

# 22

## CHAPTER

# Cultural Conflict, Bubble, and Bust 1919–1932

### CONFLICTED LEGACIES OF WORLD WAR I

- Racial Strife
- Erosion of Labor Rights
- The Red Scare

### POLITICS IN THE 1920s

- Women in Politics
- Republicans and Business
- Dollar Diplomacy
- Culture Wars

### INTELLECTUAL MODERNISM

- Harlem in Vogue
- Critiquing American Life

### FROM BOOM TO BUST

- The Postwar Economy
- Consumer Culture
- The Coming of the Great Depression

Rising to fame in *The Sheik* (1922), Rudolph Valentino became a controversial Hollywood star. Calling him “dark, darling, and delightful,” female fans mobbed his appearances. In Chicago, Mexican American boys slicked back their hair and called each other “sheik.” But some Anglo men said they loathed Valentino. One reviewer claimed the star had stolen his style from female “vamps” and ridiculed him for wearing a bracelet (a gift from his wife). The *Chicago Tribune* blamed Valentino for the rise of “effeminate men,” shown by the popularity of “floppy pants and slave bracelets.” Outraged, Valentino challenged the journalist to a fight—and defeated the writer’s stand-in.

Valentino, an Italian immigrant, upset racial and ethnic boundaries. Nicknamed the Latin Lover, he played among other roles a Spanish bullfighter and the son of a maharajah. When a reporter called his character in *The Sheik* a “savage,” Valentino retorted, “People are not savages because they have dark skins. The Arab civilization is one of the oldest in the world.”

But to many American-born Protestants, movies were morally dangerous—“vile and atrocious,” one women’s group declared. The appeal of “dark” stars like Valentino and his predecessor, Japanese American actor Sessue Hayakawa, was part of the problem. Hollywood became a focal point for political conflict as the nation took a sharp right turn. A year before *The Sheik* appeared, the Reverend Wilbur Crafts published a widely reprinted article warning of “Jewish Supremacy in Film.” He accused “Hebrew” Hollywood executives of “gross immorality” and claimed they were racially incapable of understanding “the prevailing standards of the American people.” These were not fringe views. Crafts’s editorial first appeared in a newspaper owned by prominent auto-maker Henry Ford.

Critics, though, failed to slow Hollywood’s success. Faced with threats of regulation, movie-makers did what other big businesses did in the 1920s: they used their clout to block government intervention. At the same time, they expanded into world markets; when Valentino visited Paris, he was swarmed by thousands of French fans. *The Sheik* highlighted America’s business success and its political and cultural divides. Young urban audiences, including women “flappers,” were eager to challenge older sexual and religious mores. Rural Protestants saw American values going down the drain. In Washington, meanwhile, Republican leaders abandoned two decades of reform and deferred to business. Americans wanted prosperity, not progressivism—until the consequences arrived in the shock of the Great Depression.

### IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

What conflicts in culture and politics arose in the 1920s, and how did economic developments in that decade help cause the Great Depression?

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# Life

HUNDRED PER CENT-AMERICAN NUMBER



**Celebrating the Fourth of July, 1926** This *Life* magazine cover celebrates two famous symbols of the 1920s: jazz music and the “flapper,” in her droopy tights and scandalously short skirt, who loves to dance to its rhythms. The flags at the top record the latest slang expressions, including “so’s your old man” and “step on it” (“it” being the accelerator of an automobile, in a decade when cars were America’s hottest commodity). The bottom of the picture also added a note of protest: while July 4, 1926, marked the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, *Life* says that Americans have had only “one hundred and forty-three years of liberty” — followed by “seven years of Prohibition.”

Picture Research Consultants & Archives.



## Conflicted Legacies of World War I

“The World War has accentuated all our differences,” a journalist observed in 1919. “It has not created those differences, but it has revealed and emphasized them.” In the war’s immediate aftermath, thousands of strikes revealed continuing labor tensions. Violent riots exposed white resistance to the rising expectations of African Americans, while an obsessive hunt for “foreign” radicals—like angry denunciations of Hollywood’s Latin Lover—showed that ethnic pluralism would not win easy acceptance.

### Racial Strife

African Americans emerged from World War I determined to achieve citizenship rights. Millions had loyally supported the war effort; 350,000 had served in uniform. At the same time, the Great Migration drew hundreds of thousands from the South to northern industrial cities, where they secured good wartime jobs and found they could vote and use their new economic

clout to build community institutions and work for racial justice. The black man, one observer wrote, “realized that he was part and parcel of the great army of democracy. . . . With this realization came the consciousness of pride in himself as a man, and an American citizen.”

These developments sparked white violence. In the South, the number of lynchings rose from 48 in 1917 to 78 in 1919, including several murders of returning black soldiers in their military uniforms. In 1921, after a brutal lynching in the railroad town of Rosewood, Florida, black residents armed for self-defense; mobs of furious whites responded by torching houses and hunting down African Americans. Police and state authorities refused to intervene. The town of Rosewood vanished from the map.

In northern and midwestern cities, the arrival of southern migrants deepened existing racial tensions. Blacks competed with whites—including recent immigrants—for scarce housing and jobs. Unionized white workers resented blacks who served as strikebreakers. Racism turned such conflicts into violent confrontations. Attacks on African Americans broke out in more than twenty-five cities. One of the deadliest riots



### Chicago Race Riot

When racial violence exploded in Chicago during the summer of 1919, *Chicago Evening Post* photographer Jun Fujita was on the scene to capture it. As one of the few Japanese immigrants in Chicago at the time, Fujita was probably no stranger to racism, and it took personal courage to put himself in the midst of the escalating violence. When the riot finally ended, thirty-eight people were dead and more than five hundred were injured. Chicago Historical Society/Photo by Jun Fujita.

occurred in 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois, where nine whites and more than forty blacks died. Chicago endured five days of rioting in July 1919. By September, the national death toll from racial violence reached 120.

The oil boomtown of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the site of a horrific incident in June 1921. Sensational, false reports of an alleged rape helped incite white mobs who resented growing black prosperity. Anger focused on the 8,000 residents of Tulsa's prosperous Greenwood district, locally known as "the black Wall Street." The mob—helped by National Guardsmen, who arrested blacks who resisted—burned thirty-five blocks of Greenwood and killed several dozen people. The city's leading paper acknowledged that "semi-organized bands of white men systematically applied the torch, while others shot on sight men of color." It took a decade for black residents to rebuild Greenwood.

## Erosion of Labor Rights

African Americans were not the only ones who faced challenges to their hard-won gains. The war effort, overseen by a Democratic administration sympathetic to labor, had temporarily increased the size and power of labor unions. The National War Labor Board had instituted a series of prolabor measures, including recognition of workers' right to organize. Membership in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) grew by a third during World War I, reaching more than 3 million by war's end, and continued to climb afterward. Workers' expectations also rose as the war economy brought higher pay and better working conditions.

But when workers tried to maintain these standards after the war, employers cut wages and rooted out unions, prompting massive confrontations. In 1919, more than four million wage laborers—one in every five—went on strike, a proportion never since equaled. A walkout of shipyard workers in Seattle sparked a general strike that shut down the city. Another strike disrupted the steel industry, as 350,000 workers demanded union recognition and an end to twelve-hour shifts. Elbert H. Gary, head of United States Steel Corporation, refused to negotiate; he hired Mexican and African American replacements and broke the strike. Meanwhile, business leaders in rising industries, such as automobile manufacturing, resisted unions, creating more and more nonunionized jobs.

Public employees fared no better. Late in 1919, Boston's police force demanded a union and went on strike to get it. Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge won national fame by declaring, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere,



**Fear of "Bolshevism," 1919**

This cartoon from the *Post Dispatch* in Cleveland, Ohio, reflects nationwide panic over the general strike by 110 unions that paralyzed Seattle in February 1919. Opponents of radical labor unrest had a deeper fear: the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, resulting in creation of the USSR, had brought into existence the world's first enduring communist state. By crushing unions in Seattle with a club of "Law and Order," this image suggests that Uncle Sam could beat back the global communist threat. This aspect of the 1919 Red Scare prefigured, at an early date, the anxieties of the Cold War era. Ohio Historical Society.

anytime." Coolidge fired the entire police force; the strike failed. A majority of the public supported the governor. Republicans rewarded Coolidge by nominating him for the vice-presidency in 1920.

Antilabor decisions by the Supreme Court were an additional key factor in unions' decline. In *Coronado Coal Company v. United Mine Workers* (1925), the Court ruled that a striking union could be penalized for illegal restraint of trade. The Court also struck down federal legislation regulating child labor; in *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* (1923), it voided a minimum wage for women

## PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

What factors contributed to antiblack violence, labor defeats, and the Red Scare, and what connections might we draw among these events?



workers in the District of Columbia, reversing many of the gains that had been achieved through the groundbreaking decision in *Muller v. Oregon* (Chapter 20). Such decisions, along with aggressive antiunion campaigns, caused membership in labor unions to fall from 5.1 million in 1920 to 3.6 million in 1929—just 10 percent of the nonagricultural workforce.

In place of unions, the 1920s marked the heyday of **welfare capitalism**, a system of labor relations that stressed management's responsibility for employees' well-being. Automaker Henry Ford, among others, pioneered this system before World War I, famously paying \$5 a day. Ford also offered a profit-sharing plan to employees who met the standards of its Social Department, which investigated to ensure that workers' private lives met the company's moral standards. At a time when government unemployment compensation and Social Security did not exist, General Electric and U.S. Steel provided health insurance and old-age pensions. Other employers, like Chicago's Western Electric Company, built athletic facilities and selectively offered paid vacations. Employers hoped this would build a loyal workforce and head off labor unrest. But such plans covered only about 5 percent of the industrial workforce. Facing new financial pressures in the 1920s, even Henry Ford cut back his \$5 day. In the tangible benefits it offered workers, welfare capitalism had serious limitations.

## The Red Scare

Many well-off Americans sided with management in the upheavals of the postwar years. They blamed workers for the rapidly rising cost of living, which jumped nearly 80 percent between 1917 and 1919. The socialist views of some recent immigrants frightened native-born citizens; communism terrified them. When in 1919 the Soviet Union's new Bolshevik leaders founded the Third International, intended to foster revolutions abroad, some Americans began to fear that dangerous radicals were hiding everywhere. Wartime hatred of Germans was replaced by hostility toward Bolsheviks (labeled "Reds," after the color of communist flags). Ironically, American communists remained few in number and had little political influence. Of the 50 million adults in the United States in 1920, no more than 70,000 belonged to either the fledgling U.S. Communist Party or the Communist Labor Party.

In April 1919, alert postal workers discovered and defused thirty-four mail bombs addressed to government officials. In June, a bomb detonated outside the Washington town house of recently appointed attorney



**The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti, by Ben Shahn, 1931–1932**

Ben Shahn (1898–1969) came to the United States from Lithuania as a child and achieved fame as a social realist painter and photographer. Shahn used his art to advance his belief in social justice. In this painting, Sacco and Vanzetti lie dead and pale, hovered over by three distinguished Massachusetts citizens. These grim-faced men—holding lilies, a symbol of death—are Harvard University president A. Lawrence Lowell and the two other members of a commission appointed by the governor in 1927 to review the case. The commission concluded that the men were guilty, a finding that led to their execution. Judge Webster Thayer, who presided at the original trial in 1921, stands in the window in the background.

*The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* by Ben Shahn (1931–1932)

Art © Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Photo © Geoffrey Clements.

general A. Mitchell Palmer. Palmer escaped unharmed, but he used the incident to fan public fears, precipitating a hysterical **Red Scare**. With President Woodrow Wilson incapacitated by stroke, Palmer had a free

hand. He set up an antiradicalism division in the Justice Department and appointed his assistant J. Edgar Hoover to direct it; shortly afterward, it became the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In November 1919, Palmer's agents stormed the headquarters of radical organizations. The dragnet captured thousands of aliens who had committed no crimes but who held anarchist or revolutionary beliefs. Lacking the protection of U.S. citizenship, many were deported without indictment or trial.

The **Palmer raids** peaked on a notorious night in January 1920, when federal agents invaded homes and meeting halls, arrested six thousand citizens and aliens, and denied the prisoners access to legal counsel. Then Palmer, who had presidential ambitions, overreached. He predicted that on May 1 a radical conspiracy would attempt to overthrow the U.S. government. State militia and police went on twenty-four-hour alert to guard against the alleged threat, but not a single incident occurred. As the summer of 1920 passed without major strikes or renewed bombings, the Red Scare began to abate.

Like other postwar legacies, however, antiradicalism had broad, long-lasting effects. In May 1920, at the height of the Red Scare, police arrested Nicola Sacco, a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler, for the murder of two men during a robbery of a shoe company in South Braintree, Massachusetts. Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian aliens and self-proclaimed anarchists who had evaded the draft. Convicted of the murders, Sacco and Vanzetti sat in jail for six years while supporters appealed their verdicts. In 1927, Judge Webster Thayer denied a motion for a new trial and sentenced them to death. Scholars still debate their guilt or innocence. But the case was clearly biased by prosecutors' emphasis on their ties to radical groups. The execution of Sacco and Vanzetti was one of the ugly scars left by the ethnic and political hostilities of the Great War.

## Politics in the 1920s

As the plight of labor suggested, the 1920s were a tough decade for progressives who had gained ground before World War I. After a few early reform victories, including achievement of national women's suffrage, the dominant motif of the 1920s was limited government. Native-born white Protestants rallied against what they saw as big-city values and advocated such goals as immigration restriction. A series of Republican presidents placed responsibility for the nation's well-being

in the hands of business. President Calvin Coolidge declared, "The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there worships there." The same theme prevailed in continued U.S. interventions in Latin America and elsewhere: American business needs were the top priority.

## Women in Politics

At the start of the 1920s, many progressives hoped the attainment of women's voting rights would offer new leverage to tackle poverty. They created organizations like the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, a Washington-based advocacy group. The committee's greatest accomplishment was the first federally funded health-care legislation, the **Sheppard-Towner Federal Maternity and Infancy Act** (1921). Sheppard-Towner provided federal funds for medical clinics, prenatal education programs, and visiting nurses. Though opponents warned that the act would lead to socialized medicine, Sheppard-Towner improved health care for the poor and significantly lowered infant mortality rates. It also marked the first time that Congress designated federal funds for the states to encourage them to administer a social welfare program.

In 1923, Alice Paul, founder of the National Woman's Party, also persuaded congressional allies to consider an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution. It stated simply, "men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States." Advocates were hopeful; Wisconsin had passed a similar law two years earlier, and it helped women fight gender discrimination. But opponents pointed out that the ERA would threaten recent labor laws that protected women from workplace abuses. Such laws recognized women's vulnerable place in a heavily sex-segregated labor market. Would a theoretical statement of "equality" help poor and working women more than existing protections did? This question divided women's rights advocates. Introduced repeatedly in Congress over the next five decades but rarely making it out of committee, the ERA was debated again and again until the bitter ratification struggle of the 1970s (Chapter 29).

Horried at the suffering caused by World War I, some women joined a growing international peace movement. While diplomats conducted negotiations at Versailles, women peace advocates from around the

### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

Before World War I, women didn't have full voting rights, but they had considerable success as reformers. After the war they *could* vote, but their proposals met defeat. How might we account for this apparent contradiction?



### The League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters was the brainchild of Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Formed in 1920, as the Nineteenth Amendment was about to give women the vote, the league undertook to educate Americans in responsible citizenship and to win enactment of legislation favorable to women. The league helped secure passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, which provided federal aid for maternal and child-care programs. In the 1930s, members campaigned for the enactment of Social Security and other social welfare legislation.

The Library of Virginia

world convened in Zurich and called on all nations to use their resources to end hunger and promote human welfare. Treaty negotiators ignored them, but the women organized for sustained activism. In 1919, they created the **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom** (WILPF), whose leading American members included Jane Addams. Members of the league denounced imperialism, stressed the human suffering caused by militarism, and proposed social justice measures.

Such women faced serious opposition. The WILPF came under fierce attack during the Red Scare because it included socialist women in its ranks. And though women proved to be effective lobbyists, they had difficulty gaining access to positions inside the Republican and Democratic parties. Finding that women did not vote as a bloc, politicians in both parties began to take their votes for granted. New reforms failed to gain support, and others were rolled back. Many congressmen, for example, had supported the Sheppard-Towner Act because they feared the voting power of women, but Congress ended the program in the late 1920s.

## Republicans and Business

With President Wilson ailing in 1920, Democrats nominated Ohio governor James M. Cox for president, on a platform calling for U.S. participation in the League of Nations and continuation of Wilson's progressivism. Republicans, led by their probusiness wing, tapped genial Ohio senator Warren G. Harding. In a dig at Wilson's idealism, Harding promised "not nostrums but normalcy." On election day, he won in a landslide, beginning an era of Republican dominance that lasted until 1932.

Harding's most energetic appointee was Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, well known as head of the wartime Food Administration. Under Hoover's direction, the Commerce Department helped create two thousand trade associations representing companies in almost every major industry. Government officials worked closely with the associations, providing statistical research, suggesting industry-wide standards, and promoting stable prices and wages. Hoover hoped that through voluntary business cooperation with government—an **associated state**—he could achieve what progressives had sought through governmental regulation. This meant, of course, giving corporate leaders greater policymaking power.

More sinister links between government and corporate interests were soon revealed. When President Harding died suddenly of a heart attack in August 1923, evidence was just emerging that parts of his administration were riddled with corruption. The worst scandal concerned secret leasing of government oil reserves in **Teapot Dome**, Wyoming, and Elk Hills, California, to private companies. Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall was eventually convicted of taking \$300,000 in bribes and became the first cabinet officer in U.S. history to serve a prison sentence.

Vice President Calvin Coolidge became president upon Harding's death. He maintained Republican



dominance while offering, with his austere Yankee morality, a contrast to his predecessor's cronyism. Campaigning for election in his own right in 1924, Coolidge called for limited government and tax cuts for business. Rural and urban Democrats, deeply divided over such issues as prohibition and immigration restriction, deadlocked at their national convention; after 102 ballots, delegates finally nominated John W. Davis, a Wall Street lawyer. Coolidge easily defeated Davis and staved off a challenge from Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, who tried to resuscitate the Progressive Party. The 1924 Progressive platform called for stronger government regulation at home and international efforts to reduce weapons production and prevent war. "Free men of every generation," it declared, "must combat the renewed efforts of organized force and greed." In the end, Coolidge received 15.7 million votes to Davis's 8.4 million and La Follette's 4.9 million.



To see a longer excerpt of the Progressive Party platform, along with other primary sources from this period, see *Sources for America's History*.

For the most part, Republicans dropped progressive initiatives of the prewar years. The Federal Trade Commission failed to enforce antitrust laws. The Supreme Court, now headed by former Republican president William Howard Taft, refused to break up the mammoth U.S. Steel Corporation, despite evidence of its near-monopoly status. With the agricultural sector facing hardship, Congress sought to aid farmers with the McNary-Haugen bills of 1927 and 1928, which proposed a system of federal price supports for major crops. But President Coolidge opposed the bills as "special-interest legislation" and vetoed them both. While some state and municipal leaders continued to pursue ambitious agendas, they were shut out of federal power.

## Dollar Diplomacy

Political campaigns emphasized domestic issues in the 1920s, but while the United States refused to join the League of Nations, the federal government remained deeply engaged in foreign affairs. Republican presidents worked to advance U.S. business interests, especially by encouraging private banks to make foreign loans — part of the broader government-business alliance in Republicans' associated state. Policymakers hoped loans would stimulate growth and increase demand for U.S. products in developing markets. Bankers, though, wanted

government guarantees of repayment in countries they perceived as weak or unstable.

Officials provided such assurance. In 1922, for example, when American banks offered an immense loan to Bolivia (at a hefty profit), State Department officials pressured the South American nation to accept it. Diplomats also forced Bolivia to agree to financial oversight by a commission under the banks' control. A similar arrangement was reached with El Salvador's government in 1923. In other cases, the United States intervened militarily, often to force repayment of debt. To implement such policies, the U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua almost continuously from 1912 to 1933, the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924, and Haiti from 1915 to 1934.

In these lengthy military deployments, Americans came to think of the occupied countries as essentially U.S. possessions, much like Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Sensational memoirs by marines who had served in Haiti popularized the island as the "American Africa." White Americans became fascinated by *vodou* (voodoo) and other Haitian religious customs, reinforcing their view of Haitians as dangerous savages or childlike people who needed U.S. guidance and supervision. One commander testified that his troops saw themselves as "trustees of a huge estate that belonged to minors. . . . The Haitians were our wards."

At home, critics denounced loan guarantees and military interventions as **dollar diplomacy**. The term was coined in 1924 by Samuel Guy Inman, a Disciples of Christ missionary who toured U.S.-occupied Haiti and the Dominican Republic. "The United States," Inman declared, "cannot go on destroying with impunity the sovereignty of other peoples, however weak." African American leaders also denounced the Haitian occupation. On behalf of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, a delegation conducted a fact-finding tour of Haiti in 1926. Their report exposed, among other things, the sexual exploitation of Haitian women by U.S. soldiers.

By the late 1920s, dollar diplomacy was on the defensive, in keeping with a broader disgust over international affairs. At the same time, political leaders became frustrated with their poor results. Dollar diplomacy usually managed to get loans repaid, securing bankers' profits. But the loans

## COMPARE AND CONTRAST

What choices did Americans face in the elections of 1920 and 1924, and what directions did they choose?

## PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

What were the economic goals of U.S. foreign policymakers in the 1920s?



often ended up in the pockets of local elites; U.S. policies failed to build broad-based prosperity overseas. Military intervention had even worse results. In Haiti, for example, the marines crushed peasant protests and helped the Haitian elite consolidate power. U.S. occupation thus helped create the conditions for harsh dictatorships that Haitians endured through the rest of the twentieth century.

## Culture Wars

By 1929, ninety-three U.S. cities had populations of more than 100,000. New York City's population exceeded 7 million; Los Angeles's had exploded to 1.2 million. The lives and beliefs of urban Americans often differed dramatically from those in small towns and farming areas. Native-born rural Protestants, faced with a dire perceived threat, rallied in the 1920s to protect what they saw as American values.

**Prohibition** Rural and native-born Protestants started the decade with the achievement of a longtime goal: national **prohibition** of liquor (Chapter 18). Wartime anti-German prejudice was a major spur. Since breweries like Pabst and Anheuser-Busch were owned by German Americans, many citizens decided it was unpatriotic to drink beer. Mobilizing the economy for war, Congress also limited brewers' and

distillers' use of barley and other scarce grains, causing consumption to decline. The decades-long prohibition campaign culminated with Congress's passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1917. Ratified over the next two years by nearly every state and taking effect in January 1920, the amendment prohibited "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" anywhere in the United States.

Defenders hailed prohibition as a victory for health, morals, and Christian values. In urban areas, though, thousands flagrantly ignored the law. Patrons flocked to urban speakeasies, or illegal drinking sites, which flourished in almost every Chicago neighborhood; one raid on a South Side speakeasy yielded 200,000 gallons of alcohol. Profits from the secret clubs enriched notorious gangsters such as Chicago's Al Capone and New York's Jack Diamond.

In California, Arizona, and Texas, tens of thousands of Americans streamed "south of the border." Mexico regulated liquor but kept it legal (along with gambling, drugs, and prostitution), leading to the rise of booming vice towns such as Tijuana and Mexicali, places that had been virtually uninhabited before 1900. U.S. nightclub owners in these cities included such prominent figures as African American boxer Jack Johnson. By 1928, the American investors who built a \$10 million resort, racetrack, and casino in Tijuana became known as border barons. Prohibitionists were



### Wine in the Gutters, Brooklyn

This photograph captures America's cultural conflicts over prohibition. When the law went into effect, federal agents seized and destroyed supplies of alcohol, often dumping it in the streets. Here, working-class children in Brooklyn race to scoop it up in buckets before it drains away. In tenement neighborhoods, children eager to earn a nickel often toted buckets of beer, wine, and homemade liquor for their parents or neighbors. How might a rural temperance advocate have responded to this photograph? How about a working-class man in Chicago, Atlanta, Seattle, or New York? Picture Research Consultants & Archives.

outraged by Americans' circumventions of the law. Religious leaders on both sides of the border denounced illegal drinking—but profits were staggering. The difficulties of enforcing prohibition contributed to its repeal in 1933 (Chapter 23).

**Evolution in the Schools** At the state and local levels, controversy erupted as fundamentalist Protestants sought to mandate school curricula based on the biblical account of creation. In 1925, Tennessee's legislature outlawed the teaching of “any theory that denies the story of the Divine creation of man as taught in the Bible, [and teaches] instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.” The **American Civil Liberties Union** (ACLU), formed during the Red Scare to protect free speech rights, challenged the law's constitutionality. The ACLU intervened in the trial of John T. Scopes, a high school biology teacher who taught the theory of evolution to his class and faced a jail sentence for doing so. The case attracted national attention because Clarence Darrow, a famous criminal lawyer, defended Scopes, while William Jennings Bryan, the three-time Democratic presidential candidate, spoke for the prosecution.

Journalists dubbed the **Scopes trial** “the monkey trial.” This label referred both to Darwin's argument that human beings and other primates share a common ancestor and to the circus atmosphere at the trial, which was broadcast live over a Chicago radio station. (Proving that urbanites had their own prejudices, acerbic critic H. L. Mencken dismissed antievolutionists as “gaping primates of the upland valleys,” implying that they had not evolved.) The jury took only eight minutes to deliver its verdict: guilty. Though the Tennessee Supreme Court later overturned Scopes's conviction, the law remained on the books for more than thirty years.

**Nativism** Some native-born Protestants pointed to immigration as the primary cause of what they saw as America's moral decline. A nation of 105 million people had added more than 23 million immigrants over the previous four decades; the newcomers included many Catholics and Jews from Southern and Eastern Europe, whom one Maryland congressman referred to as “indigestible lumps” in the “national stomach.” Such attitudes recalled hostility toward Irish and Germans in the 1840s and 1850s. In this case, they fueled a momentous shift in immigration policy. “America must be kept American,” President Coolidge declared in 1924. Congress had banned Chinese immigration in 1882, and Theodore Roosevelt had

negotiated a so-called gentleman's agreement that limited Japanese immigration in 1907. Now nativists charged that there were also too many European arrivals, some of whom undermined Protestantism and imported anarchism, socialism, and other radical doctrines. Responding to this pressure, Congress passed emergency immigration restrictions in 1921 and a permanent measure three years later. The **National Origins Act** (1924) used backdated census data to establish a baseline: in the future, annual immigration from each country could not exceed 2 percent of that nationality's percentage of the U.S. population as it had stood in 1890. Since only small numbers of Italians, Greeks, Poles, Russians, and other Southern and Eastern European immigrants had arrived before 1890, the law drastically limited immigration from those places. In 1929, Congress imposed even more restrictive quotas, setting a cap of 150,000 immigrants per year from Europe and continuing to ban most immigrants from Asia.

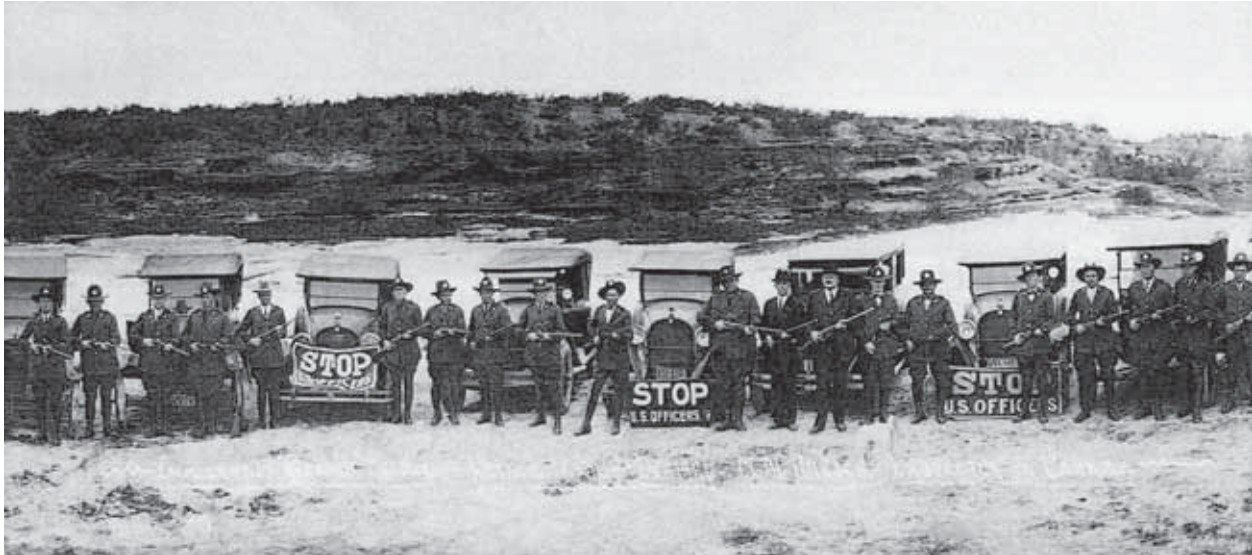
The new laws, however, permitted unrestricted immigration from the Western Hemisphere. As a result, Latin Americans arrived in increasing numbers, finding jobs in the West that had gone to other immigrants before exclusion. More than 1 million Mexicans entered the United States between 1900 and 1930, including many during World War I. Nativists lobbied Congress to cut this flow; so did labor leaders, who argued that impoverished migrants lowered wages for other American workers. But Congress heeded the pleas of employers, especially farmers in Texas and California, who wanted cheap labor. Only the Great Depression cut off migration from Mexico.

Other anti-immigrant measures emerged at the state level. In 1913, by an overwhelming majority, California's legislature had passed a law declaring that “aliens ineligible to citizenship” could not own “real property.” The aim was to discourage Asians, especially Japanese immigrants, from owning land, though some had lived in the state for decades and built up prosperous farms. In the wake of World War I, California tightened these laws, making it increasingly difficult for Asian families to establish themselves. California, Washington, and Hawaii also severely restricted any school that taught Japanese language, history, or culture. Denied both citizenship and land rights, Japanese Americans would be in a vulnerable position at the outbreak of World War II, when anti-Japanese hysteria swept the United States.

## TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

How did debates over alcohol use, the teaching of evolution, immigration, anti-Semitism, and racism evolve in the 1920s?





### The U.S. Border Patrol, Laredo, Texas, 1926

In 1926, San Antonio photographer Eugene O. Goldbeck took this photograph of U.S. Border Patrol officers in Laredo. Since 1917, Mexicans, like other immigrants, had been subject to a head tax and literacy test. The U.S. government had not enforced these provisions, however, because of pressure from southwestern employers eager for cheap Mexican labor. Following passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, the United States established the Border Patrol. Its increasing efforts to police the border slowed the casual movement of Mexican workers in and out of the United States. Why do you think the Border Patrol posed in this way for Goldbeck's picture? Notice that some of the officers depicted here were dressed as civilians. What might this signify? Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

**The National Klan** The 1920s brought a nationwide resurgence of the **Ku Klux Klan (KKK)**, the white supremacist group formed in the post-Civil War South. Soon after the premiere of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a popular film glorifying the Reconstruction-era Klan, a group of southerners gathered on Georgia's Stone Mountain to revive the group. With its blunt motto, "Native, white, Protestant supremacy," the Klan recruited supporters across the country (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 716). KKK members did not limit their harassment to blacks but targeted immigrants, Catholics, and Jews as well, with physical intimidation, arson, and economic boycotts.

At the height of its power, the Klan wielded serious political clout and counted more than three million members, including many women. The Klan's mainstream appeal was illustrated by President Woodrow Wilson's public praise for *Birth of a Nation*. Though the Klan declined nationally after 1925, robbed of a potent issue by passage of the anti-immigration bill, it remained strong in the South, and pockets of KKK activity persisted in all parts of the country (Map 22.1). Klan activism lent a menacing cast to political issues. Some local Klansmen, for example, cooperated with

members of the Anti-Saloon League to enforce prohibition laws through threats and violent attacks.

The rise of the Klan was part of an ugly trend that began before World War I and extended into the 1930s. In 1915, for example, rising anti-Semitism was marked by the lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory supervisor in Marietta, Georgia, who was wrongly accused of the rape and murder of a thirteen-year-old girl. The rise of the national Klan helped prepare the way for white supremacist movements of the 1930s, such as the Los Angeles-based Silver Legion, a fringe paramilitary group aligned with Hitler's Nazis. Far more influential were major figures such as industrialist Henry Ford, whose *Dearborn Independent* railed against immigrants and warned that members of "the proud Gentile race" must arm themselves against a Jewish conspiracy aimed at world domination. Challenged by critics, Ford issued an apology in 1927 and admitted that his allegations had been based on "gross forgeries." But with his paper's editorials widely circulated by the Klan and other groups, considerable long-term damage had been done.

**The Election of 1928** Conflicts over race, religion, and ethnicity created the climate for a stormy

**MAP 22.1****Ku Klux Klan Politics and Violence in the 1920s**

Unlike the Reconstruction-era Klan, the Klan of the 1920s was geographically dispersed and had substantial strength in the West and Midwest as well as in the South. Although the Klan is often thought of as a rural movement, some of the strongest “klaverns” were in Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Detroit, and other large cities. The organization’s members operated as vigilantes in areas where they were strong; elsewhere, their aggressive tactics triggered riots between Klansmen and their ethnic and religious targets.

presidential election in 1928. Democrats had traditionally drawn strength from white voters in the South and immigrants in the North: groups that divided over prohibition, immigration restriction, and the Klan. By 1928, the northern urban wing gained firm control. Democrats nominated Governor Al Smith of New York, the first presidential candidate to reflect the aspirations of the urban working class. A grandson of Irish peasants, Smith had risen through New York City’s Democratic machine to become a dynamic reformer. But he offended many small-town and rural Americans with his heavy New York accent and brown derby hat, which highlighted his ethnic working-class origins. Middle-class reformers questioned his ties to Tammany Hall; temperance advocates opposed him as a “wet.” But the governor’s greatest handicap was his religion.

Although Smith insisted that his Catholic beliefs would not affect his duties as president, many Protestants opposed him. “No Governor can kiss the papal ring and get within gunshot of the White House,” vowed one Methodist bishop.

Smith proved no match for the Republican nominee, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, who embodied the technological promise of the modern age. Women who had mobilized for Hoover’s conservation campaigns during World War I enlisted as Hoover Hostesses, inviting friends to their homes to hear the candidate’s radio speeches. Riding on eight years of Republican prosperity, Hoover promised that individualism and voluntary cooperation would banish poverty. He won overwhelmingly, with 444 electoral votes to Smith’s 87 (Map 22.2). Because many



# THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN



## Who Joined the Ku Klux Klan?

Asked why a person would join the Klan, you might cite racism and religious bigotry. But the story is complicated: many whites with strong prejudices did not join the Klan in the 1920s, while others did. Why?

### 1. Klan wedding in Washington, D.C., 1925.



Source: Getty Images

### 2. Poem read at a meeting of KKK Grand Dragons, North Carolina, 1923.

God Give Us Men! The Invisible Empire demands strong  
Minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands . . .  
Men who possess opinions and a will;  
Men who have honor; men who will not lie;  
Men who can stand before a demagogue and damn  
his treacherous flattering without winking! . . .  
Men of dependable character; men of sterling worth;  
Then wrongs will be redressed, and right will rule the earth.

### 3. "95% of Bootleggers Jews," editorial, *Dearborn Independent*, Michigan, 1922.

Violation and evasion of the Prohibition laws has had a deep Jewish complexion from the very beginning. . . . This does not mean, of course, that every bootlegger is a Jew. Unless you live in Chicago, New York or other large cities, an actual meeting with the Jew in this minor capacity will not be frequent. The Jew is the possessor of the wholesale stocks; . . . But notwithstanding all this carefulness, the bulk of the arrests made in the United States have been among Jews. . . . The maintenance of *the idea of drink* in the minds of the people is due to Jewish

propaganda. . . . *The idea of drink* will be maintained by means of the Jewish stage, Jewish jazz, and the Jewish comics, until somebody comes down hard upon it.

### 4. Report on a Klan gathering in Birmingham, Alabama, 1923.

Edgewood Park was crowded by noon. Klansmen and their wives and families enjoyed a great barbecue, went swimming, dancing, and picknicking. There were airplane stunts during the day with band concerts thrown in for good measure. At night there was a wonderful display of fireworks following the initiation and the address of the Imperial Wizard.

### 5. Klansmen in Buffalo, New York, 1924. Data based on historical research into a Klan membership list of almost 2,000 men in the Buffalo area.

TABLE 22.1

Klansmen in Buffalo, New York, 1924

Occupational Group	Percentage of KKK Members	Percentage of Total Native White Male Workers in Buffalo
Professional (predominantly clergy, doctors, engineers, pharmacists)	6.1	4.7
Business (small businessmen, managers, inspectors, accountants)	18.5	10.4
Low nonmanual (salesmen, clerks, foremen)	27.7	22.6
Skilled (machinists, electricians, railroad engineers, construction trades)	30.6	25.3
Semiskilled and service (factory and rail workers, deliverymen, policemen, repairmen)	16.4	30.2
Unskilled (laborers, gardeners)	0.5	14.5

**6. Interviews conducted in the 1980s with Indiana Klanswomen about Klan life in the 1920s. Seeking truthful accounts, the interviewer allowed the women to remain anonymous.**

*Anonymous*

For [the Klan] to say, we want to get rid of the niggers, we want to get rid of the Catholics, it didn't mean a thing to us. . . . I can remember quite well the stories that you hear sitting on the porch. . . . They'd talk about religion, and they'd talk about Catholics. . . . The Catholics were considered horrible people. . . .

*Anonymous*

Kelly had a grocery store. Well, it hurt their business terribly because people wouldn't go in there, because the Klan would tell you not to. . . . If you had a empty house . . . , why you were told not to rent it to a Catholic.

Some Klan leader said that the Pope was coming to take over the country, and he said he might be on the next train that went through North Manchester. You know, just trying to make it specific. So, about a thousand people went out to the train station and stopped the train. It only had . . . one passenger on it. They took him off, and he finally convinced them that he wasn't the Pope. He was a carpet salesman. And so they put him on the next train and he went on to Chicago.

**7. Editorial by National Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans in the KKK periodical *Dawn: A Journal for True American Patriots*, November 10, 1923.**

Humanity has become a commodity. For mercenary motives, our importers of it want the most inferior grade. Industry desires cheap labor. Therefore, we have had this recent flood of 5 and 10-cent citizenship. Take any map which shows the concentration of the South and Eastern European type of immigrant and you will see [that] wherever manufacturing and mining and lumbering predominate, there the hordes of unskilled labor have overwhelmingly been assembled. . . .

The present and recent flood of inferior foreigners has vastly increased our illiteracy, vitally lowered the health level and visibly menaced America by inheritable mental and moral deficiencies. . . . [Farms are] the only legitimate and justifiable excuse for cheap labor, yet that class is moving irresistibly cityward to swell the slums and multiply immorality. For example, throughout the south the colored race . . . is migrating to the North — not to its rural districts, but to its industrial centers.

**8. "Program for America," in the KKK newspaper *American Standard*, April 15, 1925.**

- Laws to require the reading of the Holy Bible in every American public school.

- Recognition of the fact . . . that Romanism is working here to undermine Americanism. . . . Since Roman Catholics give first allegiance to an alien political potentate, the pope . . . their claim to citizenship, to the ballot, and to public office in this Protestant country is illegitimate, and must be forbidden by law. . . .

- A law to destroy the alien influence of the foreign language press [by] requiring that the English language be used exclusively.

- . . . Recognition of the tendency toward moral disintegration, resulting from the activities . . . of the anti-Christian Jews, in our theaters, our motion pictures, and in American business circles; the discontinuance of these anti-Christian activities, and the exclusion of Jews of this character from America.

- The return of the Negroes to their homeland of Africa, under the protection and with the help of the United States Government.

- Strict adherence to the Constitution of the United States, including the Prohibition Amendment, by every citizen.

Sources: (2) Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 119; (3) *Dearborn Independent* editorial reprinted in *Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States* (Dearborn, MI: Dearborn Publishing, 1922), 34–40; (4) Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 150; (5) Shawn Lay, *Hooded Knights on the Niagara* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), chapter 4 (esp. 87); (6) Kathleen M. Blee, *Women in the Klan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 78–79, 149–151; (7) McVeigh, 64–65; (8) *American Standard*, April 15, 1925, 172.

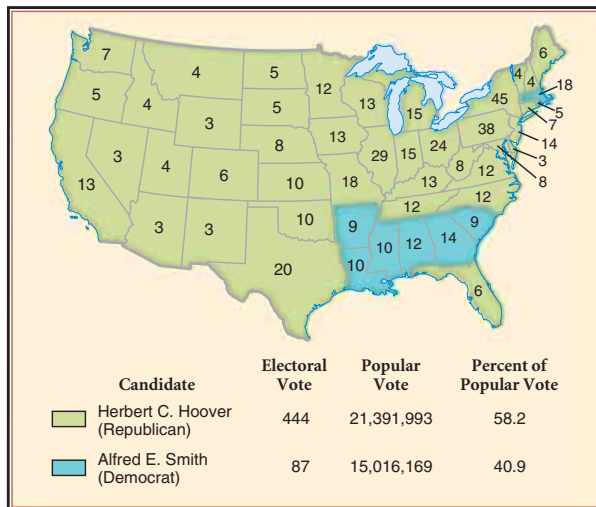
### ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. Based on the documents above, identify factors that made the KKK appealing to some Americans in the 1920s.
2. Which groups in source 5 were over- and underrepresented in the Klan? The same historian found that at least 34 percent of local Klan members were German American. Review the Thinking Like a Historian feature in Chapter 21, page 692. Why might Germans have been especially likely to join the Klan in this period?
3. What are the advantages and limitations of source 6?
4. Imagine that Republican president Calvin Coolidge had set up a federal agency to discourage KKK activity (an action he did NOT take). He put you in charge of the effort and gave you a generous budget. How would you have spent the funds? Explain why you believe your strategy might have been effective.

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Using your knowledge of Chapter 22, and drawing on evidence from the documents above, write a brief essay explaining how the rise of the KKK in the 1920s reflected larger patterns in American society and politics.



**MAP 22.2****The Presidential Election of 1928**

Historians still debate the extent to which 1928 was a critical election—an election that produced a significant realignment in voting behavior. Although Republican Herbert Hoover swept the popular and the electoral votes, Democrat Alfred E. Smith won majorities not only in the South, his party's traditional stronghold, but also in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and (although it is not evident on this map) all of the large cities of the North and Midwest. In subsequent elections, the Democrats won even more votes among African Americans and European ethnic groups and, until 1980, were the nation's dominant political party.

southern Protestants refused to vote for a Catholic, Hoover carried five ex-Confederate states, breaking the Democratic “Solid South” for the first time since Reconstruction. Smith, though, carried industrialized Massachusetts and Rhode Island as well as the nation's twelve largest cities, suggesting that urban voters were moving into the Democrats' camp.

## Intellectual Modernism

The horrors of World War I prompted many intellectuals to question long-standing assumptions about civilization, progress, and the alleged superiority of Western cultures over so-called primitive ways of life. In the United States, these questions contributed to struggles between modernity and tradition, reflected not only in politics but also in art and literature. Some of these intellectual movements had their roots in the devastation of Europe; others—such as the Harlem Renaissance—emerged from social upheavals the Great War had wrought at home.

## Harlem in Vogue

The Great Migration tripled New York's black population in the decade after 1910. Harlem stood as “the symbol of liberty and the Promised Land to Negroes everywhere,” as one minister put it. Talented African Americans flocked to the district, where they created bold new art forms and asserted ties to Africa.

**Black Writers and Artists** Poet Langston Hughes captured the upbeat spirit of the **Harlem Renaissance** when he asserted, “I am a Negro—and beautiful.” Other writers and artists also championed race pride. Claude McKay and Jean Toomer represented in fiction what philosopher Alain Locke called, in an influential 1925 book, *The New Negro*. Painter Jacob Lawrence, who had grown up in crowded tenement districts of the urban North, used bold shapes and vivid colors to portray the daily life, aspirations, and suppressed anger of African Americans.

No one embodied the energy and optimism of the Harlem Renaissance more than Zora Neale Hurston. Born in the prosperous black community of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston had been surrounded as a child by examples of achievement, though she struggled later with poverty and isolation. In contrast to some other black thinkers, Hurston believed African American culture could be understood without heavy emphasis on the impact of white oppression. After enrolling at Barnard College and studying with anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston traveled through the South and the Caribbean for a decade, documenting folklore, songs, and religious beliefs. She incorporated this material into her short stories and novels, celebrating the humor and spiritual strength of ordinary black men and women. Like other work of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's stories and novels sought to articulate what it meant, as black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois wrote, “to be both a Negro and an American.”

**Jazz** To millions of Americans, the most famous product of the Harlem Renaissance was **jazz**. Though the origins of the word are unclear, many historians believe it was a slang term for sex—an etymology that makes sense, given the music's early association with urban vice districts. As a musical form, jazz coalesced in New Orleans and other parts of the South before World War I. Borrowing from blues, ragtime, and other popular forms, jazz musicians developed an ensemble style in which performers, keeping a rapid ragtime beat, improvised around a basic melodic line. The majority of early jazz musicians were black, but white

**Archibald Motley, *Blues*, 1929**

Painter Archibald Motley (1891–1981) was born in New Orleans but arrived in Chicago as a small child, when his family—like thousands of other African Americans—moved north in search of opportunity. Motley was able to study at the Art Institute of Chicago and by the 1920s also showed his work in New York City. Many of his paintings depicted life in the predominantly African American neighborhood on Chicago's South Side that was widely known as the Black Belt. This piece, *Blues*, was painted when Motley was living in Paris. It shows the powerful impact jazz had on European listeners. Art Institute of Chicago.



performers, some of whom had more formal training, injected elements of European concert music.

In the 1920s, as jazz spread nationwide, musicians developed its signature mode, the improvised solo. The key figure in this development was trumpeter Louis Armstrong. A native of New Orleans, Armstrong learned his craft playing in the saloons and brothels of the city's vice district. Like tens of thousands of other African Americans he moved north, settling in Chicago in 1922. Armstrong showed an inexhaustible capacity for melodic invention, and his dazzling solos inspired other musicians. By the late 1920s, soloists became the celebrities of jazz, thrilling audiences with their improvisational skill.

As jazz spread, it followed the routes of the Great Migration from the South to northern and midwestern cities, where it met consumers primed to receive it. Most cities had plentiful dance halls where jazz could be featured. Radio also helped popularize jazz, with the emerging record industry marketing the latest tunes. As white listeners flocked to ballrooms and clubs to hear Duke Ellington and other stars, Harlem became the hub of this commercially lucrative jazz. Those who hailed “primitive” black music rarely suspended their racial condescension: visiting a mixed-race club became known as “slumming.”

The recording industry soon developed race records specifically aimed at urban working-class blacks. The breakthrough came in 1920, when Otto

K. E. Heinemann, a producer who sold immigrant records in Yiddish, Swedish, and other languages, recorded singer Mamie Smith performing “Crazy Blues.” This smash hit prompted big recording labels like Columbia and Paramount to copy Heinemann’s approach. Yet, while its marketing reflected the segregation of American society, jazz brought black music to the center stage of American culture. It became the era’s signature music, so much so that novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald dubbed the 1920s the “Jazz Age.”

**Marcus Garvey and the UNIA** Harlem’s creative energy generated broad political aspirations. The Harlem-based **Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)**, led by charismatic Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, arose in the 1920s to mobilize African American workers and champion black separatism. Garvey urged followers to move to Africa, arguing that people of African descent would never be treated justly in white-run countries.

The UNIA soon claimed four million followers, including many recent migrants to northern cities. It published a newspaper, *Negro World*, and solicited funds for the Black Star steamship company, which Garvey created as an enterprise that would foster trade with the West Indies and carry

### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did the Great Migration lead to flourishing African American culture, politics, and intellectual life, and what form did these activities take?



### Augusta Fells Savage, African American Sculptor

Born in Florida in 1892, Augusta Fells Savage arrived in New York in 1921 to study and remained to take part in the Harlem Renaissance. Widowed at a young age and struggling to support her parents and young daughter, Savage faced both racism and poverty. Much of her work has been lost because she sculpted in clay and could not afford to cast in bronze. Savage began to speak out for racial justice after she was denied, on the basis of her race, a fellowship to study in Paris. In 1923, she married a close associate of UNIA leader Marcus Garvey. Augusta Savage with her sculpture *Realization*, c. 1938/Andrew Herman, photographer. Federal Art Project, Photographic Division collection, Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution.

American blacks to Africa. But the UNIA declined as quickly as it had risen. In 1925, Garvey was imprisoned for mail fraud because of his solicitations for the Black Star Line. President Coolidge commuted his sentence but ordered his deportation to Jamaica. Without Garvey's leadership, the movement collapsed.

However, the UNIA left a legacy of activism, especially among the working class. Garvey and his followers represented an emerging **pan-Africanism**. They

argued that people of African descent, in all parts of the world, had a common destiny and should cooperate in political action. Several developments contributed to this ideal: black men's military service in Europe during World War I, the Pan-African Congress

that had sought representation at the Versailles treaty table, protests against U.S. occupation of Haiti, and modernist experiments in literature and the arts. One African American historian wrote in 1927, "The grandiose schemes of Marcus Garvey gave to the race a consciousness such as it had never possessed before. The dream of a united Africa, not less than a trip to France, challenged the imagination."

## Critiquing American Life

Paralleling the defiant creativity of Harlem, other artists and intellectuals of the 1920s raised voices of dissent. Some had endured firsthand the shock of World War I, an experience so searing that American writer Gertrude Stein dubbed those who survived it the **Lost Generation**. Novelist John Dos Passos railed at the obscenity of "Mr. Wilson's war" in *The Three Soldiers* (1921). Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) portrayed war's futility and dehumanizing consequences.



### UNIA Parade in Harlem, Early 1920s

This photo, taken at 138th Street in Harlem, shows the collective pride fostered by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. What types of people do you see in the crowd? How are they dressed? Note the slogan carried by a rider in the automobile: "The New Negro Has No Fear." Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

### UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

What criticisms of mainstream culture did modernist American writers offer in the 1920s?



Other writers also explored the dark side of the human psyche. In such dramas as *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), playwright Eugene O'Neill depicted characters driven by raw, ungovernable sexual impulses. O'Neill first made his mark with *The Emperor Jones* (1920), a popular Broadway drama about a black dictator driven from power by his people. Appealing to Americans' fascination with Haiti, the play offered an ambiguous message: its black protagonist was played not by the customary white actors made up in black-face, but by African Americans who won acclaim for their performances. W. E. B. Du Bois called it "a splendid tragedy." But others were dissatisfied with the play's primitivism; one actor who played Emperor Jones altered the script to omit offensive racial epithets. The white crowds who made *The Emperor Jones* a hit, like those who flocked to Harlem's jazz clubs, indulged a problematic fascination with "primitive" sexuality.

In a decade of conflict between traditional and modern worldviews, many writers exposed what they saw as the hypocrisy of small-town and rural life (American Voices, p. 722.) The most savage critic of conformity was Sinclair Lewis, whose novel *Babbitt* (1922) depicted the disillusionment of an ordinary small-town salesman. *Babbitt* was widely denounced as un-American; *Elmer Gantry* (1927), a satire about a greedy evangelical minister on the make, provoked even greater outrage. But critics found Lewis's work superb, and in 1930 he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Even more famous was F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which offered a scathing indictment of Americans' mindless pursuit of pleasure and material wealth.

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## From Boom to Bust

Spurred by rapid expansion during the war, American business thrived in the 1920s. Corporations expanded more and more into overseas markets, while at home a national consumer culture emphasized leisure and fun. But some sectors of the economy, notably agriculture, never recovered from a sharp recession in the wake of World War I. Meanwhile, close observers worried over the rapid economic growth and easy credit that fueled the Roaring Twenties. Their fears proved well founded: the "Roar" ended in the Great Depression.

## The Postwar Economy

Immediately after World War I, the United States experienced a series of economic shocks. They began with rampant inflation, as prices jumped by one-third in

1919 alone. Then came a two-year recession that raised unemployment to 10 percent. Finally, the economy began to grow smoothly, and more Americans began to benefit. Between 1922 and 1929, national per capita income rose an impressive 24 percent.

Large-scale corporations continued to replace small business in many sectors of the economy. By 1929, through successive waves of consolidation, the two hundred largest businesses had come to control almost half of the country's nonbanking corporate wealth. The greatest number of mergers occurred in rising industries such as chemicals (with DuPont in the lead) and electrical appliances (General Electric). At the same time, mergers between Wall Street banks enhanced New York City's position as the financial center of the nation and increasingly the world. Aided by Washington's dollar diplomats, U.S. companies exercised growing global power. Seeking cheaper livestock, giant American meat-packers opened plants in Argentina; the United Fruit Company developed plantations in Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala; General Electric set up production facilities in Latin America, Asia, and Australia.

Despite the boom, the U.S. economy had areas of significant weakness throughout the 1920s. Agriculture, which still employed one-fourth of all American workers, never fully recovered from the postwar recession. Once Europe's economy revived, its farmers flooded world markets with grain and other farm products, causing agricultural prices to fall. Other industries, including coal and textiles, languished for similar reasons. As a consequence, many rural Americans shared little of the decade's prosperity. The bottom 40 percent of American families earned an average annual income of only \$725 (about \$9,100 today). Many, especially rural tenants and sharecroppers, languished in poverty and malnutrition.

## Consumer Culture

In middle-class homes, Americans of the 1920s sat down to a breakfast of Kellogg's corn flakes before getting into Ford Model Ts to work or shop at Safeway. On weekends, they might head to the local theater to see the newest Charlie Chaplin film. By 1929, electric refrigerators and vacuum cleaners came into use in affluent homes; 40 percent of American households owned a radio. The advertising industry reached new levels of ambition and sophistication, entering what one historian calls the era of the "aggressive hard sell." The 1920s gave birth, for example, to fashion modeling and style consulting. "Sell them their dreams," one radio announcer urged advertisers in 1923. "People

## Urban Writers Describe Small-Town America

### Sinclair Lewis *Main Street*

In his novel *Main Street* (1920), Sinclair Lewis portrayed the fictional midwestern town of Gopher Prairie. In the excerpts below, Lewis's narrator describes the reactions of young, urban Carol Kennicott, wife of the town's new doctor, and Bea Sorenson, a Swedish American farm girl.

When Carol had walked for thirty-two minutes she had completely covered the town, east and west, north and south; and she stood at the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue and despaired.

Main Street with its two-story brick shops, its story-and-a-half wooden residences, its muddy expanse from concrete walk to walk, its huddle of Fords and lumber-wagons, was too small to absorb her. The broad, straight, unenticing gashes of the streets let in the grasping prairie on every side. She realized the vastness and the emptiness of the land. The skeleton iron windmill on the farm a few blocks away, at the north end of Main Street, was like the ribs of a dead cow. She thought of the coming of the Northern winter, when the unprotected houses would crouch together in terror of storms galloping out of that wild waste. They were so small and weak, the little brown houses. They were shelters for sparrows. . . .

She wanted to run, fleeing from the encroaching prairie, demanding the security of a great city. Her dreams of creating a beautiful town were ludicrous. Oozing out from every drab wall, she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer.

She trailed down the street on one side, back on the other, glancing into the cross streets. It was a private Seeing Main Street tour. She was within ten minutes beholding not only the heart of a place called Gopher Prairie, but ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego.

Dyer's Drug Store, a corner building of regular and unreal blocks of artificial stone. Inside the store, a greasy marble soda-fountain with an electric lamp of red and green and curdled-yellow mosaic shade. Pawed-over

heaps of toothbrushes and combs and packages of shaving-soap. Shelves of soap-cartons, teething-rings, garden-seeds, and patent medicines in yellow packages — nostrums for consumption, for “women's diseases” — notorious mixtures of opium and alcohol, in the very shop to which her husband sent patients for the filling of prescriptions.

The train which brought Carol to Gopher Prairie also brought Miss Bea Sorenson.

Miss Bea was a stalwart, corn-colored, laughing young woman, and she was bored by farm-work. She desired the excitements of city-life, and the way to enjoy city-life was, she had decided, to “go get a job as a hired girl in Gopher Prairie.” . . .

Bea had never before been in a town larger than Scandia Crossing, which has sixty-seven inhabitants.

As she marched up the street she was meditating that it didn't hardly seem like it was possible there could be so many folks all in one place at the same time. My! It would take years to get acquainted with them all. And swell people, too! A fine big gentleman in a new pink shirt with a diamond, and not no washed-out blue denim working-shirt. A lovely lady in a longery dress (but it must be an awful hard dress to wash). And the stores! . . . A drug store with a soda fountain that was just huge, awful long, and all lovely marble . . . and the soda spouts, they were silver, and they came right out of the bottom of the lamp-stand! Behind the fountain there were glass shelves, and bottles of new kinds of soft drinks, that nobody ever heard of. Suppose a fella took you *there*!

### Anzia Yezierska *Bread Givers*

A child of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, Anzia Yezierska grew up on the Lower East Side of New York City. In her autobiographical novel *Bread Givers* (1925), Yezierska described her arrival in the Ohio town where she attended college.

Before this, New York was all of America to me. But now I came to a town of quiet streets, shaded with green trees. No crowds, no tenements. No hurrying noise to beat the race of the hours. Only a leisured quietness whispered in the air: Peace. . . .

Each house had its own green grass in front, its own free space all around, and it faced the street with the calm security of being owned for generations, and not rented by the month from a landlord. In the early twilight, it was like a picture out of fairyland to see people sitting on their porches, lazily swinging in their hammocks, or watering their own growing flowers.

So these are the real Americans, I thought, thrilled by the lean, straight bearing of the passers-by. They had none of that terrible fight for bread and rent that I always saw in the New York people's eyes. . . . All the young people I had ever seen were shut up in factories. But here were young girls and young men enjoying life, free from the worry for a living. . . . The spick-and-span cleanliness of these people! It smelled from them, the soap and the bathing. Their fingernails so white and pink. . . . What a feast of happenings each day of college was to those other students. Societies, dances, letters from home, packages of food, midnight spreads and even birthday parties. I never knew that there were people glad enough of life to celebrate the day they were born.

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Source: From *Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska. Copyright © 1970 by Louise Levitas Henriksen. Reprinted by permission of Persea Books, Inc., New York. All rights reserved.

## Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd

### *Middletown*

In 1929, sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd published *Middletown*, a study of life in a small midwestern city. Middletown was not a single community but a composite of several communities studied by the Lynds.

The first real automobile appeared in Middletown in 1900. . . . At the close of 1923 there were 6,221 passenger cars in the city, one for every 6.1 persons, or roughly two for every three families. . . . As, at the turn of the century, business class people began to feel apologetic if they did not have a telephone, so ownership of an automobile has now reached the point of being an accepted essential of normal living. . . .

According to an officer of a Middletown automobile financing company, 75 to 90 percent of the cars purchased

locally are bought on time payment, and a working man earning \$35.00 a week frequently plans to use one week's pay each month as payment for his car. The automobile has apparently unsettled the habit of careful saving for some families. . . . "I'll go without food before I'll see us give up the car," said one woman emphatically. . . .

Many families feel that an automobile is justified as an agency holding the family group together. . . . [But] the fact that 348 boys and 382 girls in the three upper years of the high school placed "use of the automobile" fifth and fourth respectively in a list of twelve possible sources of disagreement between them and their parents suggests that this may be an increasing decentralizing agent. . . .

If the automobile touches the rest of Middletown's living at many points, it has revolutionized its leisure . . . making leisure-time enjoyment a regularly expected part of every day and week rather than an occasional event. . . . The frequency of movie attendance of high school boys and girls is about equal, business class families tend to go more often than do working class families, and children of both groups attend more often without their parents than do all the individuals or combinations of family members put together. . . . It is probable that time formerly spent in lodges, saloons, and unions is now being spent in part at the movies, at least occasionally with other members of the family. Like the automobile and radio, the movies [break] up leisure time into an individual, family, or small group affair.

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Source: Excerpt from *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, by Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd. Copyright © 1929 by Harcourt, Inc. and renewed 1957 by Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What attitudes toward the small town and big city does *Main Street* represent? Why do you think Lewis includes views as different as Carol's and Bea's?
2. How does the urban experience of Yezierska's narrator shape her reaction to life in an Ohio town? How might small-town residents have reacted to her description of them as "the real Americans"? How might Lewis have responded to Yezierska's description?
3. How do the two novelists (Lewis and Yezierska) differ from the sociologists (the Lynds) in the issues they emphasize, and in their tone and point of view? What features of small-town life does each text emphasize?



# Bananas

... a good mixer  
with every fruit that grows

Oranges, apples, grapefruit, pineapples, pears, melons, grapes—all these and many others—blend perfectly with bananas. The distinctive flavor of the banana, when added to a fruit cup, a fruit salad, or any fruit combination, brings out the flavor of the other fruits and makes them taste better.

“EAT plenty of fresh fruits” is now an accepted principle of diet—and the mere sight of mellow, luscious bananas is an invitation to serve many delicious and nourishing fruit combinations.

*All year round from the tropics*... Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas—every season, every day—bananas are available. Thanks to the nearness and all-year-round productiveness of the tropics, they always can be had at your grocery or fruit store.

Children crave the temptingly flavored banana instinctively. And it is well that they do, for bananas are one of the most important energy-producing foods. Doctors and dietitians consider the banana not only one of the most *valuable* foods, but also one of the most *easily digested*... as beneficial for grown-ups as for children.

Serve bananas with other fruits, with cereals, with milk or cream... or serve them plain. But always be sure they are *fully ripe* (generously flecked with brown spots). If they are not at the proper stage of ripeness when you buy them, let them ripen at room temperature. Never place them in the ice-box.

**UNIFRUIT BANANAS**  
A United Fruit Company Product  
Imported and Distributed by Fruit Dispatch Company  
17 Battery Place, New York, N. Y.

“Ripe bananas are good for little children.”

## American Companies Abroad

United Fruit was one of the many American companies that found opportunities for investment in South America in the 1920s and that introduced tropical foods to the United States. The company used elaborate and informative color advertisements to sell its products. Bananas were sufficiently exotic that the ads explained to consumers how to tell when bananas were ripe and how to store them (“Never place them in the ice-box”). John W. Hartman Center/Duke University Special Collections Library.

don’t buy things to have things. . . . They buy hope—hope of what your merchandise will do for them.”

In practice, participation in consumer culture was as contested as the era’s politics. It was no accident that white mobs in the Tulsa race riot plundered radios and phonograph players from prosperous African American homes: the message was that whites deserved such items and blacks did not. But neither prosperity nor poverty was limited by race. Surrounded by exhortations to indulge in luxuries, millions of working-class Americans barely squeaked by, with wives and mothers often working to pay for basic necessities. In times of crisis, some families sold their furniture, starting with pianos and phonographs and continuing, if necessary, to dining tables and beds. In the Los Angeles suburb of South Gate, white working-class men secured jobs in the steel and automobile industries, but prices were

high and families often found it difficult to make ends meet. *Self-help* was the watchword as families bartered with neighbors and used their yards to raise vegetables, rabbits, and chickens.

The lure of consumer culture created friction. Wives resented husbands who spent all their discretionary cash at the ballpark. Generational conflicts emerged, especially when wage-earning children challenged the expectation that their pay should go “all to mother.” In St. Louis, a Czech-born woman was exasperated when her son and daughter stopped contributing to rent and food and pooled their wages to buy a car. In Los Angeles, one fifteen-year-old girl spent her summer earning \$2 a day at a local factory. Planning to enroll in business school, she spent \$75 on dressy shoes and “a black coat with a red fox collar.” Her brother reported that “Mom is angry at her for ‘squandering’ so much money.”

Many poor and affluent families shared one thing in common: they stretched their incomes, small or large, through new forms of borrowing such as auto loans and installment plans. “Buy now, pay later,” said the ads, and millions did. Anyone, no matter how rich, could get into debt, but **consumer credit** was particularly perilous for those living on the economic margins. In Chicago, one Lithuanian man described his neighbor’s situation: “She ain’t got no money. Sure she buys on credit, clothes for the children and everything.” Such borrowing turned out to be a factor in the bust of 1929.

**The Automobile** No possession proved more popular than the automobile, a showpiece of modern consumer capitalism that revolutionized American life. Car sales played a major role in the decade’s economic boom: in one year, 1929, Americans spent \$2.58 billion on automobiles. By the end of the decade, they owned 23 million cars — about 80 percent of the world’s automobiles — or an average of one for every six people.

The auto industry’s exuberant expansion rippled through the economy, with both positive and negative results. It stimulated steel, petroleum, chemical, rubber, and glass production and, directly or indirectly, created 3.7 million jobs. Highway construction became

a billion-dollar-a-year enterprise, financed by federal subsidies and state gasoline taxes. Car ownership spurred urban sprawl and, in 1924, the first suburban shopping center: Country Club Plaza outside Kansas City, Missouri. But cars were expensive, and most Americans bought them on credit.

This created risks not only for buyers but for the whole economy. Borrowers who could not pay off car loans lost their entire investment in the vehicle; if they defaulted, banks were left holding unpaid loans. Amid the boom of the 1920s, however, few worried about this result.

Cars changed the way Americans spent their leisure time, as proud drivers took their machines on the road. An infrastructure of gas stations, motels, and drive-in restaurants soon catered to drivers. Railroad travel faltered. The American Automobile Association, founded in 1902, estimated that by 1929 almost a third of the population took vacations by car. As early as 1923, Colorado had 247 autocamps. “I had a few days after I got my wheat cut,” reported one Kansas farmer, “so I just loaded my family . . . and lit out.” An elite Californian complained that automobile travel was no

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

How did the radio, automobile, and Hollywood movies exemplify the opportunities and the risks of 1920s consumer culture?



**Automobiles at Jacksonville Beach, Florida, 1923**

The automobile transformed Americans’ leisure pursuits. As proud car owners took to the road in ever-larger numbers, the “vacation” became a summer staple. Auto travel created a booming business in gas stations, roadside motels, campgrounds, and sightseeing destinations. A Florida vacation — once reserved for wealthy northeasterners who had traveled to Miami’s exclusive hotels by first-class rail car — became an attainable luxury for middle-class and even some working-class families. © Curt Teich Postcard Archives, Lake County Museum.





**Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan**

Charlie Chaplin (left) and Jackie Coogan starred together in *The Kid* (1921), a silent comedy that also included sentimental and dramatic moments, promising viewers “a smile . . . and perhaps a tear.” Chaplin, born in London in 1889, moved to the United States in 1912 and over the next two decades reigned as one of Hollywood’s most famous silent film stars. In 1919, he joined with D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and other American directors and stars to create the independent studio United Artists. *The Kid* made the Los Angeles-born Coogan—discovered by Chaplin on the vaudeville stage—into America’s first child star. Library of Congress.

longer “aristocratic.” “The clerks and their wives and sweethearts,” observed a reporter, “driving through the Wisconsin lake country, camping at Niagara, scattering tin cans and pop bottles over the Rockies, made those places taboo for bankers.”

**Hollywood** Movies formed a second centerpiece of consumer culture. In the 1910s, the moviemaking industry had begun moving to southern California to take advantage of cheap land, sunshine, and varied scenery within easy reach. The large studios—United Artists, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—were run mainly by Eastern European Jewish immigrants like Adolph Zukor, who arrived from Hungary in the 1880s. Starting with fur sales, Zukor and a partner then set up five-cent theaters in Manhattan. “I spent a good

deal of time watching the faces of the audience,” Zukor recalled. “With a little experience I could see, hear, and ‘feel’ the reaction to each melodrama and comedy.” Founding Paramount Pictures, Zukor signed emerging stars and produced successful feature-length films.

By 1920, **Hollywood** reigned as the world’s movie capital, producing nearly 90 percent of all films. Large, ornate movie palaces attracted both middle-class and working-class audiences. Idols such as Rudolph Valentino, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks set national trends in style. Thousands of young women followed the lead of actress Clara Bow, Hollywood’s famous **flapper**, who flaunted her boyish figure. Decked out in knee-length skirts, flappers shocked the older generation by smoking and wearing makeup.

Flappers represented only a tiny minority of women, but thanks to the movies and advertising, they became influential symbols of women’s sexual and social emancipation. In cities, young immigrant women eagerly bought makeup and the latest flapper fashions and went dancing to jazz. Jazz stars helped popularize the style among working-class African Americans. Mexican American teenagers joined the trend, though they usually found themselves under the watchful eyes of *la dueña*, the chaperone.

Politicians quickly grasped the publicity value of American radio and film to foreign relations. In 1919, with government support, General Electric spearheaded the creation of Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to expand U.S. presence in foreign radio markets. RCA—which had a federal appointee on its board of directors—emerged as a major provider of radio transmission in Latin America and East Asia. Meanwhile, by 1925, American films made up 95 percent of the movies screened in Britain, 80 percent in Latin America, and 70 percent in France (America Compared, p. 727). The United States was experimenting with what historians call **soft power**—the exercise of popular cultural influence—as radio and film exports celebrated the American Dream.

## The Coming of the Great Depression

By 1927, strains on the economy began to show. Consumer lending had become the tenth-largest business in the country, topping \$7 billion that year. Increasing numbers of Americans bought into the stock market, often with unrealistic expectations. One Yale professor proclaimed that stocks had reached a “permanently high plateau.” Corporate profits were so high that some companies, fully invested in their own operations, plowed excess earnings into the stock





## Hollywood in Europe

European film studios struggled after World War I to reach audiences who had fallen in love with American movies. Working-class Europeans, in particular, preferred Hollywood's offerings to the films produced in Europe. In this 1928 article from a cinematography journal, German expressionist filmmaker Erich Pommer suggested new strategies for expanding an audience for European films. Expressionists, influenced by romanticism and modernism, explored dark themes such as spiritual crisis and insanity. (A famous example of expressionist painting is Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.) Pommer worked for American studios and later fled to the United States after the rise of Hitler.

The towering importance of the American motion picture on the world's markets cannot be safely explained by the unlimited financial resources at the disposal of the American producers. . . . Its main reason is the mentality of the American picture, which, notwithstanding all attacks and claims to the contrary, apparently comes nearest to the taste of international cinema audiences.

. . . The specific and unique element of the American film is the fact of its being absolutely uncomplicated. Being what is called "naïve" it knows no problems. . . .

*Universal Appeal.* It is really preferable to have a picture too light rather than too heavy, because in the latter case there is a danger that the public will not understand the story. This is the worst thing that can happen with a picture. . . .

*Spectacular Appeal.* The international appeal of a picture has its foundation in a story. It is totally independent of the capital invested and of the splendor and luxury used in its production. The fact that in most cases the supers and monumental pictures have proved to be such international successes, does not disprove this claim.

Such productions always have a simple story of universal appeal, because it is simply impossible to use spiritual thoughts and impressions of the soul in a picture deluxe. The splendour in such production is not merely created for decoration — it is its outstanding purpose. . . . But splendour means show, and a show is always and everywhere easy to understand. . . .

Source: Excerpt from "The International Picture: A Lesson on Simplicity" by Erich Pommer from *Film Europe* and *Film America: Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939*, edited by Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby, 1999, ISBN: 978-0-85989-546-0. Used by permission of Exeter University Press.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How does Pommer characterize the attraction of popular American films for European audiences? What does he mean when he calls those films "naïve"?
2. How does Pommer propose to produce German films that will compete with Hollywood? What constraints and challenges did he face?

market. Other market players compounded risk by purchasing on margin. An investor might, for example, spend \$20 of his own money and borrow \$80 to buy a \$100 share of stock, expecting to pay back the loan as the stock rose quickly in value. This worked as long as the economy grew and the stock market climbed. But those conditions did not last.

Yet when the stock market fell, in a series of plunges between October 25 and November 13, 1929, few onlookers understood the magnitude of the crisis. Cyclical downturns had been a familiar part of the industrializing economy since the panic of the 1830s; they tended to follow periods of rapid growth and speculation. A sharp recent recession, in 1921, had not

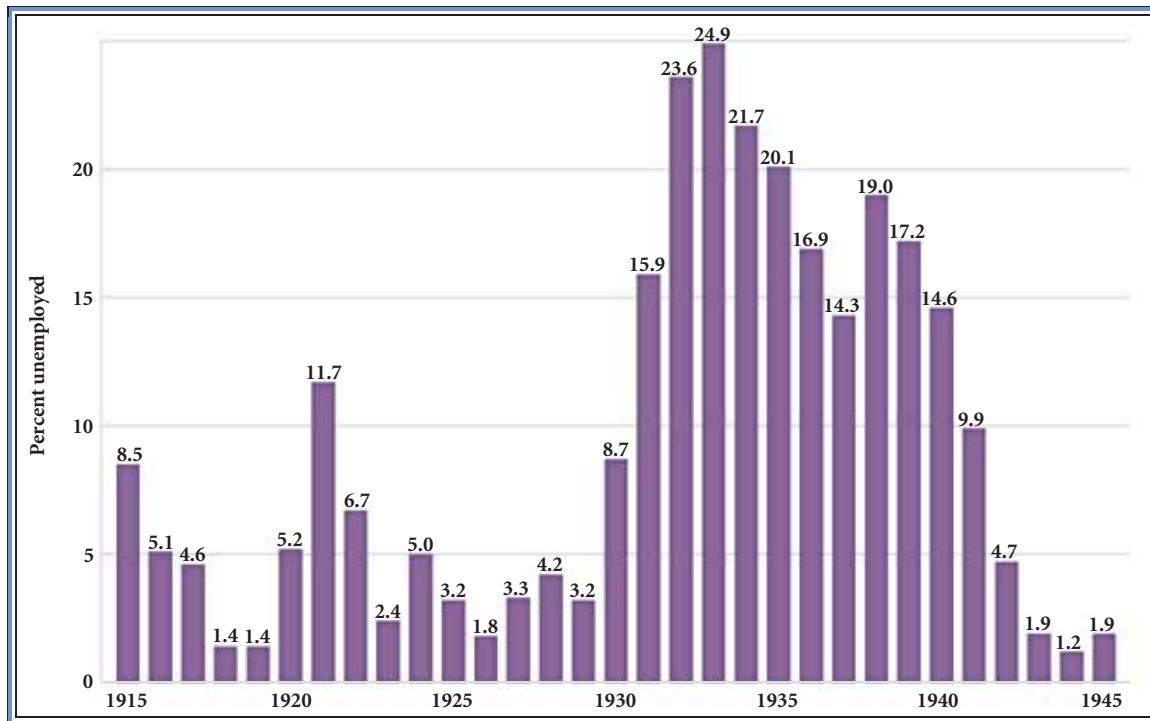
triggered disaster. The market rose again in late 1929 and early 1930, and while a great deal of money had been lost, most Americans hoped the aftermath

of the crash would be brief. In fact, the nation had entered the Great Depression. Over the next four years, industrial production fell 37 percent. Construction plunged 78 percent. Prices for crops and other raw materials, already low, fell by half. By 1932, unemployment had reached a staggering 24 percent (Figure 22.1).

A precipitous drop in consumer spending deepened the crisis. Facing hard times and unemployment, Americans cut back dramatically, creating a

### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What domestic and global factors helped cause the Great Depression?



**FIGURE 22.1**  
Unemployment, 1915–1945

During the 1920s, business prosperity and low rates of immigration resulted in historically low unemployment levels. The Great Depression threw millions of people out of work; by 1933, one in four American workers was unemployed, and the rate remained high until 1941, when the nation mobilized for World War II.

vicious cycle of falling demand and forfeited loans. In late 1930, several major banks went under, victims of overextended credit and reckless management. The following year, as industrial production slowed, a much larger wave of bank failures occurred, causing an even greater shock. Since the government did not insure bank deposits, accounts in failed banks simply vanished. Some people who had had steady jobs and comfortable savings found themselves broke and out of work.

Not all Americans were devastated by the depression; the middle class did not disappear and the rich lived in accustomed luxury. But incomes plummeted even among workers who kept their jobs. Salt Lake City went bankrupt in 1931. Barter systems developed, as barbers traded haircuts for onions and potatoes and laborers worked for payment in eggs or pork. “We do not dare to use even a little soap,” reported one jobless Oregonian, “when it will pay for an extra egg, a few more carrots for our children.” “I would be only too glad to dig ditches to keep my family from going hungry,” wrote a North Carolina man.

Where did desperate people turn for aid? Their first hope lay in private charity, especially churches and synagogues. But by the winter of 1931, these institutions were overwhelmed, unable to keep pace with the extraordinary need. Only eight states provided even minimal unemployment insurance. There was no public support for the elderly, statistically among the poorest citizens. Few Americans had any retirement savings, and many who had saved watched their accounts erased by failing banks.

Even those who were not wiped out had to adapt to depression conditions. Couples delayed marriage and reduced the number of children they conceived. As a result, the marriage rate fell to a historical low, and by 1933 the birthrate dropped from 97 births per 1,000 women to 75. Often the responsibility for birth control fell to women. It was “one of the worst problems of women whose husbands were out of work,” a Californian told a reporter. Campaigns against hiring married women were common, on the theory that available jobs should go to male breadwinners. Three-quarters of the nation’s school districts banned married women

### Minnesota Potato Farmers

The prosperity and consumer pleasures of the 1920s hardly extended to all Americans. This Minnesota family had horses, not a tractor; many of the women's clothes were probably made by hand. Rural and working-class Americans, who often struggled in the 1920s, found conditions even harsher after 1929. On the other hand, farmers had resources to fall back on that city folks did not: they could grow their own food, and they had long experience in “making do.” Minnesota Historical Society.



from working as teachers — ignoring the fact that many husbands were less able to earn than ever before. Despite restrictions, female employment increased, as women expanded their financial contributions to their families in hard times.

The depression crossed regional boundaries, though its severity varied from place to place. Bank failures clustered heavily in the Midwest and plains, while areas dependent on timber, mining, and other extractive industries suffered catastrophic declines. Although southern states endured less unemployment because of their smaller manufacturing base, farm wages plunged. In many parts of the country, unemployment rates among black men stood at double that of white men; joblessness among African American women was triple that of white women.

By 1932, comprehending the magnitude of the crisis, Americans went to the ballot box and decisively rejected the probusiness, antiregulatory policies of the 1920s. A few years earlier, with business booming, politics had been so placid that people chuckled when President Coolidge disappeared on extended fishing trips. Now, Americans wanted bold action in Washington. Faced with the cataclysm of the Great Depression, Americans would transform their government and create a modern welfare state.

## SUMMARY

Although involvement in World War I strengthened the United States economically and diplomatically, it left the nation profoundly unsettled. Racial tensions exploded after the war as African Americans pursued new opportunities and asserted their rights. Meanwhile, labor unrest grew as employers cut wages and sought to break unions. Labor's power declined sharply in the war's aftermath, while anxieties over radicalism and immigration prompted a nationwide Red Scare.

The politics of the 1920s brought a backlash against prewar progressivism. The agenda of women reformers met very limited success. Republican administrations pursued probusiness “normalcy” at home and “dollar diplomacy” abroad. Prohibition and the Scopes trial demonstrated the influence religion could exert on public policy, while rising nativism fueled a resurgent Ku Klux Klan and led to sweeping new restrictions on immigration.

Postwar alienation found artistic expression in new forms of modernism, which denounced the dehumanizing effects of war and criticized American materialism and hypocrisy. Spreading throughout the nation



from New Orleans, jazz appealed to elite and popular audiences alike. Black artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, including many inspired by pan-African ideas, explored the complexities of African American life.

Business thrived and a booming consumer culture, exemplified by the radio, the automobile, and

Hollywood films, created new forms of leisure, influencing daily life and challenging older sexual norms. However, the risky speculation and easy credit of the 1920s undermined the foundations of the economy. After the 1929 crash, these factors, along with a range of interconnected global conditions, plunged the United States into the Great Depression.

CHAPTER REVIEW



**MAKE IT STICK** Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you’ve read.

**TERMS TO KNOW** Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

Key Concepts and Events		Key People
<i>Adkins v. Children’s Hospital</i> (p. 707)	Scopes trial (p. 713)	A. Mitchell Palmer (p. 708)
welfare capitalism (p. 708)	National Origins Act (p. 713)	Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (p. 709)
Red Scare (p. 708)	Ku Klux Klan (p. 714)	Henry Ford (p. 714)
Palmer raids (p. 709)	Harlem Renaissance (p. 718)	Leo Frank (p. 714)
Sheppard-Towner Federal Maternity and Infancy Act (p. 709)	jazz (p. 718)	Zora Neale Hurston (p. 718)
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (p. 710)	Universal Negro Improvement Association (p. 719)	Louis Armstrong (p. 719)
associated state (p. 710)	pan-Africanism (p. 720)	Marcus Garvey (p. 719)
Teapot Dome (p. 710)	Lost Generation (p. 720)	Adolph Zukor (p. 726)
dollar diplomacy (p. 711)	consumer credit (p. 725)	
prohibition (p. 712)	Hollywood (p. 726)	
American Civil Liberties Union (p. 713)	flapper (p. 726)	
	soft power (p. 726)	

**REVIEW QUESTIONS** Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter’s main ideas.

1. What was the Republican vision of “normalcy,” and how did the Harding and Coolidge administrations seek to realize it?
2. Along what lines did Americans find themselves divided in the 1920s? How were those conflicts expressed in politics? In culture and intellectual life?

3. What factors contributed to the economic boom of the 1920s and the crash that followed?
4. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Between 1917 and 1945, the “Roaring Twenties” were the only years when the United States did not face a major economic or international crisis. Review the categories

of “America in the World,” “Politics and Power,” and “Identity” on the thematic timeline on page 671. In what ways do they suggest that the prosperous 1920s were a politically distinctive era? What continuities do you see in politics and foreign policy?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

1. **ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** The Ku Klux Klan of the Reconstruction era (Chapter 15) emerged in a specific political and social context; while the Klan of the 1920s built on its predecessor, its goals and scope were different. Using material from Chapters 15 and 22, imagine that you are investigating a series of Klan meetings in each era (1870s and 1920s). Where would you conduct your investigation? How might you explain, to the public, the Klan’s membership and activities? How would you compare the two Klans?
2. **VISUAL EVIDENCE** This chapter includes two depictions of people dancing to jazz: the *Life* magazine cover that opens the chapter (p. 705) and *Blues* (p. 719) by Archibald John Motley Jr., an African American painter of the Harlem Renaissance. Look at these pictures carefully. Who do you think were the intended audiences for each? What evidence could you point to in support of that conclusion? What messages do you think the *Life* artist and Motley wanted to convey?

## MORE TO EXPLORE Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper* (1995). A readable overview of events in the 1920s.

David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1979). A wonderful account of politics, arts, and culture in the vibrant “Negro capital of the world.”

Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (2010). A lively recent history of the movement to ban liquor.

Martha L. Olney, *Buy Now, Pay Later* (1991). Explores the rise and impact of consumer credit.

Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti* (2001). A compelling exploration of U.S. occupation of Haiti and its impact on Haiti and especially the United States.

The PBS series *American Experience* has produced an excellent documentary on the Scopes trial; information and documents are available at [pbs.org/wgbh/amex/monkeytrial/](https://pbs.org/wgbh/amex/monkeytrial/). For a broad view of the 1929 crash and its impact, see [pbs.org/wgbh/amex/crash](https://pbs.org/wgbh/amex/crash).

**TIMELINE** Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

<b>1915</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Ku Klux Klan founded</li> <li>• United States occupies Haiti</li> </ul>
<b>1916</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United States occupies Dominican Republic</li> </ul>
<b>1917</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race riot in East St. Louis, Illinois</li> </ul>
<b>1919</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race riot in Chicago</li> <li>• Boston police strike</li> <li>• Palmer raids</li> <li>• Women's International League for Peace and Freedom founded</li> </ul>
<b>1920</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Height of Red Scare</li> <li>• Eighteenth Amendment (prohibition) takes effect</li> <li>• Warren Harding wins presidency</li> <li>• Eugene O'Neill's <i>The Emperor Jones</i></li> </ul>
<b>1921</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race riots in Rosewood, Florida, and Tulsa, Oklahoma</li> <li>• Sheppard-Towner Federal Maternity and Infancy Act</li> </ul>
<b>1923</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adkins v. Children's Hospital</i></li> <li>• President Harding dies</li> <li>• Calvin Coolidge assumes presidency</li> <li>• Teapot Dome scandal</li> <li>• Equal Rights Amendment first introduced in Congress</li> </ul>
<b>1924</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Origins Act</li> <li>• Coolidge wins presidential election against Democrats and La Follette's Progressive Party</li> <li>• First suburban shopping center opens outside Kansas City, Missouri</li> </ul>
<b>1925</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Coronado Coal Company v. United Mine Workers</i></li> <li>• Scopes "monkey trial"</li> <li>• Alain Locke's <i>The New Negro</i></li> <li>• F. Scott Fitzgerald's <i>The Great Gatsby</i></li> </ul>
<b>1927</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sacco and Vanzetti executed</li> </ul>
<b>1928</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herbert Hoover wins presidency</li> </ul>
<b>1929</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stock market crashes precipitate Great Depression</li> </ul>



**KEY TURNING POINTS:** American politics underwent two shifts in the period covered in this chapter: one in the aftermath of World War I, and another in 1932. What caused each turning point? What factors in American Society, economics, and culture help explain each moment of political change?