

23

Coping with Change

1920–1929

By the
SOUTH SHORE LINE

Trains from Chicago operated over Illinois Central R.R.
from Randolph, Van Buren, 12TH, 43RD, 53RD & 63RD St. Stations.



RUDOLPH VALENTINO IN THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

(Granger Collection)

to Hollywood, America's emerging movie capital. Shortening his name to "Rudolph Valentino," he appeared in fifteen short films in 1919–1920.

Stardom came in 1921 with *The Sheik* and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Appearing in romantic melodramas such as *Blood and Sand* (1922), *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1924), and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), Valentino reigned as Hollywood's most popular male actor. With his good looks, swarthy skin, and piercing dark eyes, he exuded sex appeal, rousing fantasies of erotic adventures in female viewers. In this era of silent films, his poor English posed no problem. Movie magazines chronicled his two marriages and an affair with a famous actress, Pola Negri.

In August 1926, at thirty-one, Valentino died in New York after surgery for a perforated ulcer. Lines of female fans stretched for blocks around the funeral home. Pola Negri collapsed at the coffin. For several years thereafter, a veiled woman in black appeared each year on the anniversary of his death to place flowers at his grave in Hollywood. In a meteoric seven-year career, an unknown immigrant had become one of the brightest celebrities of a celebrity-obsessed decade. The popularity of the movies and their larger-than-life stars was only one novelty in a turbulent era that brought a Niagara of new consumer goods, a gushing flood of automobiles, and a babble of sound from millions of radios and phonographs. The decade also saw changing cultural values, creativity in the arts, and bitter social conflicts. With good reason, it soon acquired a nickname, "the Roaring Twenties."

Many features of contemporary American life may be traced to the 1920s. Indeed, this decade marks the dawn of the modern era. This chapter explores how different groups of Americans responded to technological, social, and cultural changes that could be both exciting and threatening.

AMONG THE MANY IMMIGRANTS

arriving at Ellis Island in 1913 was the eighteen-year-old son of a veterinarian from a southern Italian village: Rodolfo Alfonso Raffaello Piero Filiberto Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antoguolla. After working as a gardener and dance instructor, he joined a touring operetta company that soon went bankrupt. Adrift in San Francisco, he met an actor who encouraged him to move

A New Economic Order (p. 698)

Booming Business, Ailing Agriculture 698
 New Modes of Producing, Managing, and Selling 699
 Women in the New Economic Era 699
 Struggling Labor Unions in a Business Age 702

Standpat Politics in a Decade of Change (p. 702)

The Evolving Presidency: Scandals and Public-Relations Manipulation 702
 Republican Policy Making in a Probusiness Era 704
 Independent Internationalism 704
 Progressive Stirrings, Democratic Party Divisions 706
 Women and Politics in the 1920s: Achievements and Setbacks 706

Mass Society, Mass Culture (p. 706)

Cities, Cars, Consumer Goods 706
 Soaring Energy Consumption and Environmental Threats 708
 Mass-Produced Entertainment 708
 Celebrity Culture 711

Cultural Ferment and Creativity (p. 712)

The Jazz Age and the Postwar Crisis of Values 712
 Alienated Writers 716
 Architects, Painters, and Musicians Confront Modern America 716
 The Harlem Renaissance 717

A Society in Conflict (p. 718)

Immigration Restriction 718
 Needed Workers/Unwelcome Aliens: Hispanic Newcomers 718
 Nativism, Antiradicalism, and the Sacco-Vanzetti Case 719
 Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial 719
 The Ku Klux Klan 720
 The Garvey Movement 721
 Prohibition: Cultures in Conflict 722

Hoover at the Helm (p. 723)

The Election of 1928 723
 Herbert Hoover's Social Thought 724

A PLEASURE-MAD DECADE A 1925 railroad poster advertises the Lake Michigan beaches near Chicago. (Chicago Historical Society)

FOCUS Questions

- What economic innovations came in the 1920s, and what was their effect on different social groups?
- What political and social ideas shaped the administrations of Presidents Harding and Coolidge?
- What developments underlay 1920s' mass culture, and how did they affect American life and leisure?
- What social developments contributed to the cultural creativity and conflicts of the 1920s?
- How did Herbert Hoover's social and political thought differ from that of Harding and Coolidge?

A New Economic Order

Fueled by new products and new ways of producing and selling goods, the economy surged in the 1920s. Not everyone benefited, and farmers suffered severe economic woes. Still, the overall picture appeared rosy. These economic changes influenced the decade's political, social, and cultural climate, as Americans confronted a changing society.

Booming Business, Ailing Agriculture

Recession struck in 1920 as Washington canceled wartime defense contracts and veterans reentered the job market. Recovery came by 1922, however, and for the next few years the nonfarm economy hummed (see Figure 23.1). Unemployment fell to 3 percent, prices held steady, and the gross national product (GNP) grew by 43 percent from 1922 to 1929.

New consumer goods, including electrical products, fed the prosperity. By the mid-1920s, with more than 60 percent of the nation's homes electrified, new appliances, from refrigerators and vacuum cleaners to fans and razors, filled the stores. The manufacture and marketing of such appliances, as well as the construction of hydroelectric generating plants and equipment, provided a massive economic stimulus.

The automobile helped fuel the boom. Introduced before the war (see Chapter 21), automobiles spread like wildfire in the 1920s. By 1930, some 60 percent of U.S. families owned cars (see Figure 23.2). Ford

Motor Company led the market until mid-decade, when General Motors (GM) spurred ahead by touting comfort and color (Ford's Model T came only in black). GM's lowest-priced car, named for French automotive designer Louis Chevrolet, proved especially popular. In 1927 **Henry Ford** introduced the stylish Model A in various colors. By the decade's end, the automobile industry accounted for about 9 percent of all manufacturing wages and had stimulated such industries as rubber, gasoline and motor oil, advertising, and highway construction.

The stock market reflected the prevailing prosperity, and then far outran it. As the decade ended, a speculative frenzy gripped Wall Street (covered in Chapter 24).

The business boom reverberated globally. To supply overseas markets, Ford, GM, and other corporations built production facilities abroad. U.S. firms acquired foreign factories or sources of raw materials. U.S. meatpackers built plants in Argentina; Anaconda Copper bought Chile's biggest copper mine; the mammoth United Fruit Company established plants across Latin America. But true economic globalization lay far ahead. Economic nationalism prevailed in the 1920s, as the industrialized nations, including the United States, erected high tariff barriers. The Fordney-McCumber Tariff (1922) and the Smoot-Hawley Tariff (1930) pushed U.S. tariffs to all-time highs, helping domestic manufacturers but stifling foreign trade.

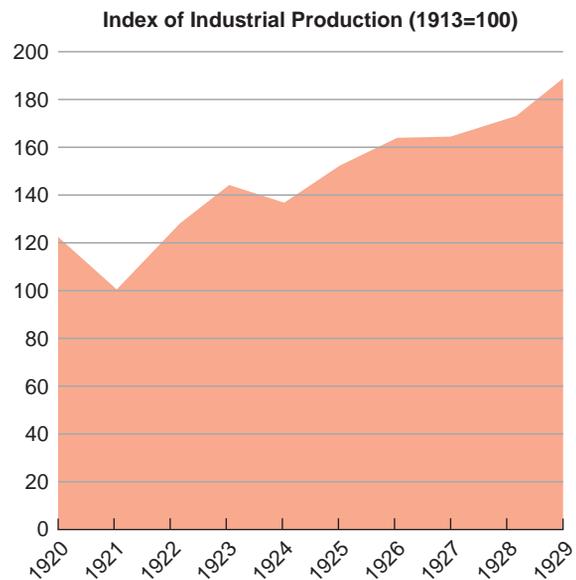


FIGURE 23.1 ECONOMIC EXPANSION, 1920–1929 After a brief postwar downturn, the American economy surged in the 1920s.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, *Long-Term Economic Growth* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1966), 169.

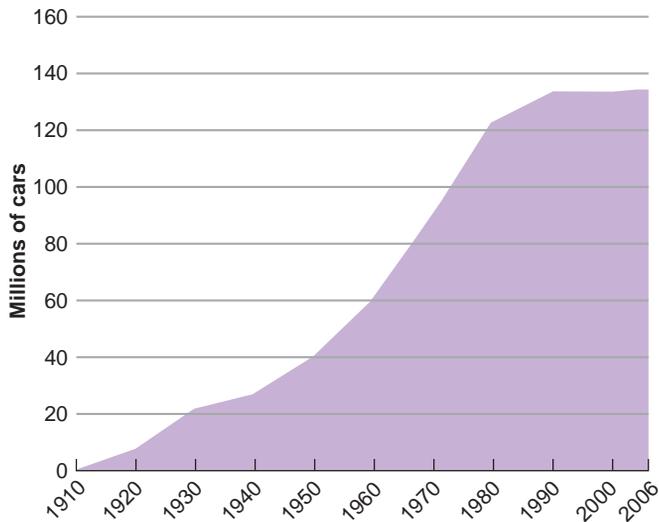


FIGURE 23.2 THE AUTOMOBILE AGE: PASSENGER CARS REGISTERED IN THE UNITED STATES, 1910–2006 From a plaything for the rich, the automobile emerged after 1920 as the basic mode of transportation for the masses. The number leveled off after 1990, as many people switched to sports utility vehicles (SUVs) and light trucks, which are not included in these statistics.

Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 716; *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1980–2009* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

While prosperity lifted overall wage rates, workers benefited unequally, reflecting regional variations and discriminatory employment practices. The variation between North and South loomed largest. In 1928, unskilled laborers in New England earned an average of forty-seven cents an hour, in contrast to twenty-eight cents in the South. Textile corporations moved south seeking lower wage rates, devastating New England mill towns. African-Americans, women workers, Mexican-Americans, and recent immigrants clustered at the bottom of the wage scale. For farmers, wartime prosperity gave way to hard times. Grain prices plummeted when government purchases for the army dwindled, European agriculture revived, and America’s high tariffs depressed agricultural exports. As tractors and other new machinery boosted farm production, the resulting surpluses further weakened prices. Farmers who had bought land and equipment on credit during the war felt the squeeze as payments came due.

New Modes of Producing, Managing, and Selling

Productivity increased dramatically in the 1920s. New assembly-line techniques boosted industrial

workers’ per capita output by some 40 percent. At Ford plants near Detroit, workers stood in place and performed repetitive tasks as chains conveyed the vehicles past them.

Assembly-line work influenced employees’ behavior. Managers discouraged individual initiative. Even conversation or laughter could distract workers from their task. Ford employees learned to speak without moving their lips and adopted an expressionless mask that some called “Fordization of the face.” Job satisfaction diminished. Assembly-line labor did not foster the pride that came from farming or mastering a craft. Nor did it offer much prospect of advancement. In Muncie, Indiana, factories employing over four thousand workers announced only ten openings for foremen in 1924–1925.

U.S. mass-production methods had a global impact. *Fordism* became a synonym worldwide for assembly-line manufacturing. In Russia, which purchased twenty-five thousand Ford tractors in the 1920s, people “ascribed a magical quality to the name of Ford,” a visitor reported.

Business consolidation, spurred by the war, continued. By the late 1920s, over a thousand companies a year vanished through merger. Corporate giants



“HONEY, WHERE DID YOU PARK THE CAR?” Hundreds of identical Fords jam Nantasket Beach near Boston on a Fourth of July in the early 1920s. (Archive/Getty Images)

“America stands for one idea: Business.”

dominated the major industries: Ford, GM, and Chrysler in automobiles; General Electric and Westinghouse in electricity; and so forth. Samuel Insull, president of Chicago's Commonwealth Edison Company, controlled a sprawling empire of local power companies. By 1930, one hundred corporations controlled nearly half the nation's business. Without actually merging, companies that made similar products formed trade associations to coordinate prices, market share, and product specifications.

As U.S. capitalism matured, management structures evolved. Corporations set up separate divisions for product development, market research, economic forecasting, employee relations, and so on, each under a professional manager.

The shift to a consumer economy affected wage policies. Rather than paying the lowest wages possible, business leaders now realized that higher wages increased consumers' buying power. Henry Ford had led the way in 1914 by paying his workers five dollars a day, well above the average for factory workers. Other companies soon followed suit.

New systems for distributing goods emerged. Automobiles reached consumers through dealer networks. By 1926, nearly ten thousand Ford dealerships dotted the nation. Chain stores accounted for about 25 percent of retail sales by 1930. The A&P grocery chain boasted 17,500 stores. Department stores grew more inviting, with remodeled interiors and attractive displays. Air conditioning, a recent invention, made department stores (as well as movie theaters and restaurants) welcome havens on summer days.

Advertising and credit sales further stimulated the consumer economy. In 1929, corporations spent nearly \$2 billion on radio, billboard, newspaper, and magazine ads, and advertising companies employed some six hundred thousand people. Chicago advertising baron Albert Lasker owned the Chicago Cubs and his own golf course. Advertisers used celebrity endorsements, promises of social success, and threats of social embarrassment. Beneath a picture of a sad young woman, a Listerine mouthwash ad proclaimed: “She was a beautiful girl and talented too. . . . Yet in the one pursuit . . . foremost in the mind of every girl and woman—marriage—she was a failure.” Her problem was “halitosis,” or bad breath. The remedy, of course, was Listerine, and lots of it.

Portraying a fantasy world of elegance, pleasure, and limitless abundance, ads aroused desires that the advertisers promised to fulfill. One critic in 1925 described the advertisers' “dream world”:

[S]miling faces, shining teeth, schoolgirl complexions, cornless feet, perfect fitting [underwear], distinguished collars, wrinkleless pants, odorless breath, regularized bowels, . . . charging motors, punctureless tires, perfect busts, shimmering shanks, self-washing dishes, backs behind which the moon was meant to rise.

The advertisers even defined America's essential meaning in terms of its abundance of material goods and consumers' “freedom of choice” in the marketplace. Buying more and more products, they claimed, fulfilled the “pursuit of happiness” promised in the Declaration of Independence, and was thus the duty of all good citizens.

A few critics challenged the advertisers' cultural dominance. In *Your Money's Worth* (1927), Stuart Chase and F. J. Schlink punctured advertisers' exaggerated claims. One observer called the book “the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the consumer movement.” The *Consumers' Research Bulletin*, launched by Chase and Schlink in 1929, tested products and reported the results to consumers.

Easy credit further lubricated the economy. Earlier, credit had typically involved pawnbrokers, bank loans, or informal arrangements between buyers and sellers. Now retailers routinely offered credit plans for big-ticket items such as automobiles, furniture, and refrigerators.

Business values saturated 1920s' culture. “America stands for one idea: Business,” proclaimed the *Independent* magazine in 1921; “Thru business, . . . the human race is finally to be redeemed.” Presidents Harding and Coolidge praised corporate America and hobnobbed with business leaders. Magazines profiled business tycoons. A 1923 opinion poll ranked Henry Ford as a leading presidential prospect. In *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925), ad man Bruce Barton described Jesus Christ as a managerial genius who “picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world.”

Although more women worked outside the home in the 1920s, their proportion of the total female population held steady at about 24 percent. Male workers dominated the auto plants and other assembly-line factories.

Women who did enter the workplace faced wage discrimination. In 1929, for example, a male trimmer in the meatpacking industry received fifty-two cents an hour; a female trimmer, thirty-seven cents. The weakening of the union movement hit women workers hard. By 1929, the proportion of women workers belonging to unions fell to a minuscule 3 percent.

Most women workers, especially recent immigrants and members of minority groups, held low-paying, unskilled positions. By 1930, however,

*Two-Fold Happiness
for her New Home*

Bluebird is one of those rare gifts that is valued not only for what it does, but also for what it permits one to do.

Because it washes with almost unbelievable thoroughness and speed, even a heavy washing can be on the line by noon.

But the happiness it brings does not consist only of doing away with the drudgery of wash day. It adds daily to the joy of living, because the home with a Bluebird can use its free laborer constantly.

For the Bluebird way of washing makes clothes last many times longer than when they are washed on a tub basis.

The leading dealer in your locality will Bluebird. He will be glad to show you why Bluebird washes so thoroughly that it cleans even heavy blankets in fifteen minutes, and so sensibly that even a wool can be washed in it without a thread being harmed.

Bluebird can be bought anywhere by making an initial payment of a few dollars, agreeing to pay the rest in convenient monthly sums.

See these Bluebird Specifications:
 Washes with record softness and no loss of resistance present.
 Washes more than 100 lbs. of clothes in 15 minutes at a cost of 1 cent per lb. of clothes.
 Washes water-proof shoes, coats, rubber boots, etc.
 Washes in the top of machine, so no need to get inside.
 Low-power direct-current motor, very quiet, with automatic safety switch.
 Machine with general under-mounting facilities.

Bluebird Appliance Co., St. Louis, U. S. A.
 Bluebird Company of Canada, Montreal, Canada.

Blue Bird

ELECTRIC CLOTHES WASHER

Blue Bird Electric Clothes Washer, 1920

THE EXCITING NEW WORLD OF ELECTRIC APPLIANCES In this 1920 ad, a bride contemplates the thrill of owning her very own electric washing machine. Pay only “a few dollars” down, the ad promised, and the balance “in convenient monthly sums.”

some 2 million women were employed in corporate offices as secretaries, typists, or filing clerks, although rarely at higher ranks. Indeed, office-space arrangements often segregated male managers and female clerks.

Nearly fifty thousand women received college degrees in 1930, almost triple the 1920 figure. Of these female graduates who joined the workforce, many entered such traditional “women’s professions” as nursing, librarianship, and school teaching. With medical schools limiting the number of women students to 5 percent of their total enrollment, the number of women physicians actually declined from 1910 to 1930. A handful of women, however, following the lead of Progressive Era trailblazers, pursued postgraduate education to become faculty members in colleges and universities.

Marginalized in the workplace, women were courted as consumers. In the decade’s advertising, glamorous women smiled behind the steering

wheel, swooned over new appliances, and smoked cigarettes in romantic settings. (One ad man promoted cigarettes for women as “torches of freedom.”) In the advertisers’ dream world, housework became an exciting challenge. As one ad put it, “Men are judged... according to their power to delegate work. Similarly the wise woman delegates to electricity all that electricity can do.”

“Men are judged... according to their power to delegate work. Similarly the wise woman delegates to electricity all that electricity can do.”

Struggling Labor Unions in a Business Age

Organized labor struggled in the 1920s. Union membership fell from 5 million to 3.4 million in the decade. Several factors underlay this decline. For one thing, despite inequities and regional variations, overall wage rates rose, reducing the incentive to join a union. Further, the union movement’s strength lay in traditional crafts and older industries like printing, railroading, mining, and construction. These unions were ill-suited to the new mass-production factories.

Management hostility further weakened organized labor. Henry Ford hired thugs to intimidate union organizers. In 1929, anti-union violence flared in North Carolina, where textile workers faced low wages, long hours, and appalling work conditions. In Marion, deputy sheriffs shot and killed six striking workers. In Gastonia, the communist-led National Textile Workers Union organized the strike. The mill’s absentee owners

refused to negotiate and evicted strikers from their company-owned homes. When armed thugs in league with the owners raided an encampment of strikers, the police chief was shot, possibly by one of his own deputies. In the end, these strikes failed, and the textile industry remained nonunion.

As wartime antiradical sentiments persisted, opponents of labor unions often smeared them with the “communist” label, whether accurate or not. The antiunion campaign took subtler forms as well. Manufacturers’ associations renamed the nonunion shop the “open shop” and dubbed it the “American Plan” of labor relations. Some corporations provided cafeterias and recreational facilities for employees or sold them company stock at reduced prices. Corporate publicists praised “welfare capitalism” (the term for this anti-union strategy) as evidence of employers’ benevolent concern for their workers.

Black membership in labor unions stood at only about eighty-two thousand by 1929, mostly miners, dockworkers, and railroad porters. The American Federation of Labor officially prohibited racial discrimination, but most AFL unions in fact barred African-Americans. Corporations often hired jobless blacks as strikebreakers, increasing organized labor’s hostility toward them.

Standpat Politics in a Decade of Change

With Republicans in control of Congress and the White House, politics reflected the decade’s business orientation. Unsettled by rapid social change, voters turned to conservative candidates who seemed to represent stability and traditional values. In this climate, would-be reformers and exploited groups had few political options.

The Evolving Presidency: Scandals and Public-Relations Manipulation

While white southerners and urban immigrants remained heavily Democratic, the Republican Party continued to attract northern farmers, businesspeople, many white-collar workers and professionals, and some skilled blue-collar workers. The GOP also benefited from the antiradical mood that fueled the early postwar Red Scare (see Chapter 22) and the anti-union campaign. Exploiting such fears, the Republican-led New York legislature set up a committee to investigate “seditious activities” and required loyalty oaths of public-school teachers.

With Republican progressives having bolted to Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, GOP conservatives



PRESIDENT HARDING WITH LADDIE, JUNE 1922 As politicians learned the arts of publicity, posed scenes like this became more common. (*Library of Congress*)

controlled the 1920 convention and nominated Ohio Senator **Warren G. Harding** for president. As a young newspaper editor, Harding had married the local banker's daughter, who helped manage his 1914 Senate campaign. A genial backslapper, he enjoyed good liquor, a good poker game, and at least one long-term extramarital affair. In the election, Harding swamped his Democratic opponent James M. Cox. After the stresses of war and Wilson's moralizing, voters welcomed Harding's bland oratory.

Harding made some notable cabinet selections: Henry C. Wallace, the editor of an Iowa farm periodical, as secretary of agriculture; **Charles Evans Hughes**, former New York governor and 1916 presidential candidate, secretary of state; and **Andrew Mellon**, a Pittsburgh financier, treasury secretary. **Herbert Hoover**, the wartime food czar, became secretary of commerce.

Harding also made some disastrous appointments: his political manager, Harry Daugherty, as attorney general; a Senate pal, Albert Fall of New Mexico, as secretary of the interior; a wartime draft dodger, Charles Forbes, as Veterans' Bureau head. Such men set the low ethical tone of Harding's

presidency. By 1922, Washington rumor hinted at corruption in high places. "I have no trouble with my enemies," Harding told an associate; "[b]ut... my goddamn friends... keep me walking the floor nights." In summer 1923, vacationing in the West, Harding suffered a heart attack and died in a San Francisco hotel.

A 1924 Senate investigation exposed the scandals. Charles Forbes, convicted of stealing Veterans' Bureau funds, evaded prison by fleeing abroad. The bureau's top lawyer committed suicide, as did an aide to Attorney General Daugherty accused of influence peddling. Daugherty himself narrowly escaped conviction in two criminal trials. Interior Secretary Fall went to jail for leasing government oil reserves, one in Teapot Dome, Wyoming, to oilmen in return for a \$400,000 bribe. Like "Watergate" in the 1970s, "**Teapot Dome**" became a shorthand label for a tangle of scandals.

"I have no trouble with my enemies," Harding told an associate; "[b]ut... my goddamn friends... keep me walking the floor nights."

The government had no duty to protect citizens “against the hazards of the elements,” Coolidge declared.

With Harding’s death, Vice President **Calvin Coolidge**, on vacation in Vermont, took the presidential oath by lantern light from his father, a local magistrate. After entering local politics in Massachusetts, Coolidge had been elected Massachusetts governor in 1918 and secured the Republican vice-presidential

nomination in 1920.

Coolidge’s image as “Silent Cal,” a Yankee embodiment of old-fashioned virtues, was carefully crafted. The advertising executive Bruce Barton, an early master of political image-making, guided Coolidge’s bid for national office in 1919–1920. Having persuaded a Boston publisher to issue a book of Coolidge’s speeches, Barton sent autographed copies to key GOP convention delegates. Barton planted pro-Coolidge articles in magazines and in other ways marketed his candidate just as advertisers were marketing soap, socks, and cereal. The very name *Calvin Coolidge*, he wrote in a *Collier’s* magazine article building brand recognition, “seems cut from granite; one could almost strike sparks with such a name, like a flint.” Targeting newly enfranchised women, Barton composed a “Message to Women” published under Coolidge’s name in *Woman’s Home Companion*.

Long before Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” of the 1930s (covered in Chapter 24), Bruce Barton understood the political potential of radio. He advised Coolidge to speak conversationally in his radio addresses, avoiding earlier politicians’ spread-eagle oratory. Wrote an admirer of Barton: “No man is his equal in [analyzing] the middle-class mind and directing an appeal to it.”

Republican Policy Making in a Probusiness Era

While Coolidge raised the ethical tone of the White House, the probusiness policies, symbolized by high tariffs, continued. Prodded by Treasury Secretary Mellon, Congress lowered income-tax rates for the wealthy from their high wartime levels. Lower tax rates for the well-to-do, Mellon argued, would actually increase revenues by reducing the incentive to seek tax shelters. He also contended that tax cuts for high income earners encouraged business investment and thus benefited everyone. In the same probusiness spirit, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice William Howard Taft (appointed by Harding in 1921) overturned a federal ban on child labor passed in 1919.

While promoting corporate interests, Coolidge opposed government assistance for other Americans. This position faced a test in 1927 when

torrential spring rains caused severe flooding on the Mississippi River. Soil erosion resulting from poor farming practices worsened the flood conditions, as did ill-considered engineering projects aimed at draining the river’s natural floodplain for development purposes. One official described the river as “writh[ing] like an imprisoned snake” within its artificial confines. From Cairo, Illinois, to the Gulf of Mexico, water poured over towns and farms, flooding twenty-seven thousand square miles. Hundreds died, and the toll of the homeless, including many African-Americans, reached several hundred thousand. Disease spread in makeshift refugee camps. Floodwaters swept over New Orleans’s low-lying black neighborhoods.

President Coolidge rejected calls to aid the victims. The government had no duty to protect citizens “against the hazards of the elements,” he declared. Coolidge did, however, sign the Flood Control Act of 1928 funding levee construction along the Mississippi.

Another test of Coolidge’s anti-government ideology came when hard-pressed farmers rallied behind the **McNary-Haugen Bill**, a price-support plan under which the government would purchase the surplus of six basic farm commodities—cotton, corn, rice, hogs, tobacco, and wheat—at their average price in 1909–1914 (when farm prices were high). The government would then sell these surpluses abroad at market prices and recover the difference, if any, through a tax on domestic sales of these commodities. Coolidge twice vetoed the McNary-Haugen bill, warning of “the tyranny of bureaucratic regulation and control.” The government must not favor a single interest group, he argued—even though corporations had long benefited from high tariffs and other measures. These vetoes led many angry farmers to vote Democratic in 1928. In the 1930s, New Deal planners would draw upon the McNary-Haugen approach in shaping farm policy (as discussed in Chapter 24).

Independent Internationalism

The Harding and Coolidge administrations continued to oppose U.S. membership in the League of Nations. Coolidge did support U.S. membership in the new International Court of Justice (the World Court), but the Republican-controlled Congress imposed unacceptable reservations, and the U.S. did not join.

Backing away from Woodrow Wilson’s idealistic view of America’s global destiny, the Republican administrations of the 1920s pursued foreign policies that served America’s economic interests—an approach historians have called independent

internationalism. Despite postwar Europe's battered economies, Washington demanded repayment of \$22 billion in Allied war debts and German reparation payments. A study commission in 1924 reduced these claims, but high U.S. tariffs and Europe's economic problems, including runaway inflation in Germany, made repayment of even the lower claims unrealistic. When Adolf Hitler took power in Germany in 1933 (covered in Chapter 25), he repudiated all reparations payments.

The Republican administrations worked to protect U.S. corporate interests in Latin America. In Mexico, the U.S. State Department vigorously opposed the efforts of a new revolutionary government to regain control of oilfields earlier granted to U.S. companies and to restrict landholding by foreign interests. In Nicaragua, President Coolidge in 1926 sent U.S. Marines to put down an insurrection against the country's president, Adolfo Diáz, who had close ties to a U.S.-owned gold-mining company.

One notable diplomatic achievement was the **Washington Naval Arms Conference**. After the war ended, the United States, Great Britain, and Japan edged toward a dangerous (and costly) naval-arms race. In 1921, Secretary of State Hughes called a Washington conference to address the problem. He startled the delegates by outlining a specific ratio of warships among the world's naval powers. Great Britain, Japan, Italy, and France accepted Hughes's plan, and agreed to halt battleship construction for ten years. The United States and Japan also pledged to respect each other's territorial holdings in the Pacific. Although this treaty ultimately failed to prevent World War II, it did represent an early arms-control effort.

Another U.S. peace initiative was mainly symbolic. In 1928, the United States and France, eventually joined by sixty other nations, signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing aggression and outlawing war. Lacking enforcement mechanisms, this high-sounding document accomplished little.

THE 1927 MISSISSIPPI RIVER FLOOD A few of the 700,000 people displaced by the raging waters of the Mississippi await rescue, their partially submerged homes in the background. President Calvin Coolidge resisted calls for federal aid. (*Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library*)



Progressive Stirrings, Democratic Party Divisions

The reform spirit survived in Congress. The **Sheppard-Towner Act** (1921) funded rural prenatal and baby-care centers staffed by public-health nurses. The Federal Radio Commission, created by Congress in 1927, extended the regulatory principle to this new industry. A reform-minded Nebraska senator, George Norris, prevented the Coolidge administration from selling a wartime federal hydroelectric plant to Henry Ford at bargain prices. In the 1930s, this Alabama plant would become part of the Tennessee Valley Authority, a key New Deal agency.

In the 1922 midterm election, labor and farm groups joined forces to defeat some conservative Republicans. In 1924, this alliance revived the Progressive Party and nominated Senator Robert La Follette for president. The Socialist Party and the American Federation of Labor endorsed La Follette.

The 1924 Democratic convention in New York City split between urban and rural wings. By one vote, the delegates defeated a resolution condemning the **Ku Klux Klan** (discussed later in this chapter). While the party's Protestant southern wing favored former Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo, the big-city delegates championed New York's Catholic governor **Alfred E. Smith**, of Irish, German, and Italian immigrant origins. This split mirrored deep divisions in the nation. After 102 ballots, the exhausted delegates nominated an obscure New York corporation lawyer, John W. Davis.

Calvin Coolidge, aided by media adviser Barton, easily won the Republican nomination. The GOP platform praised the high protective tariff and urged tax cuts and reduced government spending. Amid general prosperity, Coolidge polled about twice Davis's total. La Follette's 4.8 million votes cut into the Democratic total, contributing to Coolidge's landslide victory.

Women and Politics in the 1920s: Achievements and Setbacks

Reformers' hope that woman suffrage would transform politics survived briefly after the war. Polling places shifted from saloons to schools and churches. The 1920 major-party platforms endorsed several measures proposed by the League of Women Voters.

The Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC), a coalition of activist groups, lobbied for child-labor laws, protection of women workers, maternal health care, and federal support for education. The WJCC played a key role in passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act and in congressional enactment of a constitutional amendment banning child labor in 1924.

As former suffragists scattered across the political spectrum, however, the movement lost focus. The League of Women Voters, drawing middle-class and professional women, played a role in the formation of the WJCC, but otherwise abandoned feminist activism, focusing instead on nonpartisan studies of civic issues." Alice Paul's National Woman's Party proposed a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women equal rights, but other reformers argued that it could jeopardize laws protecting women workers. Politically active African-American women battled racial discrimination rather than addressing feminist issues; Hispanic women in the Southwest focused on labor-union organizing.

The reactionary political climate intensified this retreat from feminist activism. Patriotic groups accused Jane Addams and other woman's-rights leaders of communist sympathies. Younger women, bombarded by ads defining liberation in terms of consumption, rejected the prewar feminists' civic engagement. One in 1927 criticized earlier suffragists' lack of "feminine charm" and their "constant clamor about equal rights."

The reforms backed by women's groups proved short-lived. The Supreme Court struck down child-labor and women's-protective laws. Few states ratified the constitutional amendment banning child labor, as critics accused its supporters, including the WJCC, of undermining the free-enterprise system. The Sheppard-Towner Act, denounced by the American Medical Association for weakening physicians' monopoly of health care, expired in 1929.

Mass Society, Mass Culture

Amid this conservative political climate, major transformations were reshaping society. Assembly lines, advertising, new consumer products, and innovations in mass entertainment and corporate organization all fueled the ferment. While some welcomed these changes; others recoiled in fear.

Cities, Cars, Consumer Goods

In the 1920 census, the urban population (defined as persons living in communities of twenty-five hundred or more) surpassed the rural (see Figure 23.3). The United States had become an urban nation.

One young woman criticized earlier suffragists' lack of "feminine charm" and their "constant clamor about equal rights."

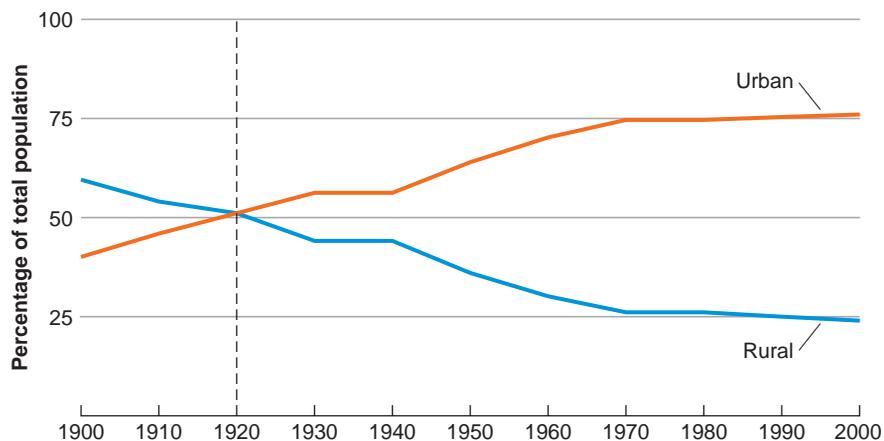


FIGURE 23.3 THE URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, 1900–2000 The urbanization of America in the twentieth century had profound political, economic, and social consequences.

Source: Census Bureau, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, updated by relevant *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, and U.S. Dept. of Transportation, *Federal Highway Administration*.

Urbanization affected different groups in different ways. African-Americans migrated cityward in massive numbers, especially after the 1927 Mississippi River floods. By 1930, more than 40 percent of the nation’s 12 million blacks lived in cities, 2 million of them in urban centers of the North and West (see Figure 23.4). The first black congressman since Reconstruction, Oscar De Priest of Chicago, won election in 1928.

For many women, city life meant eased housework thanks to laborsaving appliances. Store-bought clothes replaced hand-sewn apparel. Home baking and canning declined as bakeries and supermarkets proliferated.

For social impact, nothing matched the automobile. In *Middletown* (1929), a study of Muncie, Indiana, Robert and Helen Lynd reported one resident’s comment: “Why...do you need to study what’s changing this country? I can tell you...in just four letters: A-U-T-O.”

The A-U-T-O’s social impact proved decidedly mixed, including traffic jams, parking problems, and

highway fatalities (more than twenty-six thousand in 1924). In some ways, the automobile brought families together. As family vacations became more common, tourist cabins and roadside restaurants sprang up. But the automobile also eroded family cohesion and parental authority. Young people could borrow the car to catch a movie, attend a distant dance, or park in a secluded lovers’ lane.

Middle- and upper-class women welcomed the automobile. They could now drive to work, attend meetings, visit friends, and gain a sense of independence. Stereotypes of feminine delicacy faded as women mastered this new technology. As an automotive magazine editorialized in 1927, “[E]very time a woman learns to drive, . . . it is a threat to yesterday’s order of things.”

Automobiles offered farm families easier access to neighbors and to the city, lessening rural isolation. The automobile’s country cousin, the tractor, increased productivity and reduced the physical demands of farming. Yet increased productivity did not always mean increased profits. And as farmers

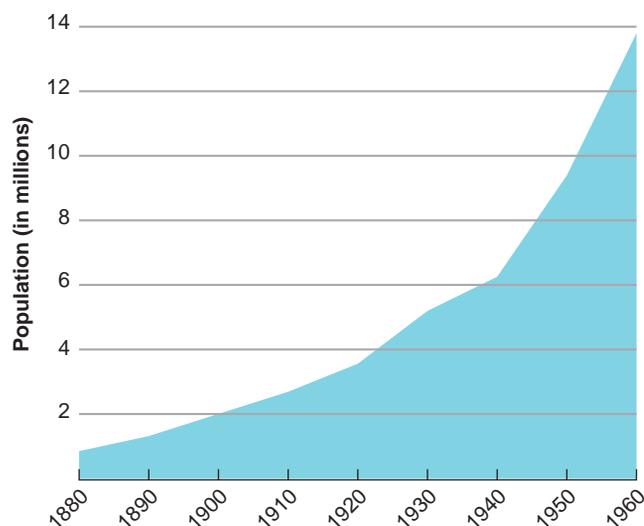


FIGURE 23.4 THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN URBAN POPULATION, 1880–1960 (IN MILLIONS) The increase in America’s urban black population from under 1 million in 1880 to nearly 14 million by 1960 represents one of the great rural-urban migrations of modern history.

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1975), vol. I, p. 12.

For too long, wrote preservationist Aldo Leopold, “a stump was our symbol of progress.”

bought automobiles, tractors, and other mechanized equipment on credit, the rural debt crisis worsened.

Ads celebrated the freedom automobiles offered, in contrast to the fixed routes and schedules of trains and streetcars. Yet the

automobile and other forms of motor transport also further standardized American life. Buses carried children to consolidated schools. Neighborhood grocery stores declined as people drove to supermarkets served by trucks bringing commercial foods from distant facilities. With the automobile came the first suburban shopping center (in Kansas City) and the first fast-food chain (A & W Root Beer).

Even at \$300 or \$400, and despite a thriving used-car market, automobiles remained too expensive for many. The “automobile suburbs” that sprang up beyond the streetcar lines attracted mainly the well-to-do, widening class divisions in American society.

Soaring Energy Consumption and Environmental Threats

Electrification and the spread of motorized vehicles impacted America’s natural resources and the environment. Electrical generating plants consumed growing quantities of coal. In 1929, U.S. refineries used over a

billion barrels of petroleum to meet the gasoline and oil demands of the nation’s 20 million cars.

Rising gasoline consumption underlay Washington’s efforts to ensure U.S. access to Mexican oil and triggered feverish competition in the oilfields of Texas and Oklahoma. The natural gas found with petroleum seemed so abundant that it was simply burned off. In short, heavy fossil-fuel consumption, though small by later standards, already characterized America in the 1920s.

The wilderness that had inspired nineteenth-century artists and writers became more accessible as cars and improved roads gave easier access to national parks and once-pristine regions. While this development broadened the constituency for wilderness preservation, it also subjected the nation’s parks and wilderness areas to heavy pressures as vacationers came to expect service stations, restaurants, hotels, and other amenities. Worried by such contradictions, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in 1924 called a National Conference on Outdoor Recreation to consider ways to balance wilderness preservation and the decade’s vacation-minded leisure culture (see *Going to the Source*).

The Sierra Club and other groups battled to protect wilderness and wildlife. In 1923, the Izaak Walton League, serving fishing enthusiasts, persuaded Congress to halt a development scheme to drain wetlands on the upper Mississippi. Instead, Congress declared this beautiful waterway a wildlife preserve. For too long, wrote preservationist Aldo Leopold in 1925, “a stump was our symbol of progress.” However, few Americans in the expansive 1920s worried about the environmental issues that would occupy future generations.

Mass-Produced Entertainment

Prosperity and workplace drudgery stimulated leisure activities in the 1920s. In their free hours, Americans sought the fulfillment their jobs often failed to provide.

Mass-circulation magazines proliferated. By 1922, ten U.S. magazines boasted circulation of more than 2.5 million. The *Saturday Evening Post*, with its Norman Rockwell covers and fiction featuring small-town life, specialized in nostalgia. *Reader’s Digest*, founded in 1921 by DeWitt and Lila Wallace, offered condensed versions of articles first published elsewhere. A journalistic equivalent of the Model T, the *Digest* offered standardized fare for mass consumption.

Book publishers expanded their market by selling through department stores or directly to the public via the Book-of-the-Month Club (founded 1926). While some criticized such mass-market



THREE YOUNG HISPANIC WOMEN OF TUCSON, ARIZONA In this posed photograph featuring an open touring car, these confident and fashionably dressed young women make their social aspirations clear. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society/Tucson AHS#62669)

President Coolidge on the Importance of Outdoor Recreation

In 1924, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover convened a National Conference on Outdoor Recreation in Washington,

D.C. Here are extracts from President Coolidge's opening address to the conference.

[Most Americans once led] an active outdoor life in the open country. . . . Those days long ago passed away for most . . . people. There is still . . . a tremendous amount of manual labor, but to a large extent this has become specialized and too often would be designated correctly as drudgery. . . . [M]ore and more [workers] are engaged in purely clerical activities. All of this makes it more necessary than ever that we should stimulate every possible interest in out of door health-giving recreation. . . .

Nearly every city is . . . laying out spacious parks and playgrounds . . . [and] providing recreation fields for . . . outdoor games Golf courses and tennis courts abound. . . . [Cities must] get the children out of the alleys and off the streets into spacious open places where there is good sunlight and plenty of fresh air. Such an opportunity . . . restores the natural balance of life and nourishes the moral fiber of youth. . . .

A certain type of outdoor activity has been much developed in recent years and calls great throngs together, which may properly be designated as exhibition games. . . . [F]irst in importance [is] baseball, which is often known as the national game. Football and polo come in the same class. . . . [F]or creating an interest which extends to every age and every class, for giving . . . a change of scene, a new trend of thought, and the arousing of new enthusiasm for the great multitude of our people, these have no superior. . . .

The famous beauty and symmetry of the Greek race in its prime was due in no small part to their general participation in athletic games. . . . We can see in the gladiatorial shows of Rome, which degenerated into the butchery alike of beasts and men, the sure sign of moral decay. . . . It is altogether necessary that we keep

our own amusements and recreations within that field which will be prophetic, not of destruction, but of development. . . . [Most Americans prefer] clean and manly sports . . . [and have] little appetite for that which is unwholesome or brutal. . . .

[Industrial workers] need an opportunity for outdoor life and recreation no less than they need opportunity of employment. Side by side with the industrial plant should be the gymnasium and the athletic field. Along with the learning of a trade . . . should go the learning of how to participate in the activities of recreation, by which life is made . . . more rounded out and complete. . . .

There is no better common denominator of a people [than] development of national interest in recreation and sports. In the case of a people which represents many nations, cultures and races, as does our own, a unification of interests and ideals in recreations is bound to wield a telling influence for solidarity of the entire population. No more truly democratic force can be set off against the tendency to class and caste than the democracy of . . . sport. . . .

I want to see all Americans have a reasonable amount of leisure. Then I want to see them educated to use such leisure for . . . strengthening . . . the quality of their citizenship. We can go a long way in that direction by getting them out of doors and really interested in nature . . . [and] engaging them in games and sports. . . . We must make [America] a land of vision, a land of work, of sincere striving for the good, but we must [also] . . . make it a land of wholesome enjoyment and perennial gladness.

Source: *John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project.* www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24169.

QUESTIONS

1. In Coolidge's view, what conditions of modern life make outdoor recreation necessary, and what social benefits will result from such activities?
2. How do Coolidge's views compare with John Muir's? (See Chapter 21, Going to the Source.)



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e for additional primary sources on this period.

ventures for debasing literary taste, they did help sustain a common national culture in an increasingly diverse society.

Radio and the movies similarly offered standardized cultural fare. The radio era began on November 2, 1920, when Pittsburgh station KDKA reported Warren Harding's election. In 1922, New York's WEAJ began a regular news program, and a Newark station broadcast the World Series (the New York Giants beat the Yankees). Hundreds of new stations soon began operations, as radio fever gripped America.

In 1926, three corporations—General Electric, Westinghouse, and the Radio Corporation of America—formed the first radio network, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) soon followed. Testing popular taste through market research, the networks soon ruled broadcasting. Americans everywhere laughed at the same jokes, heard the same news, and absorbed the same commercials.

Some public-policy commentators advocated preserving radio as an educational and cultural

medium, free of advertising, but commercial sponsorship soon won out. The first network comedy show, *Amos 'n Andy* (1928), enriched its sponsor, Pepsodent toothpaste. White actors played the black characters on the program, which softened the realities of a racist society with stereotyped caricatures of African-American life.

The movies migrated from the nickelodeons of the immigrant wards to elegant uptown pleasure palaces and reached all social classes. In 1922, facing protests about sexually suggestive movies, industry moguls named Postmaster General Will Hays, a former head of the Republican National Committee, to police movie morals. While enforcing a code of standards, Hays also promoted Hollywood films.

Despite charges of immorality, movies often reinforced conservative values. *The Ten Commandments* (1923), directed by Cecil B. De Mille (the son of an Episcopal clergyman), cautioned against breaking moral taboos. "America's sweetheart," Mary Pickford, with her look of frail vulnerability, played innocent girls in need of protection, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes that many young



RADIO: THE EARLY YEARS In 1925, to promote the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus, radio station WJZ in New York City offered an hour-long broadcast of circus sounds, including the bellowing of Dolly, a two-year-old elephant. (Library of Congress)

women were challenging. (Pickford herself sometimes played plucky young women facing danger courageously, and in real life she shrewdly managed her career and financial interests.)

Technical innovations kept moviegoers coming. Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* (1927) introduced sound. Walt Disney's cartoon *Steamboat Willy* (1928) not only introduced Mickey Mouse but also showed the potential of animation. By 1930, with weekly attendance approaching 80 million, the corporate giants Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, and Columbia, relying on formulaic plots and type-cast stars, produced most films. As U.S. business expanded abroad, Hollywood, too, sought overseas markets.

Like advertising, the movies created a dream world only loosely tethered to reality. One ad promised "all the adventure, . . . romance, . . . [and] excitement you lack in your daily life." These mass-produced fantasies shaped behavior and values, especially of the young. Hollywood, observed novelist John Dos Passos, offered a "great bargain sale of five-and-ten-cent lusts and dreams." Along with department stores, mass magazines, and advertising, the movies, too, stimulated consumption with alluring images of the good life, opening new vistas of consumer abundance.

The 1920s mass culture was a byproduct of urbanization. Even when advertisers, radio programmers, filmmakers, and magazine editors nostalgically evoked rural or small-town life, they did so from big-city offices and studios.

For all its influence, the new mass culture penetrated society unevenly. It had less impact in rural America, and met resistance among evangelical Christians suspicious of worldly amusements. Mexican-Americans preserved traditional festivals and leisure activities despite the "Americanization" efforts of non-Hispanic priests and well-intentioned outsiders. Working-class African-Americans flocked to concerts by performers outside the mass-culture mainstream like blues singers Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Black-oriented "race records" catered to this specialized market.

Along with network shows, radio stations also broadcast farm reports, local news, church services, community announcements, and ethnic or regional music. Similarly, neighborhood movie theaters provided opportunities for socializing and for exuberant responses to the film. The *Chicago Defender*, voice of the city's black middle class, deplored the raucousness of movie theaters in black neighborhoods, where "during a death scene . . . you are likely to hear the orchestra jazzing away." Despite the new mass culture, cultural diversity survived in the 1920s.



THE ROMANCE OF THE MOVIES The 1927 film *Wings*, starring twenty-two year old Clara Bow, told of two World War I flying aces in love with the same young woman. It won the first Academy Award for best picture. (Collection of Hershenson-Allen Archives)

Celebrity Culture

Professional sports and media-promoted spectacles provided diversion as well. In 1921, Atlantic City promoters launched a bathing-beauty contest they grandly called the Miss America Pageant. Celebrities dominated professional sports: Babe Ruth of the New York Yankees, who hit sixty home runs in 1927; Ty Cobb, the Detroit Tigers' manager, whose earlier record of 4,191 hits still inspired awe; prizefighters Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney, whose two heavyweight fights drew massive radio audiences. Ruth was a coarse, heavy-drinking womanizer; Cobb, a foul-tempered racist. Yet the alchemy of publicity transformed them into heroes with contrived nicknames: "the Sultan of Swat" (Ruth) and "the Georgia Peach" (Cobb).

Hollywood offered a "great bargain sale of five-and-ten-cent lusts and dreams."

This celebrity culture illuminates the stresses facing ordinary Americans in these years of social change. For young women uncertain about society's shifting expectations, beauty pageants offered one ideal to which they could aspire. For men confronting unsettling developments from feminism to Fordism, the exploits of sports heroes like Dempsey or Ruth could restore damaged self-esteem.

Celebrity worship crested in the response to **Charles Lindbergh**, a daredevil stunt pilot who flew solo across the Atlantic in his small single-engine plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, on May 20–21, 1927. A Minnesotan of Swedish ancestry, Lindbergh had entered a \$25,000 prize competition offered by a New York hotel for the first nonstop New York-to-Paris flight. His success gripped the public's imagination. In New York, thousands cheered a ticker-tape parade. Radio, newspapers, magazines, and movie newsreels offered saturation coverage.



CHARLES A. LINDBERGH AND THE SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS In a celebrity-obsessed decade, Lindbergh rocketed to instant fame after his 1927 solo transatlantic flight in a plane that was less than twenty-eight feet long. (*National Archives*)

An instant celebrity, Lindbergh became a blank screen onto which people projected their hopes, fears, and ideologies. President Coolidge praised the flight as a triumph of U.S. business and corporate technology. Many editorial writers, by contrast, saw Lindbergh as proof that despite standardization and mechanization, the individual still counted. Others praised this native-born midwesterner of Scandinavian roots as more authentically American than the recent immigrants crowding the cities.

Overall, the new mass media had mixed social effects. Certainly, they promoted cultural standardization and uniformity of thought. But mass magazines, radio, and movies also helped forge a national culture and introduced new viewpoints and ways of behaving. Implicitly they conveyed a potent message: a person's immediate surroundings need not limit his or her horizons. If the larger world they opened for Americans was often superficial or tawdry, it could also be exciting and liberating.

Cultural Ferment and Creativity

American life in the 1920s involved more than politics, assembly lines, and celebrity worship. Young people savored the postwar moment as engrained pieties and traditional ways faced challenges. As writers, artists, and musicians embraced the modernist spirit of cultural innovation, African-Americans created a cultural flowering known as the Harlem Renaissance.

The Jazz Age and the Postwar Crisis of Values

The war's disillusioned aftermath sharpened the cultural restlessness already bubbling in prewar America. The year 1918, wrote Randolph Bourne, marked "a sudden... stop at the end of an intellectual era." Poet Ezra Pound hammered the same point in 1920. America had marched to war, he wrote, to save "a botched civilization;... an old bitch gone in the teeth."

The postwar cultural ferment, summed up in the phrase "the Jazz Age," took many forms. Some young people—especially affluent college students—boisterously assailed middle-class standards of behavior. Grabbing the freedom offered by the automobile, they threw parties, drank bootleg liquor, and flocked to jazz clubs. Asked her favorite activity, a California college student replied, "I adore dancing; who doesn't?" Urged by advertisers, many young women defied prevailing taboos and took up cigarettes. For some, smoking became

a feminist issue. As one female college student reasonably asked, “Why [should] men . . . be permitted to smoke while girls are expelled for doing it?”

Young people also discussed sex more freely. Sigmund Freud, the Viennese physician who explored the sexual aspects of human psychology, enjoyed a popular vogue in the 1920s. Despite much talk about sex and charges of rampant immorality, however, the 1920s’ “sexual revolution” is hard to pin down. Premarital intercourse remained exceptional and widely disapproved, especially for women.

What *can* be documented are changing courtship patterns. “Courting” had once been a formal prelude to marriage. The 1920s brought the more casual practice of “dating,” whereby young people gained social confidence and a degree of sexual experience without necessarily contemplating marriage. Wrote novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, “None of the Victorian mothers had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed.” A Methodist bishop denounced new dances that brought “the bodies of men and women in unusual relation to each other.” The 1920s saw greater erotic freedom, but within bounds, as most young people drew a clear line between permissible and taboo behavior.

For women, these changes in some ways proved liberating. Female sexuality was more openly acknowledged. Skirt lengths crept up; makeup became more acceptable; and the elaborate armor of petticoats and corsets fell away. The awesome matronly bosom mysteriously deflated as a more boyish figure became the fashion ideal.

An enduring twenties stereotype is “the flapper,” the sophisticated, pleasure-mad young woman. (The term originated with a magazine illustration of a fashionable young lady whose rubber rain boots were open and flapping.) In the nineteenth century, the idealized woman on her moral pedestal had symbolized an elaborate complex of cultural ideals. The flapper, with her bobbed hair, defiant cigarette, lipstick, and short skirt, although a journalistic creation, similarly epitomized youthful rejection of entrenched stereotypes (See *Beyond America*).

In some ways, however, 1920s’ mass culture thwarted full gender equality nearly as effectively as had earlier Victorian stereotypes. Many young women, while rejecting older taboos, now molded their appearance according to standards dictated by fashion magazines. Advertisers and movies encouraged women to pursue a “glamorous” lifestyle by purchasing new fashions, cosmetics, silk stockings, and other consumer accessories. Further, the traditional double standard, which held women to a stricter behavior code, remained in force. Young men could boast of sexual exploits, but young

women who “went all the way” or were reputed to be “fast” risked damaged reputations.

Around 1922, according to F. Scott Fitzgerald, adults embraced the rebelliousness of the young. As middle-aged Americans “discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood,” he wrote, “the orgy began.” But such sweeping cultural generalizations can mislead. During the years of Fitzgerald’s alleged national orgy, the divorce rate remained constant, and many conservative, religious Americans clung to traditional standards, rejecting alcohol and wild parties. Many farmers, industrial workers, blacks, Hispanics, and recent immigrants found economic concerns more pressing than the latest fads.

A Methodist bishop denounced new dances that brought “the bodies of men and women in unusual relation to each other.”



F. SCOTT FITZGERALD AND HIS WIFE ZELDA While Fitzgerald chronicled the 1920s in his fiction, he and Zelda lived the high life in New York, Paris, and the French Riviera. (*Stock Montage*)



Beyond America

GLOBAL INTERACTIONS



The “New Woman” in the 1920s

In 1922, the French writer Victor Marguerite published *La Garçonne*, a novel about a young woman who pursues a series of relationships with other men after her fiancé betrays her. The novel created a scandal. Even the title unsettled readers: blurring gender distinctions, it gave a feminine twist to “garçon,” the word for boy. The French were not alone in worrying about gender issues in the 1920s. Throughout the Western world, the behavior, dress, and even hairstyles of what journalists called the “New Woman” drew nervous scrutiny.



FRENCH TENNIS STAR SUZANNE LENGLEN AT ENGLAND'S WIMBLEDON STADIUM IN THE EARLY 1920S With her short tennis outfits and fondness for sipping brandy between sets, Lenglen offered one version of the international “New Woman” of the 1920s. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

In part, the “New Woman” phenomenon involved politics and feminist activism. The Netherlands granted women the vote in 1917, Canada in 1918, Austria in 1919, the United States in 1920, and so on. In some European parliaments, women comprised up to 10 percent of the members in the 1920s. In England, the American-born heiress Nancy Astor, having married into the British nobility, became in 1919 the first woman elected to the House of Commons, three years after Jeannette Rankin’s pathbreaking election to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Most Mexican states adopted woman suffrage in the 1920s, and in 1927 the government affirmed women’s equal rights. During the Mexican Revolution (1915–1919), the young activist Hermila Galindo had published a feminist journal, *Mujer Moderna (Modern Woman)*. In the 1920s, organizations such as the Consejo Feminista de Mexico (Feminist Council of Mexico) pursued the cause despite opposition from Catholic leaders and a strong tradition of *machismo*, or male dominance.

Facing a conservative backlash at home, some 1920s’ women’s-rights advocates turned to the League of Nations. The British feminist Vera Brittain declared: “The time has now come . . . to obtain by international agreement what national legislation has failed to accomplish.” The American Alice Paul joined with British feminists to promote a League of Nations treaty upholding women’s rights worldwide. Although the effort failed, the League’s successor, the United Nations, created a Commission on Women in 1946. Other causes embraced by women’s organizations, including world peace, similarly transcended national boundaries. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom drew delegates from as far away as China to its conferences.

The birth-control cause, led in the United States by Margaret Sanger, attracted broader support as well, though with mixed results. While contraceptives became more accessible in England, religious opposition kept them illegal in Spain and Italy. In Germany and France, government campaigns to replace wartime population losses by increasing the birthrate retarded the movement.

The “New Woman” phenomenon involved not only feminist activism but also young women’s career and lifestyle choices. This social process, too, flowed across national borders. The Paris fashion designer Coco Chanel shaped women’s fashions from Vienna to Vancouver. Her gender-bending designs featured slim, knee-length outfits patterned on men’s suits.

The so-called flapper look spread across Europe and the Americas thanks to movies, fashion journals, and women’s magazines. A Mexico City newspaper in 1924 advertised a movie called *La Esposa Flapper (The Flapper Wife)*. A Danish woman, recalling her 1920s’ girlhood, wrote: “I grew up on a farm . . . far from anywhere, but of course we knew what was in style. We saw it in pictures and magazines and movies.” One influence on her was doubtless the 1926 “Miss Denmark” competition, in which the winner, Edith Jørgensen, met the press in a short, sleeveless dress; silk stockings; and high-heeled shoes.

The “New Woman” image involved behavior as well as fashions. In many countries, young women of the 1920s became secretaries, university students, and department-store clerks—career choices that implied independence and at least a postponement of marriage and domesticity. Many also embraced the permissive climate of the era, from movies and casual dating to cigarettes and alcohol. As the writer Elisabeth de Gramont summed up her youth in 1920s’ France: “We all wanted to forget the war; while eminent men were discussing its consequences, we were dancing.”



WOMEN ATHLETES AT THE 1928 OLYMPIC GAMES IN AMSTERDAM

Runners from (l. to r.) Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand in the final lap of the 100-meter relay. The Canadian, Myrtle Cook, won the gold medal for her team. A Toronto ticker-tape parade honoring Canada’s female track-and-field team, dubbed “the Matchless Six,” drew an estimated 100,000 people. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

In Europe and England, as in the United States, the subject of sex, including homosexuality and lesbianism, was more freely discussed. *The Well of Loneliness*, a 1928 novel about a love affair between two women by the English writer Radclyffe Hall, attracted censors’ attention, but became a best seller in the process.

The sports world welcomed young women, including the tennis stars Helen Moody of the United States and Suzanne Lenglen of France, known equally for her brilliant play and her revealing outfits. Despite protests from the Vatican, the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam for the first time included female athletes.

The “New Woman” movement had limits. In Italy and Spain, where Catholic influence was strong and fewer women had access to movies and popular magazines, traditional ways persisted. An Italian bishop even denied communion to women with bobbed hair. Under the dictator Benito Mussolini, who came to power in 1922, Italy discouraged feminism and celebrated motherhood with an annual parade in Rome honoring the (married) women who had borne the most children.

Despite such exceptions, changes in women’s lives pervaded the Western world, upsetting conservatives in many countries. A German government radio program launched in 1924, *Schule der Frau (Woman’s School)*, featured recipes and homemaking tips to encourage domesticity among German women. In France, the gender debate became a way of discussing a broader postwar cultural crisis. Commentators dismayed by the disorienting changes of the 1920s pinpointed shifting gender roles as a cause. In abandoning her traditional role, they warned, “the modern woman” threatened the social order itself.

In Canada, a businessman wrote the *Montreal Herald* in 1921 complaining of his secretary’s “peek-a-boo” blouse.” [W]hy is she not satisfied to reserve for her own boudoir the display of her feminine charms [?]” he grumbled. A 1926 column in the same paper disapprovingly described a typical evening scene as young people enjoyed the freedom and anonymity of downtown Montreal: “[A] stenographer waiting for her girlfriend, a saleslady keeping a tryst with her fellow . . . a young sheik waits for a dance-hungry jazz baby.”

Such alarmed commentary pervaded the 1920s, as observers in many countries confronted that unsettling creature, the “New Woman.”

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- What did 1920s’ commentators mean by the “New Woman”?
- Why did so many find the changes in female dress and behavior disturbing?

Asked why he stayed in America, Mencken replied, “Why do people visit zoos?”

The “Jazz Age” was partially a media and literary creation. Fitzgerald’s romanticized novel about affluent postwar youth, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), spawned many imitators. With his movie-idol good looks, Fitzgerald not only wrote about

the Jazz Age but lived it. Yet if the Jazz Age stereotype obscured the complexity of the 1920s, it did capture a part of the postwar scene, especially the raucous new mass culture and the hedonism and materialism of the well-to-do as they basked in the era’s prosperity.

Alienated Writers

Like Fitzgerald, many young writers found the decade’s cultural turbulence energizing. Rejecting the old order’s moralistic pieties, they also disliked the business pieties of the new order. In *Main Street* (1920), novelist Sinclair Lewis satirized the smugness and cultural barrenness of Gopher Prairie, a fictional mid-western town based on his native Sauk Centre, Minnesota. In *Babbitt* (1922), Lewis skewered a mythic larger city, Zenith, and the protagonist George F. Babbitt, a real-estate agent trapped in middle-class conformity.

H. L. Mencken, a journalist and critic, in 1924 launched the iconoclastic *American Mercury* magazine, an instant success with alienated intellectuals and college youth. Mencken championed writers like Lewis and Theodore Dreiser while ridiculing politicians, small-town America, Protestant fundamentalism, and the middle-class “Booboisie.” His essays on Harding, Coolidge, and Bryan remain classics of political satire. Asked why he stayed in America, Mencken replied, “Why do people visit zoos?”

For the novelist Ernest Hemingway, seriously wounded in 1918 while a Red Cross volunteer on the Italian front, World War I was a watershed experience. In 1926, now an expatriate in Paris, Hemingway published *The Sun Also Rises*, portraying a group of American and English young people, variously damaged by the war, as they drift around Spain. His *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), loosely based on his own experiences, depicts the war’s futility and politicians’ empty rhetoric. In one passage, the narrator says,

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We...had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up...over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices

were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it.

Although writers like Hemingway and Lewis blasted wartime hypocrisy and postwar vulgarity, they remained American at heart, striving to create a more authentic national culture. Even Fitzgerald, himself caught up in Jazz Age excesses, was fundamentally a moralist. His masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), portrayed not only the party-filled lives of the decade’s moneyed class, but also their superficiality, selfishness, and heedless disregard for the less fortunate.

Architects, Painters, and Musicians Confront Modern America

A burst of architectural creativity transformed the urban skyline in the 1920s. By 1930, New York City boasted four buildings more than fifty stories tall. Work on the 102-story Empire State Building, long the world’s tallest building, began that year. The skyscraper, proclaimed one writer, “epitomizes...American civilization.” Cultural critic Lewis Mumford, by contrast, in *Sticks and Stones* (1924) and other works, deplored urban America’s skyscrapers and automobile-clogged streets. Mumford preferred smaller communities and regional cultures to the congested cities and mass culture of 1920s’ America.

The decade’s leading painters took America—real or imagined—as their subject. While Thomas Hart Benton evoked a past of cowboys, pioneers, and riverboat gamblers, Edward Hopper portrayed faded towns and lonely cities of the present. Hopper’s painting *Sunday* (1926), picturing a man slumped on the curb of an empty street of abandoned stores, conveyed both the bleakness and potential beauty of urban America.

The painter and photographer Charles Sheeler found inspiration in factories, including Henry Ford’s plant near Detroit. The Italian immigrant Joseph Stella captured New York’s vitality in such paintings as *The Bridge* (1926), an abstract representation of the Brooklyn Bridge. Wisconsin’s Georgia O’Keeffe, who moved to New York City in 1918, evoked the allure of the metropolis in her paintings of the later 1920s.

The decade’s creative ferment inspired composers as well. Ruth Crawford Seeger arranged American folksongs for the poet Carl Sandburg’s *American Song-bag* (1927). Carl Ruggles set a Walt Whitman poem to music in 1923. And Frederick Converse’s ambitious 1927 tone poem about the automobile, “Flivver Ten Million,” featured such episodes as “May Night by the Roadside” and “The Collision.”

Of all the musical innovations, jazz best captured the modernist spirit. The Original Dixieland Jass Band—white musicians imitating New Orleans’ black jazz bands—had debuted in New York City in 1917, launching a vogue that spread by live performances, radio, and recordings. The white bandleader Paul Whiteman offered watered-down “jazz” versions of standard tunes, and white composers embraced jazz as well. George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and *An American in Paris* (1928) revealed strong jazz influences.

Meanwhile, black musicians preserved authentic jazz and explored its potential. The 1920s recordings of trumpeter Louis Armstrong and his band decisively influenced the future of jazz. While the composer and bandleader Duke Ellington mesmerized audiences at Harlem’s Cotton Club, Fletcher Henderson’s band, featuring singer Ethel Waters and saxophonist Coleman Hawkins, held forth at New York’s Roseland Ballroom. Pianists Fats Waller, Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, and Earl Hines demonstrated that instrument’s jazz potential. Although much of 1920s’ popular culture faded quickly, jazz endured.

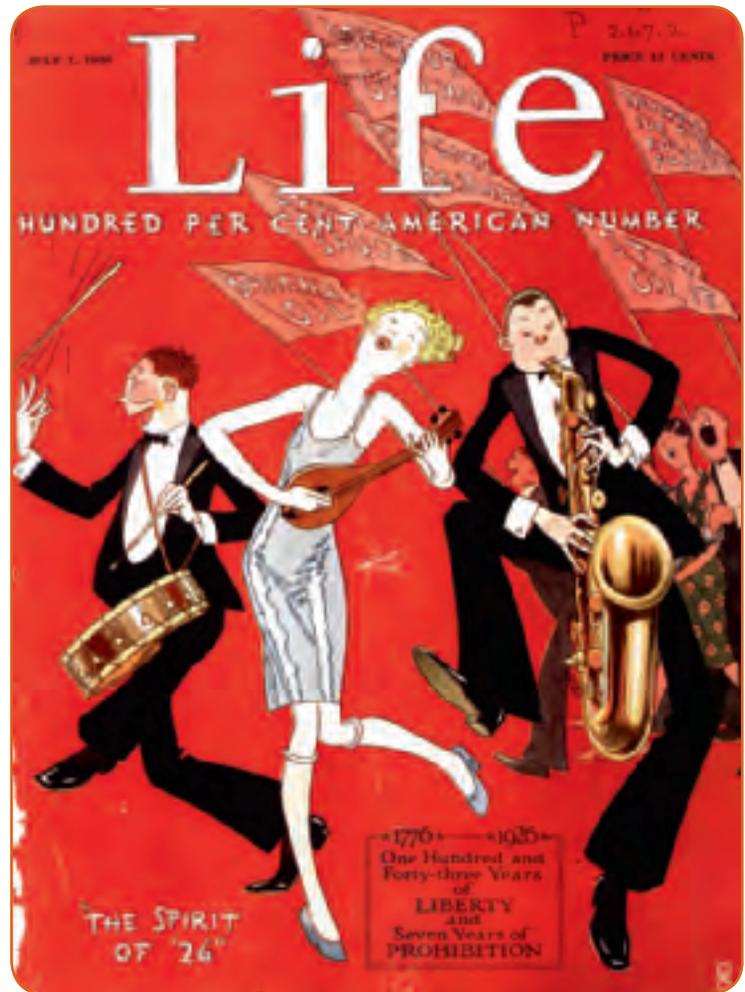
The Harlem Renaissance

Jazz was only one of many black contributions to 1920s’ American culture. The social upheavals of these years energized African-American cultural life, especially in New York City’s Harlem. Once an elite white suburb, Harlem attracted many African-Americans during and after World War I, and by 1930 most of New York’s 327,000 blacks lived within its boundaries. This concentration, plus the proximity of Broadway theaters, record companies, book publishers, and the NAACP’s national headquarters, all contributed to the Harlem Renaissance.

This cultural flowering took varied forms. The Mississippi-born black composer William Grant Still, moving to Harlem in 1922, produced many works, including *Afro American Symphony* (1931). Painter Aaron Douglas and sculptor Augusta Savage explored the visual arts. Savage, moving from Florida to Harlem in 1921, opened a studio and later an art school.

The 1921 Broadway hit *Shuffle Along* launched a series of popular all-black musicals. Film-maker Oscar Micheaux featured black actors and black story lines. The multi-talented Paul Robeson gave vocal concerts; made films; and appeared on Broadway in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* and other plays.

Poet Langston Hughes incorporated African themes and southern black traditions in *The Weary Blues* (1926), and the Jamaican-born poet and



THE JAZZ AGE Rooted in New Orleans’ black culture, jazz gained broad popularity in the 1920s, especially among young cultural rebels, as caricatured in this 1926 magazine cover. (Picture Research Consultants & Archives)

novelist Claude McKay evoked Harlem’s vibrant, sometimes sinister, nightlife in *Home to Harlem* (1928). In *Cane* (1923), Jean Toomer used poetry, drama, and fictional vignettes to convey the world of the rural black South. Novelist Nella Larsen, from the Danish West Indies, told of a mulatto woman’s struggles in *Quicksand* (1928). In *The New Negro* (1925), Alain Locke, a philosophy professor at Howard University, assembled essays, poems, short stories, and artworks to document Harlem’s cultural riches.

The white cultural establishment took notice. Book publishers and magazine editors courted black writers. Broadway producers mounted black shows. Whites jammed Harlem’s jazz clubs. The 1929 Hollywood film *Hallelujah*, featuring an all-black cast, romanticized plantation life and dramatized the city’s dangers. DuBose Heyward’s 1925 novel *Porgy* (adapted for the stage by Heyward and his wife Dorothy) drew inspiration from Charleston’s

“[U]nfortunately I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me...I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem.”

African-American community. George Gershwin's musical version, *Porgy and Bess*, premiered in 1935.

The Harlem Renaissance resonated internationally. Jazz won fans in Europe. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay found readers in Africa, Latin America, and Europe. The dancer and singer Josephine Baker, after debuting in Harlem, moved to Paris in 1925, where

her highly erotic performances created a sensation.

With white support came misunderstanding and attempts at control. Rebellious young whites romanticized Harlem nightlife, ignoring the community's social problems. Some whites idealized black culture for its spiritual or “primitive” qualities. When Langston Hughes's poems addressed the gritty realities of black life in America, his wealthy white patron angrily withdrew her support. Wrote Hughes: “[S]he felt that [Negroes] were America's great link with the primitive.... But unfortunately I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me... I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem.”

The exuberance of the Harlem Renaissance faded as hard times hit in the 1930s. Nevertheless, it stands as a memorable cultural achievement. Future black writers, artists, musicians, and performers would owe a great debt to their predecessors of the 1920s.

A Society in Conflict

The social changes and tensions of the 1920s produced a fierce backlash. While Congress restricted immigration, highly publicized trials in Massachusetts and Tennessee cast a harsh spotlight on the nation's divisions. Millions of whites embraced the bigotry of a revived Ku Klux Klan, and many newly urbanized African-Americans rallied to Marcus Garvey, a magnetic black leader with a riveting message of racial pride. Prohibition stirred further controversy in this conflict-ridden decade.

Immigration Restriction

Fed by wartime super-patriotism and xenophobia, the impulse to remake America into a nation of like-minded, culturally homogeneous people revived in the 1920s.

The **National Origins Act** (1924) restricted annual immigration from any foreign country to 2 percent of the number of persons of that “national

origin” in the United States in 1890. Since the great influx of southern and eastern Europeans had come later, this provision clearly aimed to reduce immigration from these regions. As Calvin Coolidge observed on signing the law, “America must be kept American.”

In 1929, Congress changed the base year for determining “national origins” to 1920, but even under this formula, Poland's annual quota stood at a mere 6,524; Italy's at 5,802; and Hungary's, 869. This quota system, which survived to 1965, represented a counterattack by native-born Protestant America against the immigrant cities. Total immigration fell from 1.2 million in 1914 to 280,000 in 1929. The law excluded Asians and South Asians entirely.

Court rulings underscored the nativist message. In *Ozawa v. United States* (1922), the U.S. Supreme Court denied citizenship to a Japanese-born university student. In 1923, the Supreme Court upheld a California law limiting Japanese immigrants' right to own or lease farmland.

Needed Workers/Unwelcome Aliens: Hispanic Newcomers

Extremely restrictive otherwise, the 1924 law did not limit immigration from the Western Hemisphere. Accordingly, immigration from Latin America (as well as from French Canada) soared. Poverty and political turmoil propelled thousands of Mexicans northward. By 1930, at least 2 million Mexican-born immigrants lived in the United States, mostly in the Southwest. California's Mexican-American population surged from 90,000 to nearly 360,000 in the 1920s.

Many of these immigrants worked in low-paid migratory agricultural jobs. Mexican labor sustained California's citrus industry. Cooperatives such as the Southern California Fruit Growers Exchange (which used the brand name “Sunkist”) hired itinerant workers on a seasonal basis, provided substandard housing in isolated settlements, and fought the migrants' attempts to form labor unions.

Other Mexican immigrants settled in cities. Migrants to the Midwest worked not only in agriculture but also in the automobile, steel, and railroad industries. Retaining deep ties to “México Lindo” (Beautiful Mexico), they formed local support networks and cultural institutions. The Mexican-American community was divided, however, between recent arrivals and earlier immigrants who had become U.S. citizens. The strongest Mexican-American organization in the 1920s, the League of United Latin-American Citizens, ignored the migrant laborers of the Southwest.



FROM GROVE TO CONSUMER: THE CALIFORNIA CITRUS INDUSTRY IN THE 1920S The photo shows Mexican workers at a citrus grove in Southern California's Orange County. The idealized scene of a mother and child with Valencia oranges is from a crate label used by an Orange County citrus grower. (Courtesy of the Local History Collection, Orange Public Library, Orange, CA; Private Collection)

Though deeply religious, Mexican-Americans found little support from the U.S. Catholic Church. Earlier, European Catholic immigrants had attended ethnic parishes and worshiped in their own languages, but church policy had changed by the 1920s. In parishes with non-Hispanic priests, Spanish-speaking Mexican newcomers encountered pressure to abandon their language and traditions.

In the larger society, Mexican immigrants faced ambivalent attitudes. Their labor was needed, but their presence angered nativists eager to preserve a "white" and Protestant nation. Would-be immigrants confronted strict literacy and financial tests, and in 1929 Congress made it a criminal offense to cross the border without following required immigration procedures. The flow continued, however, as an estimated one hundred thousand Mexicans arrived annually, legally and clandestinely, to fill the U.S. labor market's pressing demands.

Nativism, Antiradicalism, and the Sacco-Vanzetti Case

The anti-immigration movement reflected deep ethnic, racial, and religious prejudice in 1920s' America. Anti-Semitic propaganda filled Henry Ford's weekly newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, distributed through Ford dealerships and mailed free to schools and libraries. The anti-Semitic articles were reprinted in pamphlets called *The International Jew*. Sued for defamation by a Jewish attorney, Ford in 1927 issued an evasive apology blaming subordinates.

Ethnic and antiradical prejudices pervaded the **Sacco-Vanzetti Case**, a Massachusetts murder case

that began in April 1920, when robbers shot and killed a paymaster and guard at a South Braintree, Massachusetts, shoe factory. In 1921, a jury convicted two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, of the crime. After many appeals and a review by a blue-ribbon panel of notables, they were electrocuted on August 23, 1927.

These bare facts hardly convey the passions the case aroused. Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, and the prosecution harped on their radicalism. The judge barely concealed his hostility to the pair, whom he privately called "those anarchist bastards." While conservatives supported the verdict, liberals and socialists protested. On the night of the electrocution, novelist John Dos Passos wrote a bitter poem that ended: *All right you have won you will kill the brave men our friends tonight... all right we are two nations.*

Later research on Boston's anarchist community and ballistics tests on Sacco's gun pointed to their guilt. But the prejudices that tainted the trial remain indisputable, as does the case's symbolic importance in exposing the deep fault lines in 1920s' American society.

Privately the judge called Sacco and Vanzetti "those anarchist bastards."

Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial

An equally famous case in Tennessee highlighted another front in the decade's cultural wars: the growing prestige of science. While "individually powerless," wrote the Harvard philosopher Alfred North

“I am a Christian mother,”
declared the governor,
“and I am not going to
let that kind of rot go into
Texas textbooks.”

Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World* (1925), scientists were “ultimately the rulers of the world.” Many Americans welcomed the advance of science, but some religious believers found it threatening. Their fears had deepened as scholars had subjected the Bible to critical scrutiny, psychologists and sociologists had studied supernatural belief systems as expressions of human emotional needs, and biologists had embraced the naturalistic explanation for the variety of life forms on earth advanced in Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859).

While liberal Protestants had generally accepted these findings, evangelical believers had resisted. This gave rise to a movement called **fundamentalism**, after *The Fundamentals*, a series of tracts published in 1909–1914. Fundamentalists insisted on the Bible’s inerrancy and literal truth, including the Genesis account of Creation.

In the early 1920s, fundamentalists targeted Darwin’s theory of evolution. Many state legislatures considered barring public schools from teaching evolution, and several southern states enacted such laws. Texas governor Miriam “Ma” Ferguson personally censored textbooks that discussed evolution. “I am a Christian mother,” she declared, “and I am not going to let that kind of rot go into Texas textbooks.” Former Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan endorsed the antievolution cause.

In 1925, when Tennessee’s legislature outlawed the teaching of evolution in the state’s public schools, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) offered to defend any teacher willing to challenge this law. A high-school teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, John T. Scopes, encouraged by local businessmen and civic boosters, accepted the offer. After summarizing Darwin’s theory to a science class, Scopes was arrested. Famed criminal lawyer Clarence Darrow headed the defense, while Bryan assisted the prosecution. Journalists poured into Dayton; a Chicago radio station broadcast the proceedings; and the **Scopes Trial** became a media sensation.

Cross-examined by Darrow, Bryan embraced the biblical version of creation and dismissed evolutionary theory. Although the jury found Scopes guilty (in a decision later reversed on a technicality), the trial exposed Fundamentalism to ridicule. When Bryan died of a heart attack soon after, H. L. Mencken wrote a scathing column contemptuously dismissing him and his fundamentalist admirers.

The Scopes Trial exposed the anxieties felt by many Americans. Bryan shrewdly appealed to citizens fearful of cultural forces beyond their control.

Let parents and local communities decide what children are taught, he pled, evoking memories of his 1896 populist campaign defending common folk against the rich and powerful (see Chapter 20). Despite the setback in Dayton, Fundamentalism survived. Mainstream Protestant denominations grew more liberal, but many local congregations, radio preachers, Bible schools, new denominations, and flamboyant evangelists like Billy Sunday upheld the traditional faith. Southern and western states continued to pass antievolution laws, and textbook publishers modified their treatment of evolution to appease local school boards.

In Los Angeles, the charismatic Aimee Semple McPherson filled her cavernous Angelus Temple and reached thousands more by radio. Her followers, mainly transplanted midwesterners, embraced her fundamentalist theology while enjoying her theatrical sermons. (She once used a gigantic electric scoreboard to illustrate the triumph of good over evil.) At her death in 1944, her International Church of the Foursquare Gospel had more than six hundred branches in the United States and abroad.

The Ku Klux Klan

The tensions gripping American society of the 1920s also bubbled up in the form of a resurrected Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The original Klan of the Reconstruction South had eventually faded (see Chapter 16), but in 1915 hooded men gathered at Stone Mountain, Georgia, revived it. D. W. Griffith’s glorification of the original Klan in his 1915 movie *The Birth of a Nation* provided further fuel.

In 1920, two Atlanta entrepreneurs plotted a national campaign to profit from the appeal of the Klan’s ritual and its nativist, white-supremacist ideology. Their wildly successful scheme involved a ten-dollar membership fee divided among the salesman (called the Kleagle), the local sales manager (King Kleagle), the district sales manager (Grand Goblin), the state leader (Grand Dragon), and national leader (Imperial Wizard)—with a rake-off to themselves. The sale of Klan robes, masks, horse blankets, and bottled Chattahoochee River water (used in initiation rites) added to the take.

Preaching “100 percent Americanism,” the Klan demonized blacks, Catholics, Jews, aliens, and, in some cases, women suspected of violating sexual taboos. Membership estimates for the KKK and its women’s auxiliary in the early 1920s range as high as 5 million. From its southern base, the Klan spread through the Midwest and across the country from Long Island to the West Coast. The white working class and lower middle class in cities with native-born Protestant majorities proved especially receptive. In 1922, Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans admitted



THE KU KLUX KLAN IN WASHINGTON, D.C. In a brazen display of power, the Ku Klux Klan organized a march in the nation's capital in 1926. By this time, the Klan was already in decline. (*Library of Congress*)

the Klan's image as a haven of "hicks" and "rubes" and urged college graduates to support the great cause.

Although the Klan was basically a money-making scam riddled with corrupt and cynical leaders, observers commented on the ordinariness of the typical members. (Evans, a Texas dentist, called himself "the most average man in America.") The Klan's litany of enemies and its promise to restore the nation's lost purity—racial, ethnic, religious, and moral—appealed to economically marginal Protestants disoriented by a new social order of giant corporations, mass media, rebellious youth, and immigrant-filled cities. The rituals, parades, and night-time cross burnings added a jolt of drama and excitement to life's everyday routines.

But if individual Klan members seemed more needy than sinister, the Klan as a mass movement was menacing. Some KKK groups employed threats, beatings, and lynching in their quest to purify America. In several states, the Klan won political power. Oklahoma's Klan-controlled legislature impeached and removed an anti-Klan governor. The Oregon Klan elected a governor and enacted legislation requiring all children to attend public school, an attempt to destroy the state's Catholic schools.

The Klan collapsed with shocking suddenness. In March 1925, Indiana's Grand Dragon, David Stephenson, brutally raped his young secretary, who swallowed poison and died several weeks later. In prison, Stephenson revealed sordid details of political corruption. Its moral pretensions in shreds, the KKK faded. When civil-rights activism surged in the 1950s, however, the Klan would again rear its head.

The Garvey Movement

Among African-Americans who had fled southern rural poverty and racism only to experience discrimination and racism in the urban North, the 1920s produced a different kind of mass movement, led by **Marcus Garvey** and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Born in Jamaica in 1887, the son of a stonemason, Garvey founded UNIA in 1914 and soon after moved to Harlem. In a white-dominated society, Garvey glorified all things black. Urging black economic solidarity and capitalist enterprise as the lever of racial advance, he founded UNIA grocery stores and other businesses. Summoning blacks to return to "Motherland Africa," he established the Black Star Steamship Line to help them get there.

“In a world where black is despised, [Garvey] taught his followers that black is beautiful.”

An estimated eighty thousand blacks joined UNIA, and thousands more felt the lure of Garvey’s oratory, the excitement of UNIA parades and uniforms, and the appeal of economic self-sufficiency and a glorious future in Africa. Although centered in

New York and other northern cities, the movement had chapters across the South as well. Garvey’s popularity unsettled established black church leaders and roused opposition from the NAACP, which saw the African-American future in America, not Africa, and advocated racial integration rather than separation. W. E. B. Du Bois was among Garvey’s sharpest critics.

The movement also highlighted social tensions in Harlem, where two streams of the African diaspora, one from the Caribbean, the other from the American South, converged. The resulting economic and political rivalry sharpened resistance to the UNIA, with its Jamaican founder and Caribbean leadership.

In 1923, a federal court convicted Garvey of fraud in the management of his Black Star Steamship Line. He was deported in 1927, and the

UNIA collapsed. But this first mass movement in black America had revealed the social aspirations and activist potential of African-Americans in the urban North. “In a world where black is despised,” commented an African-American newspaper after Garvey’s fall, “he taught his followers that black is beautiful.” Garvey is honored in his native island as a heroic forerunner of Jamaican independence from British Colonial rule.

The NAACP, meanwhile, remained active even in a decade of rampant racism. In some 300 branches nationwide, members kept the civil-rights cause alive and patiently laid the groundwork for legal challenges to segregation.

Prohibition: Cultures in Conflict

A bitter controversy over alcohol deepened the fissures in American society. As noted in Chapter 21, the Progressive Era **prohibition** campaign was both a legitimate effort to address social problems associated with alcohol abuse and a symbolic crusade by native-born Protestants to control the immigrant cities. These tensions persisted in the 1920s. When the Eighteenth Amendment took effect in 1920, prohibitionists

A UNIA PARADE IN NEW YORK’S HARLEM, 1924 Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association attracted many African-Americans in the 1920s. The banner reads: “THE NEW NEGRO HAS NO FEAR.” (Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)



rejoiced. Saloons closed, liquor advertising vanished, and arrests for drunkenness declined. Yet prohibition gradually lost support, and in 1933 it ended.

What went wrong? Essentially, prohibition's failure illustrates the difficulty in a democracy of enforcing a widely opposed law. The Volstead Act, the 1919 prohibition law, was underfunded and weakly enforced, especially in antiprohibition areas. New York, for example, repealed its prohibition-enforcement law as early as 1923. Would-be drinkers grew bolder as enforcement faltered. For many young people, alcohol's illegality increased its appeal. Challenging prohibition, declared one college student, represented "the natural reaction of youth to rules and regulations."

Rum-runners smuggled liquor from Canada and the West Indies, and every city harbored speakeasies selling alcoholic drinks. People concocted home brew, shady entrepreneurs sold flavored industrial-grade alcohol, and sacramental wine sales soared. By 1929, alcohol consumption reached about 70 percent of prewar levels.

Organized crime helped circumvent the law. Chicago, where gangsters battled to control the liquor business, witnessed 550 gangland killings in the 1920s. Speakeasies controlled by Chicago gangster Al Capone generated annual profits of \$60 million. Although not typical, Chicago's crime wave underscored prohibition's failure. A reform designed to improve public morality was turning citizens into lawbreakers and mobsters into celebrities.

Prohibition, too, became a battleground in the decade's cultural wars. The "drys"—usually native-born Protestants—praised it. The "wets"—liberals, Jazz Age rebels, big-city immigrants—condemned it as moralistic meddling. At one college, the student newspaper suggested a campus distillery as the senior class gift.

Prohibition influenced the 1928 presidential campaign. While Democratic candidate Al Smith advocated repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, Republican Herbert Hoover praised it as "a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose." Once elected, Hoover appointed a commission to study the issue. Its confusing 1931 report admitted prohibition's failure, but urged its retention. A journalist parodied the findings:

*Prohibition is an awful flop.
We like it.
It can't stop what it's meant to stop.
We like it.
It's left a trail of graft and slime,
It's filled our land with vice and crime,
It don't prohibit worth a dime,
Nevertheless we're for it.*

The Eighteenth Amendment was finally repealed in 1933, a relic of another age.

Hoover at the Helm

Herbert Hoover, elected president in 1928, appeared well fitted to sustain the nation's prosperity. No standpat conservative like Harding and Coolidge, he brought to the White House a social and political philosophy that reflected his engineering background. He seemed the ideal president for the new technological age.

The Election of 1928

A Hollywood casting agent could not have chosen two individuals who better personified America's divisions than the 1928 presidential candidates, Al Smith and Herbert Hoover.

The Democratic party's urban-immigrant wing had gained strength since the deadlocked 1924 convention, and New York governor Al Smith easily won the nomination. A Catholic and a wet, Smith exuded the flavor of immigrant New York. Originally a machine politician and basically conservative, he had impressed reformers by backing social-welfare measures. His key advisors included several reform-minded women, notably Frances Perkins, head of the state industrial board.

Herbert Hoover won the Republican nomination after Coolidge chose not to run. Some conservative party leaders mistrusted the brilliant but aloof Hoover, who had never held elective office and had spent much of his adult life abroad. Born in Iowa and orphaned in boyhood, Hoover had put himself through Stanford University and made a fortune as a mining engineer in China and Australia. After his tour as wartime food administrator, he had served as secretary of commerce since 1921.

Disdaining conventional campaigning, Hoover instead issued "tons of reports on dull subjects" (as H. L. Mencken complained) and read radio speeches in a droning monotone that obscured the originality of his ideas. (Some Hoover strategists did make use of sound film to promote his cause.) Smith, by contrast, campaigned spiritedly across the nation. This may have hurt him, however, because his big-city wisecracking and New York accent put off many voters.

The effect of Smith's Catholicism remains debatable. Hoover urged tolerance, and Smith himself denied any conflict between his religion and the

"Prohibition is an awful flop./ We like it. . . . It don't prohibit worth a dime,/ Nevertheless we're for it."



THE POLITICAL USES OF THE NEW MEDIA Exploiting the latest in film technology, the 1928 Republican presidential campaign used sound motion pictures to promote Herbert Hoover's candidacy. (*Herbert Hoover Presidential Library*)

duties of the presidency. His candidacy energized Catholic voters, but anti-Catholic prejudice also played a role. Rumors circulated that Smith would follow the Vatican's orders if he won. (A post-election joke had Smith sending the pope a one-word telegram, "Unpack."). The decisive issue was probably not popery but prosperity. Republican orators pointed to the booming economy and warned of "soup kitchens instead of busy factories" if Smith won. In his nomination-acceptance speech, Hoover grandly predicted "the final triumph over poverty."

Hoover won in a landslide, grabbing 58 percent of the vote and even making deep inroads in the Democratic South (see Map 23.1). However, the outcome also hinted at an emerging political realignment (see Table 23.1). Smith did well

among hard-pressed Midwestern farmers angered by Coolidge's insensitivity to their plight. In northern cities, Catholic and Jewish wards voted heavily Democratic. Smith carried the nation's twelve

largest cities, all of which had gone Republican in 1924. Should prosperity falter, the Republican Party faced trouble.

Herbert Hoover's Social Thought

Admirers dubbed Hoover "the Great Engineer." Although a self-made man, he did not uncritically praise the capitalist system. His Quaker background, humanitarian activities, engineering experience, and Republican loyalties combined to produce a unique social outlook, summed up in his 1922 book *American Individualism*.

Like Theodore Roosevelt (whom he had supported in 1912), Hoover opposed untrammelled free-market competition. Rational economic development, he insisted, demanded corporate cooperation in resource allocation, product standardization, and other areas. The economy, in short, should operate like an efficient machine. Believing in ethical business behavior, Hoover welcomed the growth of welfare capitalism. But above all, he advocated *voluntarism*. The efficient, socially responsible economic

Hoover grandly predicted "the final triumph over poverty."

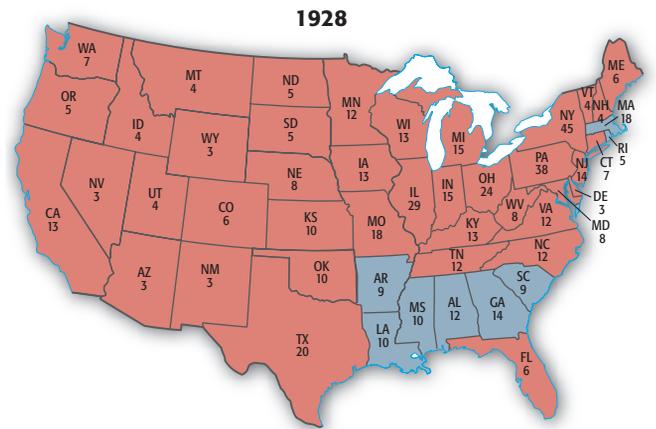
order he envisioned must arise from the voluntary action of capitalist leaders, not government coercion or labor-management power struggles.

Putting his philosophy into practice, Hoover as secretary of commerce had convened more than 250 conferences where business leaders discussed issues of common concern. He urged higher wages to increase consumer purchasing power, and in 1923 he persuaded the steel industry to adopt an eight-hour workday as an efficiency measure. During the 1927 Mississippi River floods, as President Coolidge did nothing, Hoover had visited the stricken area to mobilize private relief efforts.

A conservationist, Hoover as secretary of commerce had pushed for planned use of water resources and programs to combat the pollution of rivers and lakes. In 1922, he negotiated a compact among Western states to share Colorado River water. This agreement opened the way for a dam on the Colorado to provide hydroelectric power, control flooding, and supply water for irrigation. Construction of Hoover Dam began in 1930. (In an act of petty politics, Democrats changed the name to Boulder Dam in 1933, but Congress later restored the original name.)

Hoover's ideology had limitations. He showed more enthusiasm for cooperation among capitalists than among consumers or workers. His belief that capitalists would voluntarily embrace ethical behavior and pursue the general good reflected an exaggerated faith in the power of altruism in business decision making. His opposition to government economic intervention would prove disastrous when such intervention became urgently necessary.

Still, Hoover's presidency began promisingly. He created various commissions to gather data on recent social trends. At his urging, Congress created a Federal Farm Board to promote cooperative marketing. This, he hoped, would raise farm prices while preserving the voluntarist principle. Meanwhile, however, an economic crisis was approaching that would overwhelm and ultimately destroy his presidency.



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote
Hoover (Republican)	444 83.6%	21,392,190 58.0%
Smith (Democrat)	87 16.4%	15,016,443 40.7%

MAP 23.1 THE ELECTION OF 1928 Although Hoover won every state but Massachusetts and six Deep South states, Smith's 1928 vote in the Midwestern farm belt and the nation's largest cities showed significant gains over 1924.

TABLE 23.1 PRESIDENTIAL VOTING BY SELECTED GROUPS IN CHICAGO, 1924, 1928, AND 1932

	Percent Democratic		
	1924	1928	1932
Blacks	10	23	21
Czechoslovaks	40	73	83
Germans	14	58	69
Italians	31	63	64
Jews	19	60	77
Lithuanians	48	77	84
Poles	35	71	80
Swedes	15	34	51
Yugoslavs	20	54	67

Source: John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890–1936* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971).

CHRONOLOGY

1920–1929

1920–1921	Postwar recession.	1925 (Cont.)	Alain Locke, <i>The New Negro</i> . DuBose Heyward, <i>Porgy</i> . F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i> .
1920	Warren G. Harding elected president. Radio station KDKA, Pittsburgh, broadcasts election returns. Sinclair Lewis, <i>Main Street</i> .	1926	Book-of-the-Month Club founded. National Broadcasting Company founded. Langston Hughes, <i>The Weary Blues</i> . U.S. Marines intervene in Nicaragua.
1921	Economic boom begins; agriculture remains depressed. Sheppard-Towner Act. <i>Shuffle Along</i> , all-black musical review.	1927	<i>The Jazz Singer</i> , first sound movie. Coolidge vetoes the McNary-Haugen farm bill. Henry Ford introduces the Model A. Ford apologizes for anti-Semitic publications. Execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Charles A. Lindbergh's transatlantic flight. Marcus Garvey deported. Mississippi River flood.
1921–1922	Washington Naval Arms Conference.	1928	Herbert Hoover elected president.
1922	Supreme Court declares child-labor law unconstitutional. Fordney-McCumber Tariff restores high rates. Herbert Hoover, <i>American Individualism</i> .	1929	Federal Farm Board created. Sheppard-Towner program terminated. Textile strike in Gastonia, North Carolina. Ernest Hemingway, <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> . Claude McKay, <i>Home to Harlem</i> .
1923	Harding dies; Calvin Coolidge becomes president. Teapot Dome scandals investigated. National Origins Act (immigration restriction).		
1924	Calvin Coolidge elected president.		
1925	Scopes Trial. Ku Klux Klan scandal in Indiana.		

CONCLUSION

Repudiating the Wilsonian vision of America's postwar world role, the Republican administrations of the 1920s pursued a nationalistic foreign policy aimed at collecting war debts and protecting U.S. corporate interests in Latin America. The 1921 Washington Naval Arms Conference, though ultimately unsuccessful, represents the one diplomatic initiative of note in these years.

At home, the Twenties brought new entertainment media, consumer products, marketing strategies, and mass-production techniques. While enjoying widespread (if uneven) prosperity, Americans grappled with massive technological and social changes. Like jet-lagged travelers, they struggled to adapt to the new order. Skyscrapers, radio,

automobiles, movies, and electrical appliances—all familiar today—were exciting novelties for this generation.

While the Harding and Coolidge administrations celebrated the corporate order and pursued probusiness policies, society seethed in ferment. Ironically, the same stresses that sparked social conflict also stimulated cultural creativity. Jazz Age youth; Mexican immigrants seeking a better life; native-born advocates of immigration restriction, prohibition, and Fundamentalism; white Protestant KKK members; blacks who rallied to Marcus Garvey; the artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance; and the musicians, painters, and novelists who revitalized American culture were all, in their different ways, responding to the promise and uncertainties of modernity.

KEY TERMS

Henry Ford (p. 698)

Warren G. Harding (p. 703)

Charles Evans Hughes (p. 703)

Andrew Mellon (p. 703)

Herbert Hoover (p. 703)

Teapot Dome (p. 703)

Calvin Coolidge (p. 704)

McNary-Haugen Bill (p. 704)

Washington Naval Arms
Conference (p. 705)

Sheppard-Towner Act (p. 706)

Ku Klux Klan (p. 706)

Alfred E. Smith (p. 706)

Charles Lindbergh (p. 712)

H. L. Mencken (p. 716)

National Origins Act (p. 718)

Sacco-Vanzetti Case (p. 719)

Fundamentalism (p. 720)

Scopes Trial (p. 720)

Marcus Garvey (p. 721)

Prohibition (p. 722)

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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