving assembly line a manufacturing process that allowed workers to stay in one place as the work came to them

nativism the rejection of outside influences in favor of local or native customs

Negro nationalism the notion that African Americans had a distinct and separate national heritage that should inspire pride and a sense of community

new morality the more permissive mores adopted my many young people in the 1920s

return to normalcy the campaign promise made by Warren Harding in the presidential election of 1920

Scopes Monkey Trial the 1925 trial of John Scopes for teaching evolution in a public school; the trial highlighted the conflict between rural traditionalists and modern urbanites

Second Ku Klux Klan unlike the secret terror group of the Reconstruction Era, the Second Ku Klux Klan was a nationwide movement that expressed racism, nativism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism

Teapot Dome scandal the bribery scandal involving Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall in 1923

Summary

24.1 Prosperity and the Production of Popular Entertainment

For many middle-class Americans, the 1920s was a decade of unprecedented prosperity. Rising earnings generated more disposable income for the consumption of entertainment, leisure, and consumer goods. This new wealth coincided with and fueled technological innovations, resulting in the booming popularity of entertainments like movies, sports, and radio programs. Henry Ford's advances in assembly-line efficiency created a truly affordable automobile, making car ownership a possibility for many Americans. Advertising became as big an industry as the manufactured goods that advertisers represented, and many families relied on new forms of credit to increase their consumption levels and strive for a new American standard of living.

24.2 Transformation and Backlash
The old and the new came into sharp conflict in the 1920s. In many cases, this divide was geographic as well as philosophical; city dwellers tended to embrace the cultural changes of the era, whereas those who lived in rural towns clung to traditional norms. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial in Massachusetts, as well as the Scopes trial in Tennessee, revealed many Americans' fears and suspicions about immigrants, radical politics, and the ways in which new scientific theories might challenge traditional Christian beliefs. Some reacted more zealously than others, leading to the inception of nativist and fundamentalist philosophies, and the rise of terror groups such as the Second Ku Klux Klan.

24.3 A New Generation
Different groups reacted to the upheavals of the 1920s in different ways. Some people, especially young urbanites, embraced the new amusements and social venues of the decade. Women found new opportunities for professional and political advancement, as well as new models of sexual liberation; however, the women's rights movement began to wane with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. For black artists of the Harlem Renaissance, the decade was marked less by leisure and consumption than by creativity and purpose. African American leaders like Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois responded to the retrenched racism of the time with different campaigns for civil rights and black empowerment. Others, like the writers of the Lost Generation, reveled in exposing the hypocrisies and shallowness of mainstream middle-class culture. Meanwhile, the passage of prohibition served to increase the illegal production of alcohol and led to a rise in organized crime.

24.4 Republican Ascendancy: Politics in the 1920s
After World War I, Americans were ready for "a return to normalcy," and Republican Warren Harding offered them just that. Under the guidance of his big-business backers, Harding's policies supported businesses at home and isolation from foreign affairs. His administration was wracked by scandals, and after he died in 1923, Calvin Coolidge continued his policy legacy in much the same vein. Herbert Hoover, elected as Coolidge's heir apparent, planned for more of the same until the stock market crash ended a decade of Republican ascendancy.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following films released in 1927 was the first successful talking motion picture?
A. *The Clansman*
B. *The Great Gatsby*
C. *The Jazz Singer*
D. *The Birth of a Nation*

2. The popularization of _____ expanded the communications and sports industries.
A. radios
B. talkies
C. the Model T
D. airplanes

3. Who was the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean?
A. Orville Wright
B. Jim Thorpe
C. Charlie Chaplin
D. Charles Lindbergh

4. How did Henry Ford transform the automobile industry?

5. The Scopes Monkey Trial revolved around a law that banned teaching about _____ in public schools.
A. the Bible
B. Darwinism
C. primates
D. Protestantism

6. Which man was both a professional baseball player and an influential evangelist during the 1920s?

A. Babe Ruth
B. H. L. Mencken
C. Jim Thorpe
D. Billy Sunday

7. What was the platform of the Second Ku Klux Klan, and in what activities did they engage to promote it?

8. The popularization of which psychologist's ideas encouraged the new morality of the 1920s?

A. Sigmund Freud
B. Alice Paul
C. W. E. B. Du Bois
D. Margaret Sanger

9. Which amendment did Alice Paul promote to end gender discrimination?

A. Prohibition Amendment
B. Equal Rights Amendment
C. Sheppard-Towner Amendment
D. Free Exercise Amendment

10. Which novel of the era satirized the conformity of the American middle class?

A. *This Side of Paradise*
B. *The Sun Also Rises*
C. *A Farewell to Arms*
D. *Babbitt*

11. Why did the prohibition amendment fail after its adoption in 1919?

12. What was the Harlem Renaissance, and who were some of the most famous participants?

13. Who was the Republican presidential nominee for the 1920 election?

A. Calvin Coolidge
B. Woodrow Wilson
C. Warren Harding
D. James Cox

14. In 1929, Albert Fall was convicted of bribery while holding the position of _____.

A. Secretary of the Interior
B. head of the Veterans' Bureau
C. Secretary of the Treasury
D. Secretary of Commerce

15. Coolidge's presidency was characterized by _____.

A. scandal and dishonesty
B. silence and inactivity
C. flamboyancy and extravagance
D. ambition and greed

16. What was the economic outlook of the average American when Herbert Hoover took office in 1929?

Critical Thinking Questions

17. Explain how the 1920s was a decade of contradictions. What does the relationship between mass immigration and the rise of the Second Ku Klux Klan tell us about American attitudes? How might we reconcile the decade as the period of both the flapper and prohibition?

18. What new opportunities did the 1920s provide for women and African Americans? What new limitations did this era impose?

19. Discuss what the concept of "modernity" meant in the 1920s. How did art and innovation in the decade reflect the new mood of the postwar era?

20. Explain how technology took American culture in new and different directions. What role did motion pictures and radio play in shaping cultural attitudes in the United States?

21. Discuss how politics of the 1920s reflected the new postwar mood of the country. What did the Harding administration's policies attempt to achieve, and how?