Chapter 20 – The Roaring Twenties

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The Main Idea
The United States experienced many social changes during the 1920s.

Reading Focus
• What were the new roles for American women in the 1920s?
• What were the effects of growing urbanization in the United States in the 1920s?
• In what ways did the 1920s reveal a national conflict over basic values?
• What was Prohibition, and how did it affect the nation?
New Roles for Women

New Opportunities
- The 19th Amendment allowed women to vote, and some were elected to state and local office.
- In general, however, women voted about as much as the men in their lives.
- Many women had taken jobs during World War I but lost them when men came home.
- During the 1920s women joined the workforce in large numbers, though mostly in the lowest-paying professions.
- Women attended college in greater numbers.

New Family Roles
- The 1920s brought a shift in many people’s attitudes toward men and women’s relationships.
- The basic rules defining female behavior were beginning to change.
- American women continued to have primary responsibility for caring for the home, and most still depended on men for financial support.
- More, however, sought greater equality.
The Flapper

One popular image that reflects changes for women in the Roaring Twenties was the **flapper**, a young woman of the era who defied traditional ideas of proper dress and behavior.

### Flappers

- Flappers shocked society by cutting their hair, raising hemlines, wearing makeup, smoking, drinking, and dancing.
- The dress style was popular among young, rebellious girls.
- The term *flapper* suggested an independent, free lifestyle.
- Flappers mostly lived in cities, though rural people read about them in magazines.

### Other Women

- In much of the U.S., women only read about flappers in magazines, and many disapproved of flappers or wouldn’t dare to be so reckless.
- Some older women’s rights reformers thought flappers were only interested in fun.
- Many did not take flappers seriously.

The flapper craze took hold mainly in American cities, but in many ways the flappers represented the rift between cities and rural areas.
Effects of Urbanization

• Though the 1920s was a time of great economic opportunities for many, farmers did not share in the prosperity.
• Farming took a hard hit after World War I, when demand for products went down and many workers moved to industrialized cities.
• The 1920 census showed that for the first time ever, more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas, and three-fourths of all workers worked somewhere other than a farm.
• The rise of the automobile helped bring the cities and the country together, and rural people were now likely to spend time in town and were less isolated.
• Education also increased, and by the 1920s many states passed laws requiring children to attend school, helping force children out of workplaces.

School attendance and enrollment increased as industry grew because more people could afford to send their children to school, not to work.
Conflicts over Values

- Americans lived in larger communities, which produced a shift in **values**, or a person’s key beliefs and ideas.
- In the 1920s, many people in urban areas had values that differed from those in rural areas.
  - Rural America represented the traditional spirit of hard work, self-reliance, religion, and independence.
  - Cities represented changes that threatened those values.
- The Ku Klux Klan grew dramatically in the 1920s, and many of its members were people from rural America who saw their status declining.
  - Members of the Klan continued to use violence, targeting African Americans, Catholics, Jews, and all immigrants.
  - In the 1920s, the Klan focused on influencing politics.
  - The Klan’s membership was mostly in the South but spread nationwide.
  - The Klan’s peak membership was in the millions, many from Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio.
  - Membership declined in the late 1920s because of a series of scandals affecting Klan leaders.
## The Rise of Fundamentalism

**Billy Sunday**
- Changing times caused uncertainty, turning many to religion for answers.
- One key religious figure of the time was former ballplayer and ordained minister **Billy Sunday**.
- Sunday condemned radicals and criticized the changing attitudes of women, reflecting much of white, rural America’s ideals.
- Sunday’s Christian beliefs were based on a literal translation of the Bible called **fundamentalism**.

**Aimee Semple McPherson**
- Another leading fundamentalist preacher of the time.
- Seemed to embrace the kind of glamour that other fundamentalists warned about.
- Her religion, however, was purely fundamentalist.
- She was especially well known for healing the sick through prayer.
Charles Darwin’s theory of **evolution** holds that inherited characteristics of a population change over generations, which sometimes results in the rise of a new species.

- According to Darwin, the human species may have evolved from an ape-like species that lived long ago.
- Fundamentalists think this theory is against the biblical account of how God created humans and that teaching evolution undermine religious faith.

Fundamentalists worked to pass laws preventing evolution being taught in schools, and several states did, including Tennessee in 1925.

One group in Tennessee persuaded a young science teacher named John Scopes to violate the law, get arrested, and go to trial.

Scopes was represented by **Clarence Darrow**, and **William Jennings Bryan**, three-time candidate for president, represented the prosecution.

John Scopes was obviously guilty, but the trial was about larger issues.

Scopes was convicted and fined $100, but Darrow never got a chance to appeal because the conviction was overturned due to a technical violation by the judge.

The Tennessee law remained in place until the 1960s.
Prohibition

- Throughout U.S. history, groups like the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union worked to outlaw alcohol, but the drive strengthened in the early 1900s, as Progressives joined the effort.
- Over the years, a number of states passed anti-alcohol laws, and World War I helped the cause when grain and grapes, which most alcohol is made from, needed to feed troops.
- The fight against alcohol also used bias against immigrants to fuel their cause by portraying immigrant groups as alcoholics.
- Protestant religious groups and fundamentalists also favored a liquor ban because they thought alcohol contributed to society’s evils and sins, especially in cities.
- By 1917 more than half the states had passed a law restricting alcohol.

The Eighteenth Amendment banning alcohol was proposed in 1917 and ratified in 1919. The Volstead Act enforced the amendment.
Enforcing the new Prohibition law proved to be virtually impossible, as making, transporting, and selling alcohol was illegal, but drinking it was not.

Prohibition gave rise to huge smuggling operations, as alcohol slipped into the country through states like Michigan on the Canadian border.

Newspapers followed the hunt for **bootleggers**, or liquor smugglers, but government officials estimated that in 1925 they caught only 5 percent of all the illegal liquor entering the country.

Many people also made their own liquor using homemade equipment, and others got alcohol from doctors, who could prescribe it as medicine.

The illegal liquor business was the foundation of great criminal empires, like Chicago gangster Al Capone’s crew, who smashed competition, then frightened and bribed police and officials.

3,000 Prohibition agents nationwide worked to shut down **speakeasies**, or illegal bars, and to capture illegal liquor and stop gangsters.

Millions of Americans violated the laws, but it would be many years before Prohibition came to an end.
The Main Idea
Transformations in the African American community contributed to a blossoming of black culture centered in Harlem, New York.

Reading Focus
• What was the Great Migration, and what problems and opportunities faced African Americans in the post–World War I era?
• What was Harlem, and how was it affected by the Great Migration?
• Who were the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance?
The Great Migration

- Beginning around 1910, Harlem, New York, became a favorite destination for black Americans migrating from the South.
- Southern life was difficult for African Americans, many of whom worked as sharecroppers or in other low-paying jobs and often faced racial violence.
- Many African Americans looked to the North to find freedom and economic opportunities, and during World War I the demand for equipment and supplies offered African Americans factory jobs in the North.
- African American newspapers spread the word of opportunities in northern cities, and African Americans streamed into cities such as Chicago and Detroit.
- This major relocation of African Americans is known as the Great Migration.
African Americans after World War I

**Tensions**
- Many found opportunities in the North but also racism.
- Racial tensions were especially severe after World War I, when a shortage of jobs created a rift between whites and African American workers.
- This tension created a wave of racial violence in the summer of 1919.
- The deadliest riot occurred in Chicago, Illinois, when a dispute at a public beach led to rioting that left 38 people dead and nearly 300 injured.
- Racially motivated riots occurred in about two dozen other cities in 1919.

**Raised Expectations**
- Another factor that added to racial tensions was the changing expectations of African Americans.
- Many believed they had earned greater freedom for helping fight for freedom overseas in World War I.
- Unfortunately, not everyone agreed that their war service had earned them greater freedom.
- In fact, some whites were determined to strike back against the new African American attitudes.
New York City was one of the northern cities many African Americans moved to during the Great Migration, and by the early 1920s, about 200,000 African Americans lived in the city.

Most of these people lived in a neighborhood known as Harlem, which became the unofficial capital of African American culture and activism in the United States.

A key figure in Harlem’s rise was W.E.B. Du Bois, a well-educated, Massachusetts-born African American leader.

In 1909 Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in New York City.

Du Bois also served as editor of a magazine called *The Crisis*, a major outlet for African American writing and poetry, which helped promote the African American arts movement.

This movement was known as the **Harlem Renaissance**.
Another famous figure of the era was Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born American who took pride in his African heritage.

**Garvey’s Rise**

- Formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which promoted self-reliance for African Americans without white involvement.
- Garvey wanted American blacks to go back to Africa to create a new empire.
- Garvey wanted African Americans to have economic success. His Black Star Line promoted trade among Africans around the world.
- About 2 million mostly poor African Americans joined UNIA.

**Conflict with Du Bois**

- Garvey thought the NAACP discouraged African American self-confidence, and that their goal of breaking down barriers between races threatened African racial purity.
- Du Bois and the NAACP were suspicious of UNIA too, and *The Crisis* published an investigation of UNIA.
- The FBI charged UNIA with mail fraud, and UNIA collapsed when Garvey went to prison and then left the country upon release.
A Renaissance in Harlem

- Harlem in the 1920s was home to tens of thousands of African Americans, many from the South, who felt a strong sense of racial pride and identity in this new place.
- This spirit attracted a historic influx of talented African American writers, thinkers, musicians, and artists, resulting in the **Harlem Renaissance**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>Poets</th>
<th>Artists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little African American literature was published before that era.</td>
<td>Poets like Claude McKay and <strong>Langston Hughes</strong> wrote of black defiance and hope.</td>
<td>Black artists won fame during this era, often focusing on the experiences of African Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writers like Zora Neale Hurston and <strong>James Weldon Johnson</strong> wrote of facing white prejudice.</td>
<td>These poets recorded the distinctive culture of Harlem in the 1920s.</td>
<td>William H. Johnson, Aaron Douglas and Jacob Lawrence were well known.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Harlem Renaissance helped create new opportunities for African American stage performers, who only began being offered serious roles on the American stage in the 1920s.

**Performers**

- **Paul Robeson** came to New York to practice law but won fame onstage, performing in movies and stage productions like *Othello*.
- Robeson also played in the groundbreaking 1921 musical *Shuffle Along*, which had an all-black cast.
- Josephine Baker was also in that show, and she went on to a remarkable career as a singer and dancer in the U.S. and in Europe, where black performers were more accepted.

**Musicians**

- Harlem was a vital center for **jazz**, a musical blend of several different forms from the Lower South with new innovations in sound.
- Much of jazz was improvised, or composed on the spot.
- **Louis Armstrong** was a leading performer on the Harlem jazz scene.
- Other performers included **Bessie Smith**, Cab Calloway, and composers Duke Ellington and Fats Waller.
A New Popular Culture is Born

The Main Idea
New technologies helped produce a new mass culture in the 1920s.

Reading Focus
• How did mass entertainment change in the 1920s?
• Who were the cultural heroes of the 1920s?
• How was the culture of the 1920s reflected in the arts and literature of the era?
Radio Drives Popular Culture

During the 1920s, the radio went from being a little-known novelty to being standard equipment in every American home.

Rise of the Radio

• Guglielmo Marconi invented the radio in the late 1800s, and by the early 1900s the military and ships at sea used them.

• In 1920, most Americans still didn’t own radios, and there was not any programming.

• In 1920, a radio hobbyist near Pittsburgh started playing records over his radio, and people started listening.

Radio Station Boom

• The growing popularity of those simple broadcasts caught the attention of Westinghouse, a radio manufacturer.

• In October 1920, Westinghouse started KDKA, the first radio station.

• By 1922 the U.S. had 570 stations.

• Technical improvements in sound and size helped popularity.

• Americans now had a shared experience.
Movies exploded in popularity during the 1920s for several reasons.

### New Film Techniques
- In early years movies were short, simple pieces.
- During World War I, filmmaker **D. W. Griffith** produced *The Birth of a Nation*, a controversial film that some consider racist.
- The film nonetheless introduced innovative movie techniques and helped establish film as an art form and widened its audience.
- Woodrow Wilson, after seeing the movie, said, “it’s like writing history with lightning.”

### Talkies and Cartoons
- Another important innovation was the introduction of films with sound, or “talkies.”
- In 1927 filmgoers were amazed by *The Jazz Singer*, a hugely successful movie that incorporated a few lines of dialogue and helped change the movie industry forever.
- In 1928, the animated film *Steamboat Willie* introduced Mickey Mouse and cartoons.

By the end of the 1920s, Americans bought 100 million movie tickets a week, though the entire U.S. population was about 123 million people.
The great popularity of movies in the 1920s gave rise to a new kind of celebrity—the movie star.

One of the brightest stars of the 1920s was Charlie Chaplin, a comedian whose signature character was a tramp in a derby hat and ragged clothes.

Rudolph Valentino, a dashing leading man of romantic films, was such a big star that his unexpected death in 1926 drew tens of thousands of women to the funeral home where his body lay.

Clara Bow was a movie star nicknamed the “It Girl.”

Mary Pickford was considered “America’s Sweetheart” and was married to Douglas Fairbanks Jr., a major star of action films.

Their home, called “Pickfair,” was in Hollywood, the center of the motion picture industry.
Charles Lindbergh

- Charles Lindbergh was a daredevil pilot who practiced his skills as an airline pilot, a dangerous, life-threatening job at the time.
- Lindbergh heard about a $25,000 prize for the first aviator to fly a nonstop transatlantic flight, or a flight across the Atlantic Ocean, and wanted to win.
- He rejected the idea that he needed a large plane with many engines, and developed a very light single-engine craft with room for only one pilot.
- On May 21, 1927, Lindbergh succeeded by touching down in Paris, France after a thirty-three-and-a-half-hour flight from New York.
- Lindbergh earned the name “Lucky Lindy” and became the most beloved American hero of the time.

Amelia Earhart

- A little over a year after Lindbergh’s flight, **Amelia Earhart** became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, returning to the U.S. as a hero.
- She went on to set numerous speed and distance records as a pilot.
- In 1937 she was most of the way through a record-breaking flight around the world when she disappeared over the Pacific Ocean.
Sports Heroes

Radio helped inflame the public passion for sports, and millions of Americans tuned in to broadcasts of ballgames and prize fights featuring their favorite athletes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helen Wills:</th>
<th>Red Grange:</th>
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<td>Played powerful tennis, winning 31 major tournaments and two Olympic gold medals. Her nerves of steel earned her the nickname “Little Miss Poker Face.”</td>
<td>College football player who earned the nickname the “Galloping Ghost” for his speed. He turned professional after college, which was shocking at the time.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Babe Ruth:</th>
<th>Bobby Jones:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Known as the “Sultan of Swat,” Ruth was legendary on the baseball field for his home runs. His legend lives on today in baseball circles and popular culture.</td>
<td>Jones won golf’s first Grand Slam, meaning he won the game’s four major tournaments, and remains the only golfer to get a Grand Slam for matches in one calendar year.</td>
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The great economic and social changes of the 1920s offered novelists a rich source of materials.

F. Scott Fitzgerald helped create the flapper image, coined the term the “Jazz Age,” and explored the lives of the wealthy in *The Great Gatsby* and other novels and stories.

Sinclair Lewis wrote about the emptiness of middle-class life.

Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote poems on topics ranging from celebrations of youth to leading social causes of the day.

Willa Cather and Edith Wharton produced notable works of literature.

Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos were war veterans and, as part of the so-called Lost Generation, wrote about war experiences.

Gertrude Stein invented the term *Lost Generation*, referring to a group of writers who chose to live in Europe after World War I.

Bruce Barton’s novel compared Jesus to a modern business executive.

George Gershwin was a composer best known for *Rhapsody in Blue*—which showed the impact of jazz—as well as popular songs written with his brother Ira.
**The Harlem Renaissance**

During the 1920s, the numerous African American writers, artists, and musicians in Harlem inspired one another to reach new heights of creativity. The work produced during this time of enormous literary and artistic achievement often reflected a strong and growing sense of racial pride and confidence.

**Performing Arts**

Paul Robeson, Bessie Smith, and Louis Armstrong (from left to right) were just a few of the influential performers and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance.

**Literature**

Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, a novel about daily life in Harlem, was published in 1928 and quickly became a bestseller. It was the first novel by a Harlem writer to reach the bestseller list.

**Fine Arts**

Artist Aaron Douglas used elements of African design and subject matter in his murals for public buildings, illustrations for publications, and paintings such as “Into Bondage” (below). Douglas also created the cover for *Home to Harlem*.

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**History Close-Up**

**African American writer and philosopher Alain Locke** said of Harlem that "culturally and spiritually it focuses a people."

**Drawing Conclusions** How many art forms are represented in these pictures? How do you think this flourishing of the arts affected African Americans in general?

See Skills Handbook, p. H320
Urban and Rural Population, 1890–1930

- Rural population
- Urban population

Percentage of total population

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States
Because he placed the main fuel tank in front of the pilot’s seat, Lindbergh needed a periscope to see ahead.

Extra fuel tanks occupied the cabin space.

The wingspan was increased to accommodate the weight of the fuel.
Movement: Which states saw the greatest increase and greatest decrease in African American populations?

See Skills Handbook, p. H18
Visual Summary: The Roaring Twenties

The Roaring Twenties was a time of great cultural upheaval.

Social developments
- Changing roles for women
- Growing urbanization
- Cultural and religious conflict
- Prohibition

The Harlem Renaissance
- Great Migration: movement of African Americans from South to North
- Harlem: focal point of major African American literary and cultural movement

A New Popular Culture
- Mass entertainment: radio and movies
- An era of heroes: movie stars, sports figures, Lindbergh and Earhart
- Literature and art