
32

American Life in the "Roaring Twenties," 1919-1929

PART I: Reviewing the Chapter

A. Checklist of Learning Objectives

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. analyze the movement toward social conservatism following World War I.
2. describe the cultural conflicts over such issues as prohibition and evolution.
3. discuss the rise of the mass-consumption economy, led by the automobile industry.
4. describe the cultural revolution brought about by radio, films, and changing sexual standards.
5. explain how new ideas and values were reflected and promoted in the American literary renaissance of the 1920s.
6. explain how the era's cultural changes affected women and African-Americans.

B. Glossary

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms.

1. **syndicalism** A theory or movement that advocates bringing all economic and political power into the hands of labor unions by means of strikes. ". . . a number of legislatures . . . passed criminal syndicalism laws." (p. 729)
2. **Bible Belt** The region of the American South, extending roughly from North Carolina west to Oklahoma and Texas, where Protestant Fundamentalism and belief in literal interpretation of the Bible have traditionally been strongest. ". . . the Klan spread with astonishing rapidity, especially in the Midwest and the 'Bible Belt' South." (p. 730)
3. **provincial** Narrow and limited; isolated from cosmopolitan influences. "Isolationist America of the 1920s, ingrown and provincial, had little use for the immigrants. . . ." (p. 730)
4. **racketeer** A person who obtains money illegally by fraud, bootlegging, gambling, or threats of violence. "Racketeers even invaded the ranks of local labor unions. . . ." (pp. 736-737)
5. **underworld** Those who live outside society's laws, by vice or crime. ". . . the annual 'take' of the underworld was estimated to be from \$12 billion to \$18 billion. . . ." (p. 737)
6. **credit** In business, the arrangement of purchasing goods or services immediately but making the payment at a later date. "Buying on credit was another innovative feature of the postwar economy." (p. 739)
7. **installment plan** A credit system by which goods already acquired are paid for in a series of payments at specified intervals. ". . . encouraged by tempting installment-plan buying, countless Americans with shallow purses acquired the habit of riding as they paid." (p. 741)
8. **magnate** An influential person in a large-scale enterprise. ". . . an outraged public forced the screen magnates to set up their own rigorous code of censorship." (pp. 744-745)

9. **repression** In psychology, the forcing of instincts or ideas painful to the conscious mind into the unconscious, where they continue to exercise influence. "The Viennese physician appeared to argue that sexual repression was responsible for a variety of nervous and emotional ills." (p. 746)
10. **charismatic** Concerning the personal magnetism or appeal of a leader for his or her followers; literally, "gift of grace." "Harlem in the 1920s also spawned a charismatic political leader, Marcus Garvey." (p. 748)
11. **functionalism** The theory that a plan or design should be derived from practical purpose. "Architecture also married itself to the new materialism and functionalism." (p. 750)
12. **surtax** A special tax, usually involving a raised rate on an already existing tax. "... Congress ... abolish[ed] the surtax, the income tax, and estate taxes." (p. 752)

PART II: Checking Your Progress

A. True-False

Where the statement is true, mark T. Where it is false, mark F, and correct it in the space immediately below.

- ___ 1. The "red scare" of 1919–1920 led the U.S. government to threaten military assault on the Communist government of Russia.
- ___ 2. The Sacco-Vanzetti case aroused liberal and radical protest because of alleged prejudice by the judge and jury against the atheistic immigrant defendants.
- ___ 3. The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was strongest in the East and the West.
- ___ 4. The Immigration Act of 1924 reflected nativist prejudice against the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.
- ___ 5. The Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act were frequently violated, especially by big-city dwellers and immigrants.
- ___ 6. The Scopes trial verdict acquitted biology teacher Scopes and overturned the Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the schools.
- ___ 7. The 1920s saw a shift from heavy industrial production toward a mass-consumption economy.
- ___ 8. Henry Ford's great economic achievement was the production of a cheap, reliable, mass-produced automobile.
- ___ 9. The automobile's large social and cultural effects in such areas as family life and gender relations were comparable to its economic importance.
- ___ 10. The radio and film industries initially emphasized non-commercial and public service uses of the mass media.
- ___ 11. The 1920s saw attempts to restore stricter standards of sexual behavior, especially for women.

- ___ 12. Jazz was initially pioneered by blacks but was eventually taken up and promoted by whites.
- ___ 13. The center of black literacy and cultural achievement in the 1920s was Atlanta, Georgia.
- ___ 14. The most prominent writers of the 1920s upheld the moral virtues of small-town American life against the critical attitudes and moral questioning of the big cities.
- ___ 15. The real estate and stock market booms of the 1920s included large elements of speculation and excessive credit risk.

B. Multiple Choice

Select the best answer and write the proper letter in the space provided.

- ___ 1. The "red scare" of the early 1920s was initially set off by
- the Sacco-Vanzetti case.
 - the rise of the radical Industrial Workers of the World.
 - the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.
 - an influx of radical immigrants.
- ___ 2. Besides attacking minorities like Catholics, blacks, and Jews, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s opposed contemporary cultural and social changes such as
- evolution and birth control.
 - prohibition and higher education.
 - automobiles and airplanes.
 - patriotism and immigration restriction.
- ___ 3. The quota system established for immigration in the 1920s was based partly on the idea that
- America could accept the refugees created by war and revolution in Europe.
 - immigrants from northern and western Europe were superior to those from southern and eastern Europe.
 - immigration from Europe would be largely replaced by immigration from Asia.
 - priority in immigration would be based on family relations, profession, and education.
- ___ 4. The concentration of many American ethnic groups in separate neighborhoods with their own distinct institutions, cultures, and values meant that
- English was no longer the dominant language in the United States.
 - the United States was intolerant of ethnic differences.
 - Catholics and Jews had a political base from which to gain the presidency.
 - it was almost impossible to organize the American working class across ethnic and religious lines.
- ___ 5. One clear result of prohibition was
- a rise in criminal organizations that supplied illegal liquor.
 - an improvement in family relations and the general moral tone of society.
 - a turn from alcohol to other forms of substance abuse.
 - the rise of voluntary self-help organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous.

- ___ 6. The American city where gangsterism flourished most blatantly in the 1920s was
- New York City.
 - Harlem.
 - Chicago.
 - New Orleans.
- ___ 7. The essential issue in the Scopes trial was whether
- scientists ought to be allowed to investigate the biological origins of humanity.
 - the teachings of Darwin could be reconciled with those of religion.
 - Darwinian evolutionary science could be taught in the public schools.
 - Fundamentalist Protestantism could be taught in the public schools.
- ___ 8. The most highly acclaimed industrial innovator of the new mass-production economy was
- Babe Ruth.
 - Bruce Barton.
 - Ransom E. Olds.
 - Henry Ford.
- ___ 9. Two major American industries that benefited economically from the widespread use of the automobile were
- plastics and synthetic fibers.
 - rubber and petroleum.
 - textiles and leather.
 - electronics and aluminum.
- ___ 10. One of the primary *social* effects of the new automobile age was
- a weakening of traditional family ties between parents and youth.
 - a strengthening of intergenerational ties among parents, children, and grandchildren.
 - a tightening of restrictions on women.
 - a closing of the gap between the working class and the wealthy.
- ___ 11. Radio and the movies both had the cultural effect of
- increasing Americans' interest in history and literature.
 - increasing mass standardization and weakening traditional forms of culture.
 - undermining the tendency of industry toward big business and mass production.
 - encouraging creativity and cultural independence among the people.
- ___ 12. In the 1920s, the major changes pursued by American women were
- voting rights and political equality.
 - economic equality and equal pay for equal work.
 - social reform and family welfare.
 - cultural freedom and expanded sexual experience.
- ___ 13. The primary achievement of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association was
- its promotion of black jazz and blues.
 - its positive impact on black racial pride.
 - its economic development program in Harlem.
 - its transportation of numerous blacks to Liberia.

- ___ 14. The literary figure who promoted many new writers of the 1920s in his magazine, *The American Mercury*, was
- H. L. Mencken.
 - W. C. Handy.
 - F. Scott Fitzgerald.
 - Henry Adams.
- ___ 15. Many of the prominent new writers of the 1920s were
- fascinated by their historical roots in old New England.
 - disgusted with European domination of American culture.
 - interested especially in nature and social reform.
 - highly critical of traditional American "Puritanism" and small-town life.

C. Identification

Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

- _____ 1. The movement of 1919–1920, spawned by fear of Bolshevik revolution, that resulted in the arrest and deportation of many political radicals
- _____ 2. Hooded defenders of Anglo-Saxon and "Protestant" values against immigrants, Catholics, and Jews
- _____ 3. Restrictive legislation of 1924 that reduced the number of newcomers to the United States and discriminated against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe
- _____ 4. New constitutional provision, popular in the Midwest and South, that encouraged lawbreaking and gangsterism in big cities
- _____ 5. Term for area of the South where traditional evangelical and Fundamentalist religion remained strong
- _____ 6. Legal battle over teaching evolution that pitted modern science against Fundamentalist religion
- _____ 7. New industry spawned by the mass-consumption economy that encouraged still more consumption
- _____ 8. Henry Ford's cheap, mass-produced automobile
- _____ 9. Invented in 1903 and first used primarily for stunts and mail carrying
- _____ 10. One of the few new consumer products of the 1920s that encouraged people to stay at home rather than pulling them away from home and family
- _____ 11. Feminist Margaret Sanger's cause that contributed to changing sexual behaviors, especially for women
- _____ 12. Syncopated style of music created by blacks that attained national popularity in the 1920s
- _____ 13. Marcus Garvey's self-help organization that proposed leading blacks to Africa.
- _____ 14. H. L. Mencken's monthly magazine that led the literary attack on traditional moral values, the middle class, and "Puritanism"
- _____ 15. The New York institution in which continuously rising prices and profits were fueled by speculation in the 1920s

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

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|---|--|
| ___ 1. A. Mitchell Palmer | A. The "Poet Laureate" of Harlem and author of <i>The Weary Blues</i> |
| ___ 2. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti | B. Innovative writer whose novels reflected the disillusionment of many Americans with propaganda and patriotic idealism |
| ___ 3. Al Capone | C. Italian-American anarchists whose trial and execution aroused widespread protest |
| ___ 4. John Dewey | D. Mechanical genius and organizer of the mass-produced automobile industry |
| ___ 5. William Jennings Bryan | E. U.S. attorney general who rounded up thousands of alleged Bolsheviks in the red scare of 1919-1920 |
| ___ 6. Henry Ford | F. Baltimore writer who criticized the supposedly narrow and hypocritical values of American society |
| ___ 7. Bruce Barton | G. Top gangster of the 1920s, eventually convicted of income-tax evasion |
| ___ 8. Langston Hughes | H. Former presidential candidate who led the fight against evolution at the 1925 Scopes trial |
| ___ 9. Charles A. Lindbergh | I. U. S. treasury secretary who attempted to promote business investment by reducing taxes on the rich |
| ___ 10. Marcus Garvey | J. A leader of the advertising industry and author of a new interpretation on Christ in <i>The Man Nobody Knows</i> |
| ___ 11. Sigmund Freud | K. Viennese psychologist whose writings were interpreted by Americans as a call for sexual liberation and gratification |
| ___ 12. H. L. Mencken | L. Leading American philosopher and proponent of "progressive education" |
| ___ 13. F. Scott Fitzgerald | M. Humble aviation pioneer who became a cultural hero of the 1920s |
| ___ 14. Ernest Hemingway | N. Minnesota-born writer whose novels were especially popular with young people in the 1920s |
| ___ 15. Andrew Mellon | O. Jamaican-born leader who enhanced African-American pride despite his failed migration plans |

E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.

- ___ The trial of a Tennessee high-school biology teacher symbolizes a national conflict over values of religion and science.
- ___ Fear of the Bolshevik revolution sparks a crusade against radicals and Communists in America.
- ___ A modest young man becomes a national hero by accomplishing a bold feat of aviation.
- ___ Two Italian immigrants are convicted of murder and robbery, provoking charges of prejudice against the judge and jury.
- ___ A new immigration law tightens up earlier emergency restrictions and imposes discriminatory quotas against the "New Immigrants."

F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

Cause	Effect
___ 1. American fear of Bolshevism	A. Caused the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the imposition of immigration restrictions
___ 2. Nativist American fear of immigrants and Catholics	B. Caused many influential writers of the 1920s to criticize traditional values and search for new moral standards
___ 3. Prohibition	C. Caused the red scare and the deportation of foreign radicals
___ 4. The automobile industry	D. Enabled many ordinary citizens to join in a speculative Wall Street boom
___ 5. The radio	E. Stimulated highway construction, petroleum production, and other related industries
___ 6. Rising prosperity, new technologies, and the ideas of Sigmund Freud	F. Helped stimulate mass attention to sports and entertainment while spreading the reach of advertising
___ 7. Resentment against conventional small-town morality	G. Reduced the tax burden on the wealthy and contributed to the stock-market boom
___ 8. The economic boom of the 1920s	H. Greatly raised the incomes and living standards of many Americans
___ 9. The ability to buy stocks with only a small down payment	I. Created a new atmosphere of sexual frankness and liberation, especially among the young
___ 10. Andrew Mellon's tax policies	J. Helped spawn "bootlegging" and large-scale organized crime

G. Developing Historical Skills**Understanding Cultural Developments in Historical Context**

The first part of this chapter describes the major social and economic changes of the 1920s. The second part describes the cultural developments that also occurred in the 1920s. Since the artists, writers, and others who produced the culture and ideas of the period were living amidst these very same social changes, your knowledge of the historical context can help you understand why they created the kind of works they did.

Answer the following questions.

1. In what ways were the "movies," for all their glamour, similar to the automobile industry as developed by Henry Ford?
2. How did new technological and economic innovations like the automobile (pp. 739–742) and social changes like urbanization help bring about the cultural liberation of women?

3. In what ways did the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (pp. 749–750) or musical developments like jazz (p. 746–747) especially appeal to people living amid the social and economic changes of the 1920s? Did these cultural developments simply mirror existing politics and society, or were they in some ways a challenge to them?

4. Why were writers like H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis, and Sherwood Anderson so harshly critical of American rural and small-town life in their work? Why would writers with such attitudes have been unlikely to succeed in any period before the 1920s?

PART III: Applying What You Have Learned

1. How and why did America turn toward domestic isolation and social conservatism in the 1920s?
2. How was the diverse American "melting pot" affected by the political and cultural changes of the 1920s? (Include both white ethnic groups and blacks in your discussion.)
3. How did some of the events of the 1920s reflect national conflicts over social, cultural, and religious values?
4. How did the automobile and other new products create a mass-consumption economy in the 1920s?
5. How did the new films, literature, and music of the 1920s affect Americans' values in areas of religion, sexuality, and family life? Were African-American cultural developments fundamentally different, or were they part of the *same* cultural movement?
6. In what ways were the twenties a social and cultural reaction against the progressive idealism that held sway before and during World War I? (See Chapters 29, 30, and 31.)