

CHAPTER
13

Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *The Roaring Life of the 1920s*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW *During the 1920s, rural America clashes with a faster-paced urban culture. Women's attitudes and roles change, influenced in part by the mass media. Many African Americans join in the new urban culture.*

❶ Changing Ways of Life

MAIN IDEA *Americans experienced cultural conflicts as customs and values change in the 1920s.*

The 1920 census revealed that for the first time more Americans lived in towns and cities than in the country. The 1920s sped that process of urbanization. New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia became huge cities, and 65 others had more than 100,000 people. As 2 million people a year left their farms, city values—not small-town values—began to dominate the nation. The transition was not always easy.

One clash concerned Prohibition, favored by many rural people and opposed by many city dwellers. In 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution took effect and Prohibition became law. However, the effort to stop drinking was doomed. The government did not have enough law officers to enforce the law. Illegal nightclubs sprang up across the country. People began making their own illegal liquor. Others bought from “bootleggers”—resulting in large sums of money flowing to organized crime. By the middle of the decade, only 19 percent of Americans supported Prohibition. It remained law until 1933, however.

The country also saw a revival of Christian fundamentalism. Christian fundamentalists believed that every word in the Bible was literally true. Religious revivals and preachers drew large crowds, especially in the South and West.

Soon fundamentalists clashed with science in the Scopes trial. Fundamentalists, who rejected the scientific theory of evolution, persuaded some states to outlaw teaching of that theory in schools. Teacher John Scopes protested the law by openly teaching the subject. The trial brought famous attorneys and large crowds to a small Tennessee town. After Scopes was found guilty, the state Supreme Court reversed the conviction.

❷ The Twenties Woman

MAIN IDEA *American women pursued new lifestyles and assumed new jobs and different roles in society during the 1920s.*

The new urban culture influenced many women to demand greater freedom, symbolized by the “flapper.” These young women wore shorter skirts, shorter hair, and more jewelry than was customary before. They also smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. Not all young women were flappers, of course. Many felt caught between the old values and the new.

Many women across America were adopting new roles at work. More women worked outside the home than before the war. They took many different jobs, but hundreds of thousands became teacher and nurses, secretaries, or sales clerks. Wherever they worked, though, women faced discrimination. The 1920s began trends that continue today: identifying jobs as women’s or men’s work and paying women less than men.

Most married women did not work. Those who did found it difficult to juggle the demands of both job and family. Women also experienced changes at home. Married women had fewer children than before. Ready-made clothes and labor-saving devices made housework easier.

Other changes affected families. Marriages were more often the result of the two partners’ choice, not their parents’ arrangements. More teenagers stayed in school than before but sometimes rebelled against parental supervision.

❸ Education and Popular Culture

MAIN IDEA *The mass media, movies, and spectator sports played important roles in creating popular culture of the 1920s—a culture that many artists and writers criticized.*

With prosperity and the need for a more educated workforce, more students received a high school education. High schools changed, offering vocational training for future workers and home

economics for future homemakers. Educators met the challenge of teaching millions of children of immigrants, many of whom did not know English. As a result, an increasing number of people could read. With these increased demands, schooling costs rose dramatically.

American tastes were shaped by mass media. The number of people who read newspapers increased sharply, and national magazines flourished. The most powerful of the mass media, though, was radio. It grew into national networks that offered programming to many millions.

The growing prosperity of the 1920s gave Americans more money to spend—and more leisure time in which to spend it. Fads swept the nation. Many entertainment dollars were spent on tickets to sporting events as athletes in many sports set new records. Chief among them was baseball's Babe Ruth, a long-ball hitter.

America's biggest hero was pilot Charles A. Lindbergh, who thrilled the nation in 1927 by flying alone across the Atlantic Ocean.

Americans by the hundreds of thousands found entertainment in movie theaters. For most of the decade, the movies were silent. In 1927, Hollywood released *The Jazz Singer*—the first major talking picture. Movies, like magazines and radio, helped create a national culture.

Many artists contributed to a flowering of American culture. Playwright Eugene O'Neill dramatized family conflicts. Composer George Gershwin wrote music that combined jazz rhythms with classical forms. Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win a Nobel Prize in literature, wrote best-selling novels taking a critical look at the shallow life of middle-class Americans. F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels showed the dark underside of the flashy life of the 1920s. Dorothy Parker, Edith Wharton, and other women writers added a unique perspective in their work.

4 The Harlem Renaissance

MAIN IDEA African-American ideas, politics, art, literature, and music flourish in Harlem and elsewhere in the United States.

In the 1920s, hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved to the cities of the North. Many left the South for big cities in search of jobs. By 1929, 40 percent of all African Americans lived in cities. Racial riots erupted in the North, however.

W. E. B. Du Bois, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), protested racial violence. Another NAACP official, James Weldon Johnson, spearheaded the organization's effort to get Congress to pass a law to put an end to lynching of African Americans. While the law never passed, the number of lynchings did drop.

Marcus Garvey voiced a message of black pride that appealed to many African Americans. Garvey promoted the formation of black-owned businesses. He also urged many African Americans to return to Africa.

Harlem, a section of New York City, became home to a flowering of African-American culture called the Harlem Renaissance. Writers Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston—among others—wrote moving poems, plays, and novels portraying the difficulties and pleasures of black life. Paul Robeson won renown as an actor. Musicians Louis Armstrong, “Duke” Ellington, and Bessie Smith delighted audiences with jazz and blues.

This great decade of social and cultural change, though, would soon be overshadowed by an economic crash.

Review

1. What developments in the 1920s reflected the clash between traditional and new values?
2. How did women's lives change at work and at home during the 1920s?
3. How did mass media create national culture?
4. Give three examples of personal achievements connected with the Harlem Renaissance.