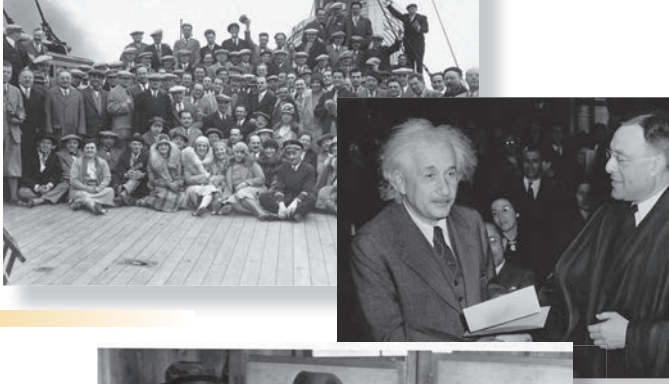
Chapter 24



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The Jazz Age and Beyond: American Culture in Prosperity and Depression

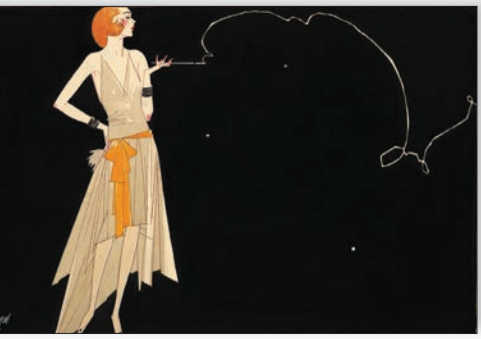
Chapter Outline

The decade of the 1920s, often called "the Jazz Age," was an era that witnessed a new plenitude of consumer products and a flowering of the new media of mass culture. Then the stock market crashed in 1929. As the country slid into its worst-ever depression, most Americans began to focus on saving, rather than spending—except when it came to movie attendance, with this form of escape proving steadily popular despite the hard times.

24.1 The Inner Revolution

24.1a Living in Good Times and Bad

If there was such a thing as the "normal" or "ordinary" American family in the interwar period, they lived in or near a small town—but even in the '20s people's lives expanded in movement and variety as families acquired automobiles and radios, and towns acquired movie houses. Real incomes advanced somewhat, and manufactured items like vacuum



The Jazz Age was characterized by wild parties, tobacco, freewheeling women, and heavy drinking during Prohibition. However, entertainment was limited largely to the upper-middle class of the largest metropolitan areas and to young people on certain college campuses, where "flappers" and "jazz babies" flourished. (Wikimedia Commons)

cleaners, washing machines, and ready-made clothes lightened the household chores that wives had been expected to perform throughout recorded history. And yet this new world of material things probably had little effect on people's ideas. In general newspapers, radio, and movies were conservative forces, reinforcing the pro-business traditions of American culture. If nothing else, votes cast in the presidential election of 1928—on the eve of the worst economic depression in American history—suggested that most people were reasonably contented with things as they were.

The characterization of the Jazz Age is often that it was a time of wild parties, tobacco, free-wheeling women, and heavy drinking despite Prohibition. These aspects of the time period, however, were limited largely to the upper middle class of the largest metropolitan areas and to young people on certain college campuses—especially in New York and other eastern coastal centers—among whom "flappers" and "jazz babies" flourished. "Flapper" was a term that referred to young women who wore short skirts, short hair, listened to **jazz**, and ignored the previous norms for "acceptable" behavior. Flappers were criticized for wearing excessive makeup, drinking during Prohibition, having casual sex, driving automobiles (supposedly the domain of men) and flaunting their inappropriate behavior.

While easier, less formal manners spread across the nation and automobiles provided young couples with an opportunity to escape supervision, the change in customs in most parts of the country was gradual and moderate and the prevalence of "flappers" should not be overstated. Deliberate flouting of the liquor laws occurred chiefly in urban industrial communities where public opinion was opposed to Prohibition.

In contrast with the 1920s, the Depression of the 1930s had very unequal effects on the world of "mid-America." If the workers of a small town had been employed in manufacturing, they were likely to suffer unemployment and economic difficulties during much of the '30s. But in the trade arena, employment kept up; and in many areas, local buying and selling of food (even on a barter basis) declined by only a moderate percentage. Conditions were worse in rural regions where crops were grown for export and not for home consumption. Many cotton farmers, for example, had to try their hand at food growing with mixed results. The middle-class belief (shared by President Hoover) that a "dole" would undermine self-reliance delayed a general system of relief payments during Hoover's administration. The worst period was over by 1933, when federal funds under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal lifted the burden of unemployment relief from the bankrupt states and communities. License statistics from the 1930s and gasoline sales indicate that most families living outside of towns kept their automobiles in service—even at the expense of food or clothing. Inadequate diet, however, was more difficult to cope with. In an abstract, theoretical view, the American standard of living was high enough in the 1920s for a decline of a quarter to a third to be borne. But unfortunately the burden was not uniformly distributed, and some Americans did die from malnutrition in the early '30s.

Jazz
The popular music of the young generation of the 1920s and 1930s that was generally viewed as an African American contribution to American music, arts, and culture—associated with loose morals, violations of conservative cultural mores, and a free-wheeling lifestyle

Behaviorism
The founder of behaviorism, John B. Watson, regarded consciousness itself as only a byproduct of physical processes, having no role in causing behavior; he insisted that both human and animal learning occurred simply through "conditioned reflexes."

Sigmund Freud
Freud popularized the idea that people are impelled to think and act in certain ways by unconscious pressures rather than by logical reasoning; he further held that these irrational, unconscious urges were of a "sexual" nature based upon unmet childhood needs.

24.16 Psychological Theories

Also of great impact during this time were the psychological theories that questioned the human ability to reason objectively and the importance of reason as a basis for action. The founder of **behaviorism**, John B. Watson, regarded consciousness itself as only a byproduct of physical processes, having no role in causing behavior. He insisted that both human and animal learning occurred simply through "conditioned reflexes." Similarly, **Sigmund Freud** popularized the idea that people were impelled to think and act in certain ways by unconscious pressures rather than by logical reasoning. He further held that these irrational, unconscious urges were of a "sexual" nature (although he used the term *sex* broadly to include many cravings for gratification not normally thought of as sexual). Thus when people thought they were behaving rationally, their behavior might be merely a disguise for a mixture of urges and cravings based upon unmet childhood needs that—though unrecognized by the individuals—influenced their behavior in many ways.

One of the appeals of Freudianism was that it offered help to people who were emotionally disturbed. Through a patient's free association of ideas in the presence of a psychoanalyst, together with the analyst's scientific interpretation of the patient's dreams, it might be possible to bring the disturbing elements to conscious recognition and thus to lessen the patient's anxiety.

The Freudian emphasis on the *libido,* and the Freudian denial of the validity of religious feelings, had a profound effect upon the thinking of well-educated people all over the Western world. By placing no emphasis on abstinence and little on reason, and by offering salvation through indulgent secular "confession," Freudianism turned older theological doctrine upside down. People who sought Freudian therapy did not necessarily discard their religious faith—and a few clergymen managed to reach a compromise with the new doctrine—however the Freudian approach weakened and contradicted the values of the nineteenth century.

Freudianism provided an excellent weapon for attacking Victorian formalities and rural Protestant virtues. Leading intellectuals like Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, and Jerome Frank applied it to politics, public opinion, and the law, with the general effect of further weakening respect for traditional standards. Magazines and books were full of the new language of psychiatry, and many well-educated people enjoyed being amateur Freudian analysts. Well-informed parents now worried about the danger of suppressing their children's urges, and the child-centered home joined the child-centered school in relaxing discipline.

24.1c Changes in Education

During this time, John Dewey advanced a radically progressive approach to education, based on the new psychology. He argued for scientific methodology and pragmatism, but also argued that education should be social and interactive rather than authoritative rote learning, and that schools should be institutions of social reform. In addition, Dewey argued that students should be allowed to experience and interact with their curriculum as well as take an active part in their own learning. Dewey also saw an educated public as essential for democracy and meaningful interaction between the people and their government. In the 1920s Dewey's principles became dominant in the major teachers' colleges and spread throughout the urban public school system as theory, if not as practice. In estimating the total influence of progressive education on pupils, however, it should be noted that in 1930 a majority of the nation's students were still in schools where the authoritative style of teaching reigned supreme.

Often allied with progressivism were new movements for efficiency and utility in education. School superintendents applied business methods of "job-analysis" to their schools. Teachers were rated by their efficiency in performing the "housekeeping" necessities of the school, whereas their intellectual worth was often ignored. The idea of preparing students for daily life, rather than requiring them to master a body of knowledge, led a writer in 1922 to divide school activities into four major categories: health, fundamental processes, civic and social relations, and recreation. Of these, only the second embraced conventional learning.

From the emphasis on utility came more practically oriented curricula at the secondary level. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, granting federal aid to vocational education, started a rapid spread of special high schools and manual or trade departments in older schools. More and more, a distinction was made between the minority in high school who expected to go to college and the majority who should substitute the development of practical skills for "book learning."

In 1920 the average teacher's salary was $871 a year, and the usual school was a small rural building with one or two teachers. The average teacher did not have a college education, might never have heard of John Dewey, and was not paid enough to support a family. As a result, most teachers were young single women teaching school until they married or found a more promising job. By 1930 the situation had improved somewhat. The average salary had risen to $1,400, and buses were making possible the consolidated school. By 1940 consolidated schools (where different teachers taught different grades),

Social theory
The idea that society no longer seemed simple, as it had at the beginning of the twentieth century, with general social laws to be discovered only by highly complex and sophisticated means

Albert Einstein
The most famous atomic scientist of the time, who not only developed the theory of relativity but also became a well-known celebrity in his own time—a rare accomplishment for a scientist

Uncertainty
The idea in the new sciences of a continual search for answers that could be, at best, only tentative

with their greater degree of specialization among teachers, were becoming the rule in the more populous areas; and a majority of children were in urban schools. Because of the fall in prices that accompanied the onset of the Great Depression, teachers' salaries had risen about 25 percent in purchasing power between 1920 and 1930.

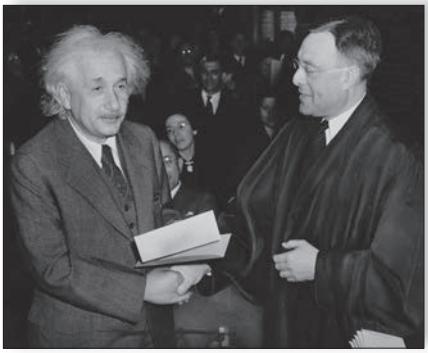
During the Jazz Age, college education followed many of these same trends. There was a decided shift away from the traditional program. For example, the number of schools where a major was offered in physical education increased. Women were offered courses in home economics, and most major universities started schools of commerce or business. For students who wanted a mixture of liberal arts and "useful" subjects, junior colleges offered two-year certificates. In 1920 there were only fifty-two such colleges, but by 1930 there were ten times that number.

Although many regarded these developments as a lowering of educational standards, colleges and universities showed substantial development as centers of learning and research. The 1920s were the first full decade in which general research was supported by massive endowments, such as those of the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations; and increasing private donations and state grants enabled American universities to rival those of Europe. At the same time, more and more Americans were going to college. In 1920, 8 percent of young people aged 18 to 21 were in college; by 1930 it was over 12 percent; and in 1940, nearly 16 percent. Though some of the 1930–1940 increase was because of lack of employment and government assistance, college degrees were becoming increasingly important in securing jobs and gaining social prestige.

Pictured is an early twentieth century home economics class. The idea of preparing students for daily life, rather than requiring them to master a body of knowledge, led a writer in 1922 to divide school activities into four major categories: health, fundamental processes, civic and social relations, and recreation. (Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-55456)

24.10 Physical and Social Theory

University departments of science continued their attack on the nineteenth-century belief that human intelligence was on the verge of understanding the nature of things. The new **social theory** was the idea that society no longer seemed simple and that if general social laws were to be discovered, it would only be by highly complex and sophisticated means. Over the course of the half century before 1920, a brilliant group of European physicists and mathematicians demonstrated that a human mind could not perceive the nature of physical reality or picture its workings using ordinary three-dimensional images. Only mathematics had a logic that could handle the four or more dimensions of physical problems. Furthermore, they discovered that matter was not solid substance but rather a system of particles held together by electrical energy, and that the only guides to this reality were mathematical equations and readings of complicated recording devices. Discoveries in the infinitesimal world of the atom and the infinite world of outer space made reflective observers uncertain as to whether reality is precise and orderly, or at least, whether the human imagination is capable of grasping its order if there is one. The most famous atomic scientist of the time, who not only developed the theory of relativity but also became a well-known celebrity in his own time—a rare accomplishment for a scientist—was **Albert Einstein**.



The most famous atomic scientist of the time, Albert Einstein, developed the theory of relativity and became a well-known celebrity for his accomplishments. (Wikimedia Commons)

Basic philosophical **uncertainty**, however, did not prevent progress in sub-atomic physics. By the 1930s it was known that tremendous energy in the form of heat could be released by splitting atoms to form new elements. While Germans were in the lead in theory, large investments by the United States government and the aid of German émigrés would produce a bomb from massive atomic fission as the Second World War came to a close in 1945. Wartime needs would also speed the development of electronic devices such as radar and digital computers. All these scientific innovations were pragmatic, based on experimentation to find what worked rather than on a complete understanding of electricity or of the inner structure of the atom.

Some popularizers predicted that the scientific uncertainty that was revealed to the reading public in the late 1920s would lead to a new age of faith. Instead, the immediate reaction seemed to be a move in the opposite direction. Like the earlier evolutionary theory, the new science undermined theology without offering anything the average person could understand to replace it. The highly abstract characterizations of God that seemed consistent with physical theories were without much appeal.

24.1e Keynesian Economics

While the social sciences as a whole continued their pursuit of more sophisticated methods, the economic collapse of the 1930s brought immediate, practical problems to bear on economic thinking. A few academic social scientists embraced Marxism and gave up hope for the capitalist system, but their number was surprisingly small. The majority turned to solutions of the type that were given a rounded theoretical formulation by the British economist John Maynard Keynes.

Keynes' ideas brought about the first major revision of economic theory in the twentieth century, and they offered a more realistic view of the operation of the entire economy than had existed before. His major work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), shifted the main theoretical emphasis from supply and demand to income and investment—or from the mechanics of the market to the distribution of income. Keynes' most important conclusions were (1) that increasing the income of the poor stimulated demand, while increasing the income of the rich promoted saving; (2) that increased demand, not increased saving, led to new business investment (his major revision of older theory); (3) that total income could increase only from such investment; and (4) that if the functioning of the undisturbed free market did not provide adequate business investment to maintain a sufficient flow of income, government was the only agency with sufficient spending power to see that this result was achieved.

Obviously these doctrines implied the need for higher wages and government investment and were hence resisted by conservatives. By the time Keynes' work was published, however, the theory was already being partially applied by President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal—which included government deficit spending to boost demand and create employment. By the end of World War II, the prosperity induced by government spending and massive redistribution of income downward was so obvious that politicians of both major parties implicitly acted on the assumptions of **Keynesian economics**; and most academic economists gradually made some of Keynes' ideas the starting point for their new theoretical models. In short, Keynes, supplied the rationale for the capitalist revolution that emerged from the disaster of the Great Depression.

24.1f Religious Fundamentalism in the 1920s

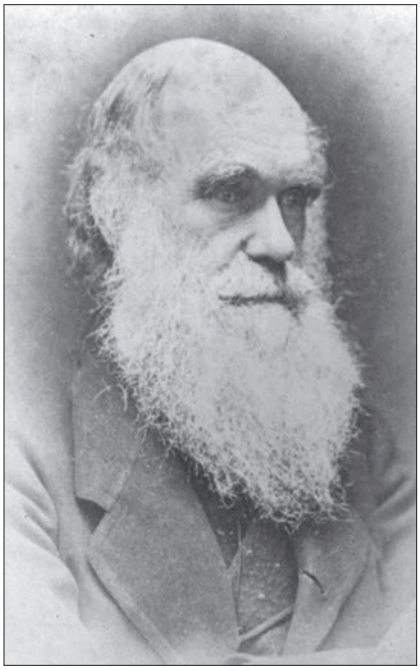
The increasingly social orientation of the leading Protestant churches was resisted by **fundamentalists**. The conflict between fundamentalism and current scientific views, either religious or secular, was dramatized by the *Scopes* trial in 1925.

In the minds of many, the publication of *On the Origin of Species* by **Charles Darwin** in 1859 and his theory of evolution called into question the literal interpretation of the creation story contained in Genesis. This, combined with growing scholarly historical criticism of the Bible, presented a challenge to the literalist interpretations of the Bible espoused by religious fundamentalists. These "attacks" on fundamentalism then combined with the anti-communism, nativism, and hyperpatriotism of the Red Scare era to form the foundation of a Protestant fundamentalist political movement that would continue in ebbs and flows through the rest of the twentieth century.

Keynesian economics
Based on the ideas of John Maynard Keynes; the idea that if the functioning of the undisturbed free market did not provide adequate business investment, government was the only agency with sufficient spending power to see that this result was achieved

Fundamentalists
Those who believe in a literal, inerrant interpretation of the Bible

Charles Darwin
Author of *On the Origin of Species,* where he argued that species evolved through a process of natural selection



Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution through natural selection in his book On the Origin of Species. *In this publication Darwin questioned the creation story from the Bible's* Genesis, *and sparked further criticism and debate regarding its factuality.*
(Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-104)

William Jennings Bryan
Famous orator, populist, three-time Democratic candidate for president, and Protestant fundamentalist who aided the Tennessee prosecution in *Scopes v. State of Tennessee* in 1925

Billy Sunday
Famous evangelist of the Jazz Age who preached a literal interpretation of the Bible, denounced Darwin's theory of evolution, and combined Christianity with American patriotism

By 1900, most American biology texts supported the concepts of organic evolution and Darwin's theory of natural selection. One botany text in 1912 even went so far as to infer the rejection of the Bible's creation story by stating, "evolution has been accepted because it appeals to the mind of man as being more reasonable that species should be created according to natural laws rather than by an arbitrary and special creation." The inclusion of these types of statements in textbooks did not create much of a furor prior to WWI—at least in part because so many rural Protestant fundamentalists received so little formal education up to that time. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, however, states required an ever growing number of students to attend public schools, with the result that rural fundamentalists were suddenly exposed in far greater numbers to ideas apparently in contradiction with their beliefs.

William Jennings Bryan perhaps well-captured the sentiments of the Protestant fundamentalists in 1924 when he argued that, "a scientific soviet is attempting to dictate what shall be taught in our schools, and, in doing so, is attempting to mold the religion of the nation."

Throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, religious fundamentalists would repeatedly charge the scientific community with being influenced by the radical political left. In the minds of the fundamentalists, the science itself had to be false because it conflicted with "God's Word." The false doctrines must therefore be the work of the Godless political left—who had somehow taken over the scientific community and were using it to further their atheistic "soviet" political agenda. Many religious fundamentalists agreed with William Jennings Bryan, who not only believed that evolution was a false doctrine, in conflict with "God's Word" and therefore evil, but also that Christians had a right, if not a duty, to suppress that evil if they were able. Bryan argued that when science and religion come into conflict, the issue should be decided by the will of the "common people" rather than by scientific scholars. Bryan echoed the sentiments of thousands of fundamentalists when he declared, "why should the Bible, which the centuries have been unable to shake, be discarded for scientific works that have to be corrected and revised every few years." Bryan further declared, "All the ills from which America suffers can be traced back to the teaching of evolution. It would be better to destroy every other book ever written, and save just the first three verses of Genesis."

William Jennings Bryan summed up the sentiments of the Protestant fundamentalists in expressing that he believed, in regards to Charles Darwin, one person was attempting to decide for all what should be taught in schools, and in doing so, was attempting to establish the religion of the nation itself. (Wikimedia Commons)

Similar to Bryan in his analysis of the evolution question, popular evangelist of the 1920s **Billy Sunday** summed up his attitudes toward the scientific revolution by stating, "When the Word of God says one thing and scholarship says another, scholarship can go to hell."

Not all Americans sympathized with Sunday, Bryan, and the fundamentalists, however; and the nation became somewhat divided between the secular and scientific left and the fundamentalist Protestant right. Columnist Walter Lippmann perhaps well summed up the rebuttal of the scientific community when he stated, "The religious doctrine that all men will at last stand equal before the throne of God was somehow transmuted in Bryan's mind into the idea that all men were equally good biologists before the ballot box."

In addition to their disdain for science and evolution, Protestant fundamentalists in general were decidedly patriotic and blended their patriotism with their religion. Billy Sunday epitomized this direction of Protestant fundamentalism in his assertion, "There can be no religion that does not express itself in patriotism." As a consequence, Reverend Sunday taught children to hiss at the German flag, advocated incarceration for those who criticized Wilson's war policies, and encouraged men to volunteer for the army (although Sunday himself, who was only 26 at the time of the American entry into the war, did not). Concerning economics, Sunday espoused laissez-faire pro-business capitalism. Sunday denounced the use of government to help alleviate social ills, such as poverty, as "godless social service nonsense."

Protestant fundamentalists of the 1920s viewed the "once-moral" America as being in decay and adrift from its founding principles, and addicted to alcohol and sin. Consequently, the Protestant fundamentalists were staunch proponents of Prohibition. When Prohibition became effective on January 16, 1920, Billy Sunday celebrated by holding a mock funeral for John Barleycorn.

Religious conservatives reacted to what they viewed as an attack on their religious beliefs by proposing laws outlawing the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Such bills were introduced into the legislatures of half of the states, and enacted in Mississippi, Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. Several bills banning the teaching of evolution failed in the Texas legislature, so Texas governor Ma Ferguson directed the state textbook commission to adopt a policy of selecting textbooks that did not mention evolution. In issuing the directive, Ferguson proclaimed, "I am a Christian mother … and I am not going to let that kind of rot go into Texas textbooks." The anti-intellectualism surrounding these and other laws extolling the Bible as a science book can hardly be overstated. For instance in Kentucky in 1922, a teacher was brought to trial for teaching that the earth was round. The teacher was fired when his opponents were able to prove in court, through the use of Bible scriptures, that the earth was indeed flat.

Scopes Monkey Trial
The *Scopes v. State of Tennessee* case in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, that received national media coverage and where the literalist interpretation of the Bible was debated in a Tennessee court

Clarence Darrow
Famous attorney and agnostic who offered his services, for free, to John T. Scopes and the ACLU to defend Scopes and debunk the literalist interpretation of the Bible

24.1g Scopes Monkey Trial

The fundamentalists were dealt a major blow in 1925 in the famous **Scopes Monkey Trial**, where twenty-five-year-old biology teacher John Scopes defied Tennessee law by teaching evolution. In this celebrated case that received national media attention, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) provided free legal defense for Scopes in the persons of Maynard Shipley and renowned agnostic defense lawyer **Clarence Darrow**. The old Protestant fundamentalist, William Jennings Bryan, volunteered his services to aid the prosecution.

The national media descended on Dayton, Tennessee, and covered the trial in a manner that made the religious fundamentalists appear backward and foolish. Bryan ended up taking the stand as a Bible expert and subsequently embarrassed himself by declaring that the earth was only five thousand years old and was created in six days, and then revealing some confusion over how "Cain took a wife." Bryan was eventually forced to concede, however, that the earth moved around the sun, which led to his admission that the Bible is filled with metaphors that need not be interpreted literally. Bryan also conceded that each of the "six days" of creation might actually stand for millions of years. Scopes was convicted and fined $100—but the fundamentalists were embarrassed in the national press, and no additional anti-evolution laws were passed in any state.

Concerning the Scopes Trial in 1925, the majority of the media and press presumed John Scopes (above) would be found guilty and published illustrations mocking the defendant. Life *magazine ran a cartoon depicting monkeys reading books and proclaimed, "The whole matter is something to laugh about." (Wikimedia Commons)*

Nevertheless, the *Scopes* trial did not result in total defeat for the creationists. Allyn and Bacon publishing admitted to the *New York Times* that their books were "tactfully" written so as to prevent disturbing the sensibilities of fundamentalists. Other publishers followed a similar strategy so that the word "evolution" vanished from most textbooks written after 1925. Generally, the word "development" was inserted into texts anywhere that the word "evolution" might have been used. In short, publishers made the economic decision not to lose book sales in the South by using the word "evolution." In the end, the mighty dollar would accomplish for the fundamentalists what their political efforts in state legislatures could not.

24.1h Ethnic Churches in Urban Centers

Equally fundamentalist in their way—but with a quite different mission and influence—were the ethnic churches. Each immigrant group in America's urban centers quickly established its own congregations upon arrival in the United States. These ethnic churches (most of which were Catholic) were centers of neighborhood social life and forces for the preservation of national customs and ceremonies. Wise Catholic bishops usually appointed priests of the same nationality as the parishioners of any particular urban church. Second- and third-generation immigrants often supported their churches and church schools more to preserve their national cultures than to show commitment to a particular denominational faith.

As the old-stock, white middle class deserted the cities, more and more urban Protestant churches became black. The original Southern Baptist denomination spawned numerous sects whose small churches provided centers where the members, often from the same areas of the South, could rejoice in the promise of a better life to come after death. This emphasis on the hereafter rather than the here-and-now made the black churches, as a whole, a conservative influence, tending to reconcile parishioners to their earthly lot.

Except in the South, the Protestant churches in America had been supported mainly by the urban middle class. Neither farmers in remote areas nor working-class city dwellers generally made the effort to participate in the activities of a Protestant church; yet for the increasingly mobile members of the middle class—particularly in suburban areas—the church had a definite social value. It was a place to meet leading citizens and develop friendships through cooperation in religious endeavors. Consequently, the great growth of the urban and suburban middle class and the spread of the automobile to outlying areas helped precipitate a steady increase in church membership up to 1929. By 1926, church members constituted 46 percent of the population.

The reasons behind this growth also go far to explain why the Great Depression reversed the trend in membership. People with only shabby clothes and no money for the collection plate did not want to appear before their more prosperous neighbors. The Depression may actually have increased religious feeling, but between 1930 and 1934 the income of Protestant churches declined 50 percent. For the decade as a whole, church membership fell about 6 percent (but this would be reversed by the rapid growth in membership in the prosperous years that followed World War II).

24.2 Mass Communication

24.2a Newspapers

The newspaper continued to be the principal reading matter of adult Americans in the interwar period. Indeed, the transition from prosperity to depression gave most people more time to read and increased the size and circulation of newspapers. Where personal interests were concerned, as in attitudes toward the New Deal, readers were prepared to disagree with their newspapers—most of which were strongly anti-Roosevelt. Publishers and editors (by subtle selection of news and comment) undoubtedly influenced readers to accept many of their ideas, however.

The newspaper was the principal reading matter of adult Americans during the interwar period. The transition from prosperity to depression gave people more time to read. With subtle selection and handling of news and commentaries, publishers and editors succeeded in influencing readers politically. (SuperStock, Underwood Photo Archives)

The trend of the period was toward papers that were less competitive in opinion and more elaborate in format. While newspaper chains stopped growing in the 1930s, a more important limitation on competition came from the merger of competing papers within the same city. In 1930, 90 percent of cities with a population over a hundred thousand had two or more directly competing papers—but of the smaller cities, only 20 percent had such morning or evening competition.

In the larger cities, all-day tabloids competed against full-sized morning and evening papers. The first American tabloid newspaper was the *New York Daily News,* started by Joseph M. Patterson in 1919. Easy to read on subways and buses, the tabloid also digested news into short, simple stories—illustrated, as never before, by photographs. In 1924 the *News* had the largest circulation in New York City. Other publishers quickly copied Patterson's innovation, and by 1940 there were nearly fifty tabloids.

Another form of potential competition was the radio newscast. To protect themselves against competition from the new medium, many papers—250 by 1940—bought control of radio stations. In spite of the obvious fact that radio could deliver news more quickly, intimately, and dramatically, the effect of news broadcasts on newspaper circulation was not severe. As people received increasing amounts of news, they appeared to become more interested in local, national, and international events and to spend more time learning about them.

Improvements in technology and press services produced better-quality newspaper illustrations, more detailed last-minute news, and an increase in special departments and columns. While the humorous column—by a writer like Will Rogers, the 1920s successor to "Mr. Dooley"—was an old feature, the column of serious general comment was an innovation in the 1920s. People bought papers just to read some favorite columnist like H. L. Mencken, Heywood Broun or Walter Lippmann; and writers with such opposing views could appear in the same paper without menacing an "objective" editorial policy. Press syndicates distributed the more popular columns and comics to newspapers all over the United States.

(Wikimedia Commons)

24.26 Magazines

The public appetite for current events was fed by the rise of weekly news magazines. In 1920 only the *Literary Digest,* which took its material on current events largely from the newspapers, was important in this weekly field. In 1923 *Time,* smartly written under the direction of editors Briton Hadden and Henry Luce, made an immediate hit; and in 1936 the Luce organization launched the weekly picture magazine *Life*. Both magazines then inspired imitators.

Magazine circulation survived the Depression quite well, probably because the readers of most magazines were middle class or above—groups less affected by depression than the lower half of the income scale. Throughout the 1920s the aged *Saturday Evening Post* was supreme among general weekly magazines. Closely mirroring middle-class interests and attitudes, it mixed good popular fiction with inspirational articles about business leaders and the virtues of the American way of doing things. During the 1930s the *Post,* by turning more liberal, managed to hold much of its circulation—but competition was weakening its position.

Babe Ruth achieved legendary status and became a beloved sports celebrity to Americans when he hit sixty home runs for the New York Yankees in 1927. (Wikimedia Commons)

Most of the leading writers of the time, including William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Earnest Hemingway, wrote for magazines. Faulkner, with only a limited audience for his novels, needed the magazine revenue to support his family. Consequently, a magazine reader could sample a wide range of American literature and thought without ever buying a bound book.

For the reader of the early 1920s, who felt unable to keep up with all that was being published, Mr. and Mrs. De Witt Wallace started *The Reader's Digest*—a collection of condensed versions of what they considered the most important articles of the preceding month. As the popularity of their digest grew, they also commissioned articles and condensed books for quick reading. The *Digest* appealed to middle-class values and celebrated rugged individualism and business success. Ultimately it became the most widely read magazine in the world.

Movie magazines also began to emerge as a means by which readers (primarily women) could keep up with the latest doings of their favorite stars. For men, there were sports magazines—the *Sporting News* was actually founded as early as 1886—which featured the exploits of the era's thrilling star athletes such as Babe Ruth (who hit sixty home runs for the New York Yankees in 1927), tennis player Helen Wills (who dominated the women's game in the '20s), and Notre Dame's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (a famed football backfield). That movie stars and sports stars loomed so large in the public imagination—indeed, one might argue that the modern phenomenon of celebrity was created in the 1920s—owed much to the new tabloid newspapers, to the magazines, and to the new medium of radio.

Urban painters
A group of painters who concentrated on the American scene but explored the problems of urban life, these artists were generally stimulated by a strong sense of social justice engendered primarily by the Depression.

Realist painters
Painters who depicted realistic and often patriotic scenes of American history

Walker Evans
Photographer who was hired by the federal government to record images of suffering during the Depression and who focused on Alabama sharecroppers

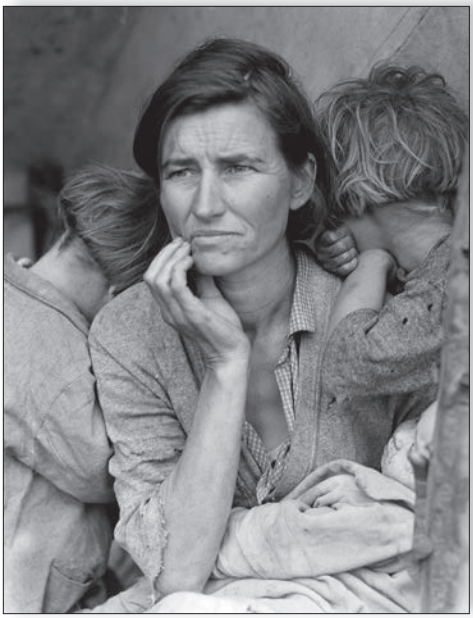
Of all the era's celebrities, none loomed larger than Charles Lindbergh, known affectionately to the American people as "Lucky Lindy." The public was already excited about the burgeoning possibilities of flight when, on May 20, 1927, Lindbergh flew solo in the small plane *The Spirit of St. Louis* from New York to Paris—proving that airplanes could be viable transportation. When he returned home, he was a hero on a scale seldom seen before or since. Indeed, he would make headlines in newspapers when he merely flew over a city—and when he actually landed in one, he was feted on a vast scale. He seemed at the time to embody the best American values and to epitomize the spirit of the new century.

24.2c Radio

In August 1920, station WWJ of *The Detroit News* initiated commercial broadcasting. The mass development of radio was retarded by many problems—including the control of necessary patents by American Telephone and Telegraph, General Electric, and Westinghouse, and the unwillingness of Associated Press (the largest news service) to have its releases broadcast. Then in 1926, AT&T agreed to permit network broadcasting by renting its wires; and AP—pressed by Hearst's International News Service and other competitors—amended its rules to allow the broadcast of important news. Between 1926 and 1929, three national radio networks were created. Advertising agencies now brought their big clients to the networks, and radio quickly achieved the form that was to characterize it during the next generation.

During the depression decade, systematic polls of public opinion commenced; hence we have the first reasonably reliable estimates of how people spent their time. By 1940, four-fifths of American households had radios, and these were turned on nearly five hours a day. Radio listeners heard Hoover, Roosevelt, and other political leaders put forth their views. Franklin Roosevelt, in particular, capitalized on his charming radio personality and on the pseudo-intimacy of home reception in his "fireside chats." Roosevelt's use of the radio helped to counterbalance the generally unfavorable newspaper opinion of him.

As international tensions mounted in the 1930s, commentators such as H. V. Kaltenborn, Lowell Thomas, and Gabriel Heatter attracted large radio audiences. In the daytime hours, radio listeners were entertained by soap operas, baseball, and college football. Professional football had its successful radio debut in 1935, and the American public followed important sporting events like the heavyweight title bouts of Joe Louis on tens of millions of sets.



Pictured is Dorothea Lange's photograph "Migrant Mother," taken in 1936. The image was the most famous picture of the Depression Era as it realistically captured the suffering of the time. Many Americans could strongly identify and empathize with what the young mother was experiencing, as was conveyed in the photo. (Wikimedia Commons)

24.2d Painting

The main body of important American painting during the interwar period was of a more conventional type, and had close enough contact with reality to permit social commentary. A significant group of painters concentrated on the American scene, exploring the problems of urban life. These **urban painters**—including Lois Jones, Ben Shahn, William Gropper, and Philip Evergood—were among those stimulated by a strong sense of social justice, engendered primarily by the Depression. They sought to use art as a "social weapon," protesting in their paintings against mob violence, political corruption, slums, and strike breaking. These angry painters of the 1930s saw poverty as an inexcusable result of capitalism. In contrast, the subsidized **realist painters** in the Federal Arts Project (one of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs) produced many community murals and other public pictures. Perhaps because of this—and perhaps because there was a general return in the late '30s to an appreciation of things American—their art tended to embrace the national past and to remain as the last strong surge of popular, realistic painting.

24.2e Photography

By the interwar years, photography had truly achieved the status of an art form, and American photographers were creating some of the most memorable pictures in the world's trove of photographic images. By the time the Great Depression fastened its grip on the nation, there was a group of highly-trained and proficient photographers ready to document the plight of those who were its victims. Among the most important of these was **Walker Evans**, who took extensive pictures of three families of Alabama sharecroppers; these images stand as a haunting record of the decade's poverty. It was **Dorothea Lange**, however, who was responsible for the most famous picture of depression-era suffering, *Migrant Mother,* taken in 1936. Lange began to portray those in need and in 1935 collaborated with University of California economist Paul Taylor, who was studying the lives of rural migrants to California. In 1936 came the founding of *Life* magazine, a publication devoted to high-quality photojournalism. In short, American photography as an art form had come of age.

Dorothea Lange
As a photographer hired by the federal government to record images of suffering during the Depression, Lange was responsible for the most famous picture of depression-era suffering: *Migrant Mother,* taken in 1936.

Alienation
A growing dissatisfaction with American society and twentieth-century values that occurred primarily among young Americans

24.2f Music

The development of the phonograph and the radio gave musical composers and performers a vastly expanded audience. By the 1920s phonographs and records had achieved an accuracy of reproduction that made them acceptable to the best musicians. Undoubtedly many more people than ever before became acquainted with operas, symphonies, and other classical works.

Aboard the SS de Grasse *in 1930, maestro Arturo Toscanini led the New York Philharmonic group on a European tour that gained international fame for the orchestra. (Wikipedia)*

In the interwar period, there was an upsurge in musical composition drawing on native materials; this produced works ranging from popular songs through more sophisticated show tunes and the jazz-based dance music of Duke Ellington, to concertos and symphonies. Jazz—which has been called both the major African American contribution to American culture and the only purely American contribution to the arts—was already popular in 1920. Built on these American traditions, the musical comedies of American composers Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, and Cole Porter captivated the Western world.

The 1930s was the decade of the dance bands, both "sweet" (Lombardo, Duchin, Whiteman, Wayne King) and "swing" (Bennie Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and Glen Miller). Perhaps swing—or perhaps the quest for novelty undertaken by millions of unemployed youths—brought back open dancing (away from one's partner) in such dances as the jitterbug. George Gershwin made use of jazz motifs and rhythms in *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), *An American in Paris* (1928), and the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935)—all of which won world acclaim.

24.2g Literature and Drama

Writers of the 1920s experienced a growing dissatisfaction with, and **alienation** from, American society and twentieth-century values. In particular, they were disillusioned by the ease with which Woodrow Wilson and other world leaders had converted moral idealism into a zeal for war. They were alienated by the triumph of materialism and business values in the postwar period and exasperated by the smug self-satisfaction of the American upper classes.

Ernest Hemingway believed in the concept of "the lost generation," and its disillusioned, cynical, expatriate society. He expressed his opinions for the causes of that disillusionment and cynicism in his World War I novel, A Farewell to Arms, *1929. (Wikimedia Commons)*

In *This Side of Paradise,* F. Scott Fitzgerald complained that the young writers "had grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in men shaken." They deplored American materialism, prosperity, Puritanism, and conformity—in short, much of the national heritage. The new writers did not preach reform, for they saw no immediate way to correct the situation. Critic H. L. Mencken's pungent attacks on American values were widely read both in his *American Mercury* magazine and in book form, revealing the desire of many intellectuals to divorce themselves from most traditional American attitudes.

"The lost generation"
The disillusioned, cynical, expatriate society of the younger generation during the Jazz Age and whose members exposed the contradictions and hypocrisies of American culture

Harlem Renaissance
An explosion of writings, many of which contained social commentary, by educated African American writers in the 1920s

Ernest Hemingway, who gave currency to the phrase **"the lost generation,"** brilliantly pictured its disillusioned, cynical, expatriate society in *The Sun Also Rises* (1925) and traced the causes of that disillusionment and cynicism in his novel of World War I, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Other writers exposed the contradictions and hypocrisies of American culture. *An American Tragedy* (1925), which portrayed a young American hopelessly confused by the false social and religious values of his environment, marked the summit of Theodore Dreiser's career. Similarly, Sinclair Lewis wrote all of his important attacks on American society during the 1920s. *Main Street* (1920) satirized the small town of the Midwest, where he observed a situation of "dullness made God." *Babbitt* (1922) parodied the self-satisfied, conformist, materialistic American businessman so successfully that "Babbitt" and "Babittry" were added to the dictionary. *Arrowsmith* (1925) depicted an America that placed frustrating impediments in the path of a doctor devoted to medical research. Sherwood Anderson, in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and in subsequent books, showed from a Freudian viewpoint how small-town morals and customs produced a neurotic society. Perhaps the most brilliant literary attacks on the lack of proper values in the American upper class, to which he personally aspired, were in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Zora Neale Hurston (Wikimedia Commons)

Another interesting literary phenomenon of the era was the **Harlem Renaissance**. Urban communities of educated blacks had, from the beginning of the century, produced an increasing volume of prose and poetry. As a group, their great achievement was to portray the world of the American black man and woman as they knew it. One of the most interesting writers of the Renaissance of the 1930s, was Zora Neale Hurston. In her best-known work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), she brought to the task of writing both an immersion in black folk culture and the tools of someone trained to analyze folklore. Controversial within the black community because some critics saw it as too rosy a picture at the expense of depicting suffering, the novel has been rediscovered in recent years.

John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, *1939, chronicles the misery of a family of Oklahoma tenant farmers who migrated to California in search of work during the Great Depression. The novel was later made into a motion picture. (Wikimedia Commons)*

The Great Depression inevitably brought a return to social issues. Poverty amidst plenty was the writer's lot as well as that of the masses. John Dos Passos, an alienated member of the upper middle class who had begun an attack on American capitalism in *Three Soldiers* (1921), achieved his best work in this genre in a trilogy, *U.S.A.,* published between 1930 and 1936. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which chronicles the misery of a family of Oklahoma tenant farmers who migrated to California in search of work, is a graphic description of the contrast between the migratory unemployed and prosperous, propertied Americans.

At the other end of the spectrum, the work of one writer—judged by critics in later decades to be the greatest of this period—virtually ignored the passing environments of war, prosperity, and depression. William Faulkner was concerned with the ultimate meaning of human existence; and while he found it in the individual's inescapable relation to nature and the land, his immediate focus was the problem faced by the traditional South in adjusting to the twentieth century. More daring as a writer than his contemporaries, he did not hesitate to depict the world through the eyes of an idiot, to manipulate time, and to imply emotional meanings beyond the range of rational communication. His great period, which ultimately won him a Nobel Prize in Literature, was from *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929 through *Light in August* in 1932.

American poets of the 1920s—also trying to deal with ultimate, or existential, problems—achieved world acclaim as well. In 1922 T. S. Eliot, expatriate but still an American citizen, published *The Waste Land,* a poem of despair with modern civilization that exerted tremendous influence.

In drama, the postwar rebellion against the world in general and America in particular also produced important work. The eleven plays of **Eugene O'Neill**, from *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) to *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931)—all strongly influenced by Freudian psychology—marked the first major American contribution to serious theater.

Eugene O'Neill
Produced eleven plays from *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) to *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931)—all strongly influenced by Freudian psychology and marking the first major American contribution to serious theater

24.2h Motion Pictures

D. W. Griffith's silent movie *Broken Blossoms* (1919), starring Lillian Gish, was widely acclaimed by critics as marking the emergence of a new art form. Unfortunately, the motion picture as an art medium was subordinated to the business interests that marketed the films. The major production studios owned chains of theaters and controlled the circulation of pictures. By 1930, with an investment of $2 billion by the owners to protect, the managers of the companies were unwilling to risk financing films that might not appeal to a major segment of the American public. Consequently, the motion pictures of the '20s were comprised of massive spectacles of courts and armies directed by Cecil B. De Mille, sentimental melodramas starring Mary Pickford, breathtaking exploits by Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., or romantic seductions by Rudolph Valentino. Nevertheless, comedy remained as one genre that could reconcile profit-oriented producers and talented actors. Most famous of the comedians of the silent film era was **Charlie Chaplin** who, producing and directing his own pictures, continued in his comedies of the underdog to protest against many of the values of American society.

Charlie Chaplin
Most famous of the comedians of the silent film era, Chaplin produced and directed his own pictures that were often comedies representing underdog protests against many of the values of American society.

The great stars from the age of classic movie stars, such as Greta Garbo, are still iconic figures in American culture. (Wikimedia Commons)

Whether or not they were art, movies began to enjoy an extraordinary influence, especially on the young. In the last three years of the 1920s, sound began to make the motion picture potentially the equal of the stage. As a result, stock companies and vaudeville practically disappeared; and the professional stage became restricted to a few of the largest cities. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the motion picture was the standard form of visual dramatic entertainment.

In the '30s the Hollywood production line turned out a steady stream of highly polished, star-laden escapist films—glittering musicals, gangster stories, Westerns, heroic costume dramas, and comedies. The movies were embraced by millions of ordinary Americans, for whom they provided—at a price as low as 10¢—a refuge from reality. The grimmer aspects of depression were treated in a few commercial films and in some excellent documentary films produced by the federal government. Film scholars and critics view the films of the 1930s—including *The Grapes of Wrath, The Wizard of Oz,* and *Gone with the Wind*—as some of the most significant American art of the twentieth century. The great stars—Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Marlene Dietrich, Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, Cary Grant, Katherine Hepburn, and Jimmy Stewart, to name only a few—are still iconic figures in American culture.

24.2i Architecture

The towering American skyscraper—created in part because of the narrow confines of the Chicago Loop and downtown Manhattan—was regarded as an architectural innovation of worldwide importance and was a monument to American ideas and marketing. As land values rose in all U.S. cities, it became economical to increase the height of buildings in the most valuable locations—but the altitudes achieved in the 1920s far exceeded this economic need. The advertising value that accrued to the company that built a towering building and the extra amount that tenants were willing to pay for the prestige and convenience of such lofty offices led to a race for height that culminated for that era in the 1,200-foot Empire State Building.

24.3 Social Change

24.3a Motorization and Urbanization

While the advent of radio and progress in electronics promised great future changes, immediate changes in American society centered on the automobile. Until World War I, automobiles had been used chiefly for the recreation of the upper middle class. In 1917 less than one farm family in six had an automobile, and in the nation as a whole there were fewer than five million cars. As forms of transport, trucks and buses were negligible economically and socially.

By 1930, two-thirds of America's farms—probably all the prosperous commercial farms—had automobiles; and the nation had about twenty-three million passenger cars. Since there were only about twenty-six million households, and many families in big cities did not need private automobiles, the United States was approaching the goal of a car in the garage of every family that wanted one. Even more spectacular than the fivefold increase in passenger cars was a ninefold rise in the number of trucks. Nearly four million commercial vehicles—of which forty thousand were buses—signaled the beginning of the change to a society built around motor transport.

One of the cultural pressures directly connected with the automobile was its rise as a sign of social status. A new car became a symbol of success and prosperity, and the bigger and more expensive the car the higher the presumed status of the owner. For many urban apartment dwellers, the automobile took the place of an elaborate house as a mark of social standing.

At the time that the Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 gave women the right to vote, upper-middle- and upper-class women in and around the largest urban centers were shaking off the decorum of Victorian customs. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Photo Company Collection, LC-USZ62-75334)

24.3b The Emancipated Woman

At the time that the Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 gave women the right to vote, upper-middle- and upper-class women in and around the largest urban centers were shaking off the decorum of Victorian customs. They were smoking in public, drinking illegally in speakeasies, talking freely about sex, and in general creating the appearance of demanding equal social rights and privileges. Nevertheless, the publicity accorded the suffrage movement and the "emancipated woman" was in many respects highly misleading. Failing to establish a bloc of voters that could be used to influence legislation, as the Anti-Saloon League had done in the Prohibition movement, women soon found that their influence on party politics was minimal.

The emancipated upper-class women were too few in number, particularly among the mature and influential, to have an effect beyond journalistic publicity. WWI produced no significant change in the definition or status of "women's work." Although the percentage of women engaged in professional life rose almost 20 percent from 1920 to 1930, women were still substantially excluded from professorships, the medical profession, and most law schools.

The proportion of women in the labor force was about the same in 1930 as it had been in 1910. In the latter year, 57 percent of working women were blacks or immigrants—which was at the time equivalent to saying they were in low-paying occupations. The percentage of women in clerical jobs remained about the same during the prosperous '20s. Women continued to be paid less than men for doing the same job. There was, in effect, an openly expressed intention by most political, trade union, and business leaders to keep women in their traditional roles, which would avoid difficult adjustments and limit female competition with men. The very fact of lower pay, however, helped many women keep their jobs in the Depression, although it lessened their militancy.

For the middle-class women who were homemakers, the trend to smaller houses and apartments and the availability of electrical housekeeping aids, such as vacuum cleaners and

refrigerators, lessened the drudgery of housework. For the few married women who could secure good jobs, there was less social stigma attached to working than in earlier decades—but strong economic and cultural barriers still blocked the road to equality with men.

The *Sweet* case
1925 case that upheld the right of blacks to defend themselves against violence

The *First Texas Primary* case
1927 case that declared exclusion of black voters from primary elections to be unconstitutional

Marcus Garvey
Flamboyant Jamaican-born founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Garvey called on black people to take pride in their race and its history, to turn their backs on white America, and to return to their African homeland.

24.3c An Urban Black Society

Since the beginning of the century, there had been a steady migration of rural blacks to the cities; however, World War I so increased the movement that the largest Northern cities—New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia—became America's major centers of black population. Although frequently able to earn more money than they ever had before, the occupants of these black urban communities soon realized that they had not achieved the Promised Land. Usually they had to move into overcrowded, run-down tenements where they replaced the most recent, poorest immigrants. Though urban blacks were usually of old American stock, they found themselves looked down on by the foreign-born whites just as they had always been looked down on by the native whites. For a time in the 1920s, the singers, dancers, and musicians of black Harlem—and some of its writers and artists as well—were embraced by white sophisticates and bohemians. But this fad did not last, nor did it touch the average black person.

There had never been much feeling of labor solidarity in the United States, and black workers in industrial centers were often resented as intruders who threatened white male employment and wage standards. Similar resentment led to attacks on blacks as the ghettos overflowed into white neighborhoods. In 1919 racial violence broke out in a score of cities all over the nation, and blacks learned that they could not rely on either police protection or justice in the courts.

In the early 1920s, black activist organizations reacted by moving in two directions. With the support of white middle-class liberals, the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sought to establish for blacks the civil and political rights guaranteed by the Constitution. On this front, temporary legal victories were won in **the *Sweet* case** (1925), which upheld the right of blacks to defend themselves against violence, and in **the *First Texas Primary* case** (1927), which declared the exclusion of black voters from primary elections to be unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the organization that represented the hopes and dreams of many working-class blacks was the Universal Negro Improvement Association founded by the charismatic Jamaican, **Marcus Garvey**. Garvey called on black people to take pride in their race and its history, to turn their backs on white America, and to return to their African homeland. The practical NAACP worked for integration, the romantic Garvey for black unity. The same twin stream has long run through African American history, and has continued to do so in the decades since.

24.3d Prohibition

Superimposed on this society was America's greatest experiment in more government control over personal habits. While farmers would continue to make wine and other drinks at home, as they always had, city dwellers were now denied the opportunity to legally buy alcohol. As a result, the urban areas that had opposed Prohibition now refused to abide by the law. Unsurprisingly, there was no difficulty in finding entrepreneurs ready to supply illicit demand.

The Eighteenth Amendment left interpretation of what was an "intoxicating" beverage to Congress. The Volstead Act of 1919, vetoed by Wilson and repassed by the necessary two-thirds majority, set the limit of alcoholic content at 0.5 percent. It is an interesting paradox that after the triumph of the prohibitionists in Congress, having passed the amendment and the Volstead Act, they settled back and made no great effort to see that their law was enforced. The number of federal agents began at about 1,500 and rose to only a little over 2,800 at the peak. With a top salary of around $3,000, it was not surprising that these men were often corruptible—but even had they been entirely diligent, they were too few even to check the imports of liquor. Furthermore, the local authorities in wet areas gave them little or no help. In 1923, New York state repealed its law for local

Twenty-first Amendment
Repealed the prohibition of alcohol

J. Edgar Hoover
Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who led the FBI in the fight against notorious criminals of the Jazz Age—including John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, Baby Face Nelson, and Bonnie and Clyde

enforcement; and politicians in other big metropolitan areas connived, almost openly, with those supplying the liquor. As a result, an illegal traffic in whiskey, wine, and beer—worth hundreds of millions of dollars annually—fell into the hands of underworld leaders. The terms "racket" and "racketeer" came into use; and the newly powerful gangsters quickly branched out into other criminal activities, including bribery, extortion, arson, and murder.

Illegal trafficking of whiskey, wine, and beer, worth hundreds of millions of dollars annually, fell into the hands of underworld leaders. (Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-96026)

Police were too often on the payroll of racketeers. Al Capone, head of the liquor racket in Chicago, was as powerful politically as anyone in the municipal government of that metropolis—and he was the undisputed ruler of the suburban city of Cicero. In the suburbs of New York and other great cities, the liquor interests often controlled county or municipal politics. The sheriffs and police chiefs received a portion of the weekly collections from speakeasies and worked against the occasional federal agent who sought to get evidence of violation of the law.

The national picture was confusing. In dry areas Prohibition appeared to work at least as well as it had before the amendment. In wet-leaning urban areas, relatively less well represented in Congress, Prohibition seemed to be undermining the moral values of both the young elite and honest government. Some manufacturers thought there was less drinking among their employees, while others were sure there was more. The Republican administration continued vaguely to sponsor "the noble experiment." The Wickersham Commission, appointed by Hoover, gave an unfavorable report in 1931, but illogically concluded that Prohibition should be continued.

In the end, it was not moral or temperance issues but rather the depression and need for government revenue in the desperate year of 1932 that apparently tipped the balance in favor of relegalizing the liquor business. There was no serious effort to substitute a new law permitting beer and wine for the unworkable Volstead Act. In 1933 the entire Eighteenth Amendment was quickly repealed by the **Twenty-first Amendment**, and the temperance problem was returned to the states.

(Clockwise from top left, John Dillinger, Melvin Pervis, Pretty Boy Floyd, Homer Van Meter, Alvin Karpis, Baby Face Nelson) J. Edgar Hoover renamed the Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Soon thereafter, state law enforcement agencies implored the FBI to assist in the apprehension of gangs across the Midwest that were responsible for armed bank robberies, the deaths of dozens of lawmen, and innocent bystanders. (CORBIS, © Bettmann)

24.3¢ Gangster Wars

In 1924, Calvin Coolidge appointed the iron-fisted **J. Edgar Hoover** as director of the Bureau of Investigation. Hoover was a gifted criminologist and master of media relations who made the bureau, renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 1935, famous for its efficiency. Hoover's FBI captured the imagination of Americans during the 1930s when city and state law enforcement agencies implored the FBI to assist in the apprehension of a growing number of gangs across the Midwest that were responsible for a string of armed bank robberies and the deaths of dozens of lawmen and innocent bystanders. The combination of automobiles, which provided fast getaways, and automatic weapons, which provided deadly firepower, allowed the gangs to successfully rob banks and retail businesses almost at will. Some Americans, nearly helpless against forces they didn't understand during the Great Depression, made

heroes of outlaws who took what they wanted at gunpoint. The famed gangsters included Baby Face Nelson, Machine Gun Kelly, Pretty Boy Floyd, and of course, the man designated by the FBI as Public Enemy #1, **John Dillinger**. Under the Motor Vehicle Theft Act—which made it a federal offense to take a stolen vehicle across state lines—the bureau was able to step in and pursue the gangs, whose crimes would have normally come under state jurisdictions.

The criminal whose pursuit received the most attention was John Dillinger. From September 1933 until July 1934, he and his violent gang terrorized the Midwest, killing ten men and wounding seven others, robbing banks and police arsenals, and staging three jail breaks—killing a sheriff during one and wounding two guards in another. As the Dillinger cat-and-mouse game continued, the notoriety of Dillinger and Hoover—as well as the FBI's **"G-Men**," especially Melvin Purvis who headed the Dillinger investigation—grew. A tip from a Dillinger insider, Anna Sage (a Romanian immigrant who cut a deal to provide information in return for protection against deportation for prostitution), eventually led to the shooting death of John Dillinger by special agents outside the Biograph Theater in Chicago. Dillinger's demise, along with the capture and shooting of other famous gangsters of the era, brought greater power to the bureau and to Hoover who would rule it until his death in 1972.

Pictured are the notorious gangsters, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, "Bonnie and Clyde." (Wikimedia Commons)

Perhaps the other most celebrated group of bank robbers of the time was the notorious gang headed by Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, known more simply in American lore as **"Bonnie and Clyde."** Bonnie and Clyde met in Texas in 1930. At the time, Bonnie was 19 and married to an imprisoned murderer; Clyde was 21 and unmarried. Soon after, he was arrested for a burglary and sent to jail. He escaped (using a gun Bonnie had smuggled to him), was recaptured, and was sent back to prison. Clyde was paroled in February 1932, rejoined Bonnie, and resumed a life of crime. At the time they were killed in 1934, they were believed to have committed thirteen murders and several robberies and burglaries. Before dawn on May 23, 1934, a posse composed of police officers from Louisiana and Texas—including Texas Ranger Frank Hamer—concealed themselves in bushes along the highway near Sailes, Louisiana. In the early daylight, Bonnie and Clyde appeared in an automobile and died in a hail of gunfire.

John Dillinger
Bank robber designated by the FBI as "Public Enemy #1" and gunned down by the FBI in Chicago in 1934

"G-Men"
Nickname for FBI men assigned to the cases involving the country's most notorious bank robbers, such as John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde

"Bonnie and Clyde"
Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, two young notorious bank robbers gunned down by the FBI and local lawmen outside Sailes, Louisiana, in 1934

24.3f Interwar Transition

By 1940 the scientific base for the highest level of consumption in world history had been achieved, but corresponding institutional adjustments had not taken place. During this time of transition, the 1920s in the U.S. marked the world's highest peak of material well-being up to that time—and the 1930s the greatest depth of politico-economic failure in American history. It was hardly surprising that each decade produced unusual problems and unique reactions.

The Great Depression inevitably upset most Americans more than any problems caused by prosperity. In 1932, they felt the deep sense of frustration that must come from seeing people starving while crops are being burned for lack of a market—but outright rebellion against capitalism or traditional American values was rare. To a remarkable degree people suffered deprivation in silence, comforting themselves with whatever was left. The majority warmly supported Franklin Roosevelt in his programs to provide greater material security, and the protest that feebly sprouted in the dark days from 1931 to 1934 was smothered under a reaffirmation of belief in traditional American values.

There was, however, a fundamental change: it would no longer be expected that individual citizens, or at least individual families, were solely responsible for their own welfare. A new tradition of public responsibility for the welfare of private citizens was in the process of creation, a tradition that would last for many decades. We now turn to a closer look at the politics of the time period, with special attention to the New Deal.

Timeline

1859	Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species.*
1886	*The Sporting News* begins publication.
1916	John Dewey publishes *Democracy and Education.*
1919	Progressive Education Association is formed.
	D. W. Griffith's silent movie, *Broken Blossoms,* debuts.
	The first American tabloid newspaper, the *New York Daily News* (founded by Joseph M. Patterson), begins publication.
1920	January 16, Billy Sunday celebrates Prohibition with a mock funeral for John Barleycorn.
	August, station WWI of *The Detroit News* initiates commercial broadcasting.
1922	Sinclair Lewis publishes *Babbitt.*
	A teacher in Kentucky is brought to trial for teaching that the earth is round; the teacher was fired when opponents proved in court, through the Bible, that the earth was flat.
1923	*Time* magazine begins publication.
1924	George Gershwin composes his first classical work, *Rhapsody in Blue.*
	William Jennings Bryan argues that a "scientific soviet" is attempting to dictate what is taught in schools and attempting to mold the religion of the nation.
	J. Edgar Hoover is appointed head of the FBI.
1925	F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby.*
	The Scopes "Monkey" Trial takes place in Dayton, Tennessee.
	Ernest Hemmingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises.*
	Theodore Dreiser publishes *An American Tragedy.*
	Sweet case upholds the right of blacks to defend themselves against violence.
1926	The Associated Press (AP) allows radio broadcasts of its news.

Timeline

1927	Babe Ruth hits sixty home runs for the New York Yankees.
	May 20–21, Charles Lindbergh flies solo in the small plane *The Spirit of St. Louis* from New York to Paris.
	First Texas Primary case declares the exclusion of black voters from primary elections to be unconstitutional.
1929	William Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury.*
	Ernest Hemmingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms.*
1930	CBS began broadcast of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra on Saturday afternoons.
	John Dos Passos publishes the first volume of his *U.S.A.* trilogy.
1931	Wickersham Commission gives an unfavorable report on Prohibition.
1932	William Faulkner publishes *Light in August.*
1934	May 23, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow perish in a hail of gunfire from lawmen outside Sailes, Louisiana.
	July 22, John Dillinger is gunned down at the Biograph Theater in Chicago.
1935	Professional football begins radio broadcasts.
	George Gershwin composes the Folk Opera, *Porgy and Bess.*
1936	Dorothea Lange publishes the photo, *Migrant Mother.*
	Life magazine begins publication.
	John Maynard Keynes publishes *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money.*
1939	John Steinbeck publishes *The Grapes of Wrath.*
1940	Ernest Hemmingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls.*

Chapter Summary

The "Jazz Age" was a period of good times in the 1920s followed by hard times in the 1930s. The period witnessed an explosion of consumer goods and new technologies as America moved into the automobile and aviation age—but also the age of motion pictures, radio and mass communication, and household conveniences. It was also an age of Prohibition of alcohol, which led to illegal consumption and organized crime. It was an age of the relaxing of sexual mores in the 1920s, of dance halls, and of jazz, often written and performed by African Americans.

The Jazz Age was a time of challenging traditional thought, something that was resisted by Protestant fundamentalists. Psychological theories questioned the ability of humans to reason objectively; and Sigmund Freud argued that subconscious impulses, including libido, influenced human behavior and thought processes. Education was altered with the ideas of John Dewey to reflect the new psychology. The idea of preparing students for daily life, rather than requiring them to master a body of knowledge, divided school activities into four major categories: health, fundamental processes, civic and social relations, and recreation. Of these, only fundamental processes embraced conventional learning. From the emphasis on utility came more practically-oriented curricula on the secondary level, including vocational education. Simultaneously, advances in physics included Einstein's theory of relativity and the discovery that atoms were all composed of identical subatomic particles.

Meanwhile, the discipline of economics became dominated by the ideas of John Maynard Keynes. His major work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), concluded that if the functioning of the free market did not provide adequate business investment, government was the only agency with sufficient spending power to correct the problem.

The advances in science and psychology provoked a Protestant fundamentalist backlash and the passage, especially in Southern states, of laws banning the teaching of evolution. In 1925, the ACLU offered legal counsel to anyone who would challenge such laws—and John T. Scopes of Dayton, Tennessee, did just that. Clarence Darrow volunteered to represent Scopes, and William Jennings Bryan volunteered to assist the prosecution. Though Bryan and the Protestant fundamentalists were generally embarrassed in the trial—and the national media (led by H. L. Mencken) made "monkeys" out of Bryan and the fundamentalists—the *Scopes* laws stayed on the books; and publishers voluntarily pulled Darwin from the textbooks so as to retain their textbook sales in the South.

Concerning the national media, newspapers, radio, and magazines exploded in the Jazz Age, led by three major radio networks and *Time* magazine. Music on the radio was dominated by jazz, swing, and the big band sound of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller. Photography also came into its own; and *Life* magazine was born in 1936, dedicated to depicting American life in pictures.

In literature and drama, the Jazz Age produced American icons George Gershwin, William Falkner, Ernest Hemmingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald while American movies came of age. Meanwhile, the automobile dominated American life.

With Prohibition, the Jazz Age was also the age of bootleg alcohol, the growth of both the FBI and organized crime, and the era of celebrated gangsters. The most famous and notorious gangsters of all were "Public Enemy #1" John Dillinger and "Bonnie and Clyde," who were killed by lawmen within two months of each other in 1934. While the government was stamping out organized crime, the culture was changing during the Great Depression from a hyperindividualist one, to one that was more holistic in character where collective responsibilities received greater attention.

Key Terms

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Pop Quiz

1. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 granted federal aid to _____.
   a. vocational education
   b. women's education
   c. education for blacks
   d. higher education

2. Which of the following is included in the arguments of John Maynard Keynes?
   a. Increasing the income of the poor stimulated demand.
   b. Increased demand, not increased savings, led to new investment.
   c. Total income could only increase from new investment that comes from increased demand.
   d. All of the above

3. What spawned the Protestant fundamentalist political movement?
   a. the view of many that Darwin's theory of evolution conflicted with the creation story in the Bible
   b. growing scholarly historical criticism of the Bible
   c. the anti-Communism, hyperpatriotism, and nativism of the Red Scare
   d. all of the above

4. The *Scopes* trial in Tennessee dramatized the debate between _____.
   a. fundamentalists and liberals
   b. liberals and nationalists
   c. nationalists and fundamentalists
   d. Communists and fundamentalists

5. Which of the following is true of culture in the Jazz Age?
   a. The vast majority of the population adopted the lifestyle of wild parties, free-wheeling women, and heavy drinking.
   b. While flappers and jazz babies existed, the cultural changes in most parts of the country were moderate and gradual.
   c. While flappers and jazz babies existed, the cultural changes in most parts of the country were even more radical with Communism and atheism.
   d. Jazz, wild parties, free-wheeling women, and heavy drinking were characteristics only of the low income black community.

6. By 1940, the item that four-fifths of American households owned and used five hours a day was the _____.
   a. radio
   b. television
   c. still
   d. washing machine

7. The writer who gave currency to the phrase "the lost generation" was _____.
   a. Ernest Hemingway
   b. F. Scott Fitzgerald
   c. H. L. Mencken
   d. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

8. The author of *The Waste Land* was _____.
   a. Hart Crane
   b. Lillian Hellman
   c. T. S. Eliot
   d. Clifford Odets

9. The "emancipated women" of the 1920s were doing all of the following except _____.
   a. smoking in public
   b. drinking illegally in speakeasies
   c. talking freely about sex
   d. exerting tremendous influence on political parties through their new right to vote

10. The man who was appointed to head the Bureau of Investigation in 1924 (later the FBI) and who headed that agency until his death in 1972 was _____.
    a. J. Edgar Hoover
    b. Herbert Hoover
    c. Melvin Purvis
    d. Frank Hamer

11. Keynesian economics emphasized the laws of supply and demand. T F

12. Scientific discoveries in physics and psychology made truth less certain. T F

13. John Maynard Keynes taught that prosperity depended on high _____ and investment by _____.

14. In early radio, _____ dictated what would be broadcast.

15. Marcus Garvey founded the _____ _____ _____ Association.

Answer Key:
1. a 2. d 3. d 4. a 5. b 6. a 7. a 8. c 9. d 10. a 11. F 12. T 13. wages; government 14. advertisers 15. Universal Negro Improvement