



The Jazz Age

Objectives

1. Describe the new fads and heroes that emerged during the 1920s and how they affected American culture.
2. Identify the origins, importance, and spread of a new musical style—jazz.
3. Explain how new literature styles described American society in a new, more critical way.

Prepare to Read

Reading Skill

Summarize Main Ideas and Essential Details A summary includes more than just main ideas. It must also include essential details. Still, a summary should not repeat everything in the text, but it should include those details necessary for understanding the main ideas. To find these details, ask yourself if the main idea would make sense without a detail. If not, then include the detail.

Vocabulary Builder

High-Use Words

critic, p. 749

analyze, p. 750

Key Terms and People

Charles Lindbergh, p. 747

jazz, p. 747

Sinclair Lewis, p. 749

Langston Hughes, p. 750

★ **Background Knowledge** In the previous section, you learned how social changes and conflicts shaped American society during the 1920s. This section will examine the arts and culture produced by a society undergoing great changes.

Main Idea

Optimistic Americans in the 1920s eagerly embraced new fads and hailed new heroes.

Fads and Heroes

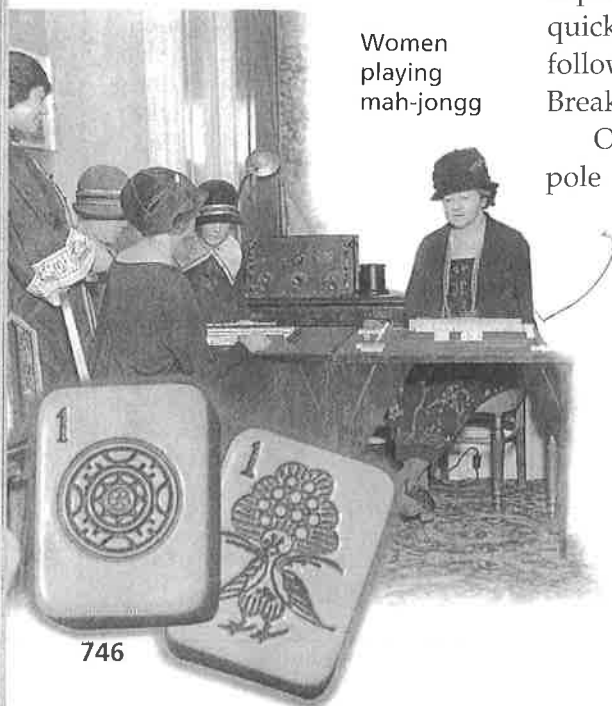
The energy and enthusiasm of the 1920s reflected the optimism felt by many Americans of the time. One hit song put it this way: "Ev'ry morning, ev'ry evening, ain't we got fun?"

As the economy soared and the culture roared, young people expressed their joy for life in dancing. Dance fads became popular quickly and then disappeared. The Charleston swept the nation, followed by the Lindy Hop, the Black Bottom, and then the Breakaway.

Other fads also became part of popular culture in the 1920s. Flagpole sitting was all the rage. Young people competed to see who could sit the longest atop a flagpole. Some did it for hours, others for days. Another fad that tested young people's endurance was the dance marathon. Couples danced for hundreds of hours until only one last bleary-eyed pair remained shuffling wearily about the dance floor.

The Chinese game of mah-jongg became extremely popular. Women went to mah-jongg clubs wearing Chinese-style silk gowns. College students formed their own mah-jongg clubs. Guests brought mah-jongg sets to dinner parties and set up their ivory and bamboo tiles on playing tables. In 1923, mah-jongg sets outsold radios.

Women playing mah-jongg



Heroes of the New Age The growing popularity of sports entertainment produced a new kind of celebrity: the sports hero. Baseball great Babe Ruth became one such celebrity. His record of hitting 60 home runs in one season lasted for more than 30 years.

Other celebrities of the decade included swimmer Johnny Weissmuller, football player Red Grange, golf champion Bobby Jones, tennis stars Bill Tilden and Helen Wills, and boxer Jack Dempsey.

The mass media helped to make these celebrities style setters, too. When Babe Ruth began wearing a camel's-hair coat, so did millions of other Americans.

Charles Lindbergh, nicknamed Lucky Lindy, was the most beloved hero of the era. The handsome young airplane pilot gained his fame by being the first to fly nonstop across the Atlantic in 1927. He became an instant hero. New York City gave him the biggest ticker tape parade ever. Lindbergh seemed to symbolize American energy and optimism.

✓Checkpoint What sports events became popular during the 1920s?

An American Sound

During the 1920s, a new musical sound achieved wide popularity. Jazz was created by black musicians in the nightclubs and dance halls of New Orleans. New Orleans was a major port city, where people and cultures from around the world came together. Jazz combined rhythms from West Africa and the Caribbean, work chants and spirituals from the rural South, and harmonies from Europe into an original new style of music.

Jazz quickly spread to other American cities, following along with the Great Migration. African American musicians also found eager audiences for their music in St. Louis, New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and Detroit. Among the most famous of the new jazz artists were trumpet player and singer Louis Armstrong, singer Bessie Smith, and band leader Duke Ellington. All had roots in the South.

Armstrong, who was known as Satchmo, learned to play the trumpet while growing up in a New Orleans orphanage. Like other jazz players, he developed the ability to take a simple melody and recombine the notes and rhythms in new ways to produce a cascade of rich and exciting sounds. Because of jazz's emphasis on improvisation and experimentation, listeners heard many different versions of the basic tune.

Biography Quest



Gertrude Ederle
1906–2003

Nobody thought a woman could swim across the English Channel, the 35-mile-wide body of water between England and France. But Gertrude Ederle did it.

On August 6, 1926, Ederle stepped into the water on the French side. And 14 hours and 31 minutes later, she stepped ashore in England. Not only was she the first woman to swim the Channel—she had beaten the existing men's record by nearly 2 hours!

Biography Quest

What problems did Ederle face as a result of her swim?

For: The answer to the question about Ederle

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Main Idea

Jazz originated among African American musicians and became the dominant music form of the 1920s.



Summarize Main Ideas and Essential Details

List three essential details from the text under the heading "An American Sound" that could be used in a summary. Use your own words.

THE JAZZ AGE

Jazz spread from the dance halls of New Orleans to Chicago, Harlem, and beyond. Its rollicking beat was soon being heard all over the world.

Critical Thinking: Apply Information How did the Jazz Age open up new opportunities for African Americans?

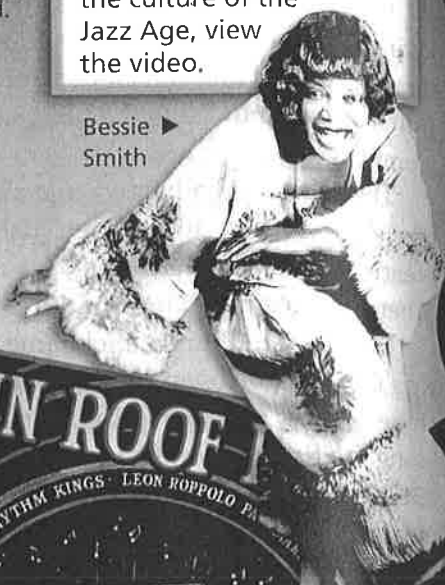
Jazz Greats The leading jazz performers were African Americans, such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Bessie Smith. Many became "goodwill ambassadors" abroad, performing in many countries.

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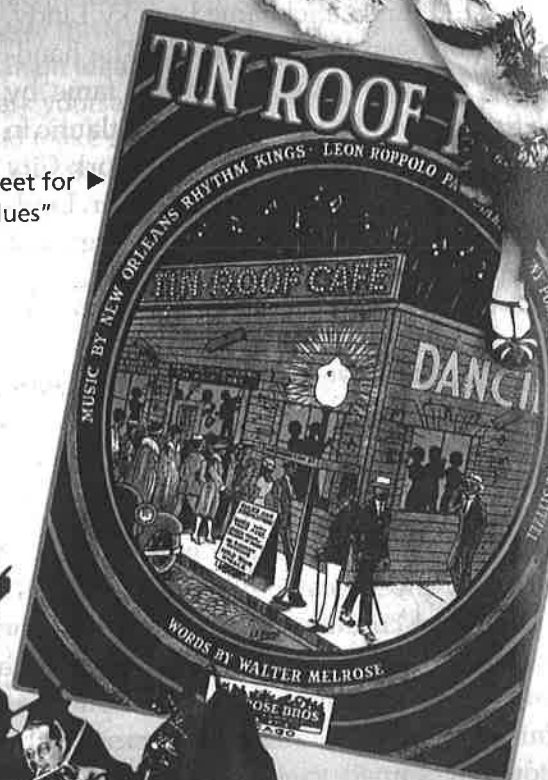
Bessie Smith ▶



The song sheet for
"Tin Roof Blues" ▶

◀ Louis
Armstrong

Duke
Ellington
▼



Duke Ellington
and his band

Radio helped to spread jazz beyond the African American community. During the 1920s, white audiences, white band leaders such as Paul Whiteman, and white composers such as George Gershwin embraced jazz. Jazz became one of the most important American contributions to world culture. It was so popular that the decade of the 1920s became known as the Jazz Age.

However, jazz did not set everyone's feet to tapping. The rhythms of the new music were jarring to many older Americans. And jazz alarmed people who thought it encouraged an overemphasis on frivolity and pleasure and undermined the morals of America's young people.

✓**Checkpoint** Why was jazz considered an American art form?

Literature of the 1920s

American literature flourished during the 1920s. Writers both reflected the exuberance of the era and criticized its excesses. Many writers seemed disillusioned by the postwar generation. They complained that Americans had turned from international idealism to greedy selfishness. Some of these writers found American society so intolerable that they became "expatriates," people who leave their own country to live abroad.

Social Critics F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* captured the luxurious society of the wealthy. Fitzgerald was a critic of what he saw as the emptiness of rich people's lives. He seemed both fascinated and disgusted by the people he described.

Fitzgerald's friend Ernest Hemingway was another important writer of the decade. A one-time newspaper reporter, Hemingway was noted for his short, direct sentences using everyday language. Living among American expatriates in France, Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) about a group of young Americans who drifted around Spain after the war. Another Hemingway novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), powerfully captured the growing antiwar sentiments of his generation.

Sinclair Lewis reacted against what he saw as the hypocrisies of middle-class culture. In *Babbitt* (1922), Lewis used a fictional real estate agent named George F. Babbitt to criticize American society.

"Babbitt was virtuous. He advocated, though he did not practice, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised, though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; he paid his debts; he contributed to the church, the Red Cross, and the Y.M.C.A.; he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only as it was sanctified by precedent. . . ."

—Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*

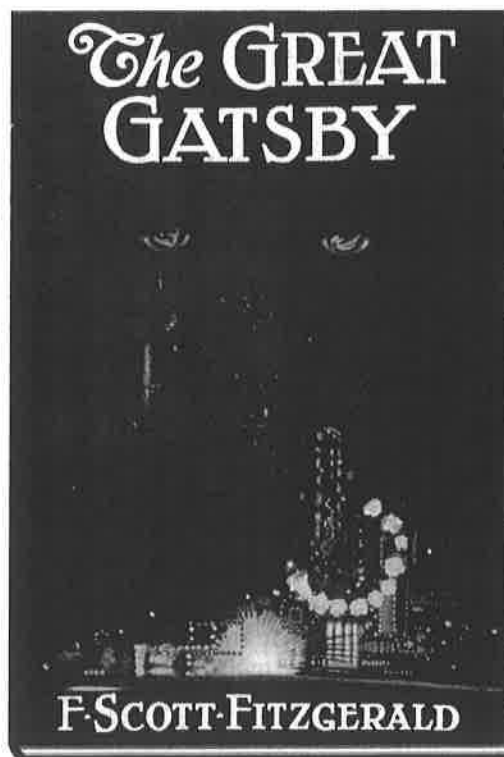
Based on this character's moral faults, "babbity" became a common term for mediocrity combined with an unthinking conformity to middle-class standards and prejudices.

Main Idea

Writers of the Harlem Renaissance cast a critical eye on American society.

Vocabulary Builder

critic (KRIHT ihk) *n.* someone who makes judgments on the value of objects or actions



F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* calls attention to the excesses of the Roaring Twenties.



Zora Neale Hurston

Vocabulary Builder

analyze (AN ah līz) v. to critically examine an idea or object by separating it into parts

The Harlem Renaissance During the 1920s, a vibrant African American culture grew in Harlem, a part of New York City that attracted thousands of migrants from the South. Writers, musicians, and poets reacted against the prejudice they faced while expressing the hopes of black Americans. Jazz clubs and the music scene were one part of the Harlem Renaissance. Perhaps even more important were the writers.

Poet **Langston Hughes** won praise not only for the beauty of his poems but also for his moving expressions of racial pride. He wanted his poems to sound like jazz music. He said, "I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street. . . . [These songs] had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going."

James Weldon Johnson was another Harlem Renaissance figure who combined poetry and politics. Johnson wrote editorials for the *New York Age*, one of the most important black-owned newspapers in the country. He also worked as an organizer for the NAACP.

Zora Neale Hurston moved to New York to study anthropology at Barnard College. She, too, became swept up in the cultural excitement of the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston spent much time recording folk songs and folk tales to both preserve and **analyze** them. She also became an accomplished writer and is most remembered today for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

☒ **Checkpoint** What was the Harlem Renaissance?

★ **Looking Back and Ahead** While Americans benefited from the general prosperity of the 1920s, it was easy to overlook a number of disturbing economic trends. In the next section, you will learn why a frenzied stock market boom concealed signs of an economy that was facing serious problems.

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Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) **Identify** Who was Charles Lindbergh?
(b) **Draw Inferences** How did Lindbergh symbolize the American hero of the 1920s?
2. (a) **List** Who were the leading writers of the 1920s and what were their major works?
(b) **Explain Problems** Which problems were the writers addressing in their works?

Reading Skill

3. **Summarize Main Ideas and Essential Details** Reread the text following the subheading "The Harlem Renaissance." List three essential details, in your own words, for a summary.

Vocabulary Builder

Read the sentence that follows. If the sentence is true, write YES. If the sentence is not true, write NO and explain why.

4. Jazz began in New Orleans when musicians of French heritage combined sounds from Europe with Native American music.

Writing

5. Proofread and correct the following sentences: The Jazz age is similar to current life in America in many ways. For example, the people of both periods worshiped sports heroes and other celebrities. Both ages was known for there populous fads. I think I druther live today than in the past.