The Roaring Twenties
1919-1929
Terms and People

- **Warren Harding** – elected President of the United States in 1920
- **Calvin Coolidge** – Harding’s vice president, who took over as president in 1923 after the death of President Harding
- **communism** – an economic or political system in which the state owns the means of production and a single party rules
- **anarchist** – a person who opposes all organized government
President Wilson and the Democrats became unpopular after WWI for several reasons.

- Mishandling of the Treaty of Versailles
- Economic recession
- Labor strikes
- Fear of Communists
In 1920, Republican Warren Harding ran for President against Woodrow Wilson. Harding promised the return to “normalcy” that many Americans wanted. Harding won by a landslide. Many Americans hoped a change in leadership would lead to peace and prosperity.
President Harding choose a number of friends for important cabinet positions. Some of these men were unqualified and even corrupt. They used their government positions to make money illegally and their actions helped to wreck the Harding presidency. The worst scandal involved Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall taking bribes and making illegal deals with oil executives to drill oil-rich government land in Teapot Dome, Wyoming. It was called the Teapot Dome Scandal.
Political Cartoon

As the Teapot Dome scandal unfolded, many people began to take a closer look at the illegal activities of the Harding cabinet. This cartoon, titled "Juggernaut," was published in 1924 during the height of the scandal. A "juggernaut" is an indestructible force that crushes everything in its path.

The oil scandal at the heart of Teapot Dome is portrayed as a steamroller.

The steamroller is headed towards the White House.

Skills Focus: Reading Like a Historian

1. Identifying Points of View  What does the artist's choice of title and imagery say about the power of the scandal?
2. Making Inferences  What effect does the artist think the scandal might have on the Republican administration?

Harding’s presidency was marred by scandal.

The billboards in this cartoon show the “sale” of government institutions.

Harding did not live to regain the public’s trust. He had a fatal heart attack in 1923.
President Harding was politically and personally an honest man and the rumors of corruption took a toll on his health. He became depressed and tired and died suddenly just before the scandals became public.
Vice President Calvin Coolidge became president when Warren Harding died on August 2, 1923.
On August 2, 1923, Vice-President Calvin Coolidge went to bed early at his family home in Plymouth Notch, Vermont. During the night, Coolidge’s father received news by telegram that President Harding had died. He then woke his son.

The U.S. Attorney General urged Coolidge to take the oath of office as soon as possible. At 2:47 A.M. on August 3, 1923, John Coolidge, a justice of the peace, administered the oath to his son.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>President promised a return to “normalcy” after years of progressive reforms and war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coolidge</td>
<td>President who promoted business.</td>
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“More business in government, less government in business.”

“The business of America is business.”
President Coolidge moved quickly to clean up the scandals by cooperating with investigations and limited the damage to the Republican Party.

President Coolidge was pro-business and believed in the economic theory of *laissez faire*. This stated that *business, if left unregulated by the government, would act in a way that would benefit the nation*. Under the Coolidge administration the recession ended, business prospered, and so did many Americans.

Coolidge was also an *isolationist*. He believed that *the United States should stay out of other nations’ affairs except in matters of self-defense*. 
President Coolidge’s major peace effort was the **Kellogg-Briand Pact** of 1928. This pact, or treaty, was signed by 15 nations who pledged not to make war against one another except in self-defense. Ultimately, the Kellogg-Briand Pact did not live up to its aim of ending war.
Fear of communism abroad led to a “Red Scare” in the United States.

In 1919, foreign anarchists bombed several targets in the U.S.

Many Americans came to fear all foreigners.

Thousands of anarchists and Communists, or “Reds,” were arrested, and many were deported.
The case of two Italian immigrants shows the mistreatment of foreigners during this time.

Sacco and Vanzetti were accused of robbery and murder with little evidence.

Both men were anarchists.

They were found guilty and executed in 1927.
Fears about radicals led to new limits on immigration to the United States.

Americans worried about losing their culture and having to compete for jobs.

Congress passed laws limiting immigration in 1921, 1924, and 1929.

Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2003
Terms and People

- **prohibition** – a total ban on alcoholic drinks
- **bootlegger** – liquor smugglers
- **speakeasy** – illegal taverns that served liquor
In 1919, the **Eighteenth Amendment** made it illegal to make, sell, or transport alcohol.

This began a period of time known as **Prohibition**.

- Conserve grains used to make alcohol.
- Reduce drunkenness and family violence.
The 18th Amendment banned the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.
Prohibition led to the growth of illegal nightclubs called speakeasies. Gangsters like Al Capone battled for control of the growing bootleg liquor business.
Women gained new rights in the 1920s.

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women voting rights.

Women joined political parties and were elected to offices.

However, they still lacked full equality.

Women were still barred from many universities and from serving on juries.

Married women were not allowed to keep their earnings.
Many younger women in the 1920s shocked the older generation. These “flappers” did not seem interested in women’s rights. Their attitude and style came to symbolize women in the 1920s.
The flapper became a symbol of American women in the 1920s. Women had more personal freedoms and began to drive cars, play sports, go to college, and get jobs.
Young people as a group rebelled against the values and authority of their elders. The under-25 generation wanted fun and freedom. They experimented with new fashions, attitudes, and ways of behavior.

As school became a place for socializing as well as learning young people stayed in school longer and more went to college.
Three inventions in the 1920s led to the emergence of a new mass culture.

Automobiles

Commercial Radio

Movies
Henry Ford built his first successful automobile in the 1890s, but created the more affordable Model T in the 1920s.
Henry Ford used the assembly line to speed up production and lower costs and prices.
The automobile greatly changed American life.

- Families could easily move to suburbs.
- Rural residents became less isolated.
- New businesses were opened by highways.
- Americans began to travel more.

Automobiles symbolized freedom and independence.
Labor saving appliances and shorter working hours gave Americans more leisure time in the 1920s. New types of mass media – communications that reach a large audience – began to take hold. Radio and movies provided entertainment and spread the latest ideas about fashion and lifestyles.

Popular culture included songs, dances, fashions, and even slang expressions like *hep* (with it), *scram* (leave in a hurry), *spiffy* (dressed up), and *ritzy* (elegant).
Radio and movies revolutionized entertainment in the 1920s.

Almost any family could afford a radio.

People nationwide listened to the same music, news, sports, and radio dramas.

Households With Radios, 1922–1930

SOURCE: Historical Statistics of the United States
Many Americans went to the movies weekly.

Movies provided an escape, and action films and comedies were very popular.

Movie fans began to worship celebrities.
Actor Harold Lloyd’s movie adventures in the film *Safety Last* symbolized the thrills and excitement of the Jazz Age.
Why did movie theaters average nearly 100 million moviegoers per week during the 1920s?
Why do fewer people attend movies today than did over three-quarters of a century ago?
Sports entertainment also gained popularity in the 1920s, and **sports heroes became celebrities**.

Baseball player **Babe Ruth** was one such hero.

The mass media made Ruth a style setter. Millions of fans copied his style.
Celebrities of the 1920s

- Charlie Chaplin
- Rudolph Valentino
- Duke Ellington
- Babe Ruth
- Clara Bow
- Mary Pickford
- Al Jolson
- Jack Dempsey
Some Americans feared that rapid social changes would destroy their way of life.

This fear was reflected in the Scopes Trial of 1925.

High school teacher John Scopes taught evolution.

This violated Tennessee law. Scopes was put on trial.
Lawyer Clarence Darrow defended public school biology teacher John Scopes when he broke Tennessee law by teaching his students the theory of evolution. The trial attracted national attention.
The trial encapsulated the conflict between modern, urban Americans and traditional, rural Americans.

William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate, prosecuted Scopes.

Clarence Darrow, a famous Chicago lawyer, defended Scopes.

Scopes lost his job. Laws against teaching evolution remained but were rarely enforced.
Fear of social change also caused racial tensions.

Many African Americans served in World War I.

They hoped to gain equality in America.

Many moved to northern cities. This was called the Great Migration.

Violent race riots broke out in several cities.
The Ku Klux Klan was reborn in the 1920s. More than 40,000 members marched through Washington, D.C. in 1925 to show off their growing political power.
Terms and People

- **Charles Lindbergh** – the first airplane pilot to fly nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean
- **jazz** – a style of music developed in New Orleans in the 1920s
- **Sinclair Lewis** – author of *Babbit*, a novel about the hypocrisies of middle-class culture
- **Langston Hughes** – Harlem Renaissance poet whose poems express racial pride
During the 1920s, feelings of optimism ran high. Many Americans expressed their new exuberance through dance.

Dances such as the Charleston

Dance marathons

The Chinese game of mah-jongg

Flagpole sitting competitions

Americans participated in other amusing fads as well.
The Original
CHARLESTON

The original of "All Charleston, first introduced in "Runnin' Wild""

Words and Music by
CECIL MACK
and
JIMMY JOHNSON

HARMS
NEW YORK
Flagpole sitting, a fad of the 1920s, involved sitting on a platform on top of a flagpole for days.
Fads of the Roaring Twenties

- Shorter Hemlines
- Dance Marathons
- Bobbed Hairstyles
- Silly Songs
- Flagpole Sitting
The 1920s marked the beginning of the air age. Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart helped to promote the idea of commercial air transportation.
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.
The 1920s saw the creation of a new musical sound: **Jazz**

Jazz combined elements of music from around the world.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Jazz Music</th>
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<tr>
<td>West African rhythms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caribbean rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern work chants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spirituals</td>
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<tr>
<td>European harmonies</td>
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Jazz was created by black musicians in the port city of New Orleans, where these cultures met.
Jazz music gained popularity among African American audiences.

Many African American jazz musicians became famous.

- Trumpet player: Louis Armstrong
- Band leader: Duke Ellington
- Singer: Bessie Smith
Jazz quickly spread beyond the African American community.

People all around America heard jazz on the radio. White composers, band leaders, and audiences embraced jazz.

Jazz became one of the most important American contributions to world culture. The 1920s became known as the “Jazz Age.”
Like music, American literature flourished during the 1920s.

Many writers seemed disillusioned by the postwar generation.

They complained that Americans had become greedy and selfish after World War I.
Harlem, New York produced a burst of African-American cultural activity known as the Harlem Renaissance, which began in the 1920s and lasted into the 1930s. Harlem became home to writers, musicians, singers, painters, sculptors, and scholars. Poets and writers like Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Zora Neale Hurston were able to exchange ideas and develop their creativity.

Some American artists and writers did not view the decade as a time of celebration. World War I had left them filled with resentment and little hope for the future. They were called the Lost Generation. Many of them moved to Paris, France and became expatriates, people who choose to live in a country other than their own.

Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald were members of the Lost Generation.
Writers were an important part of the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes wrote poems that expressed racial pride. He wanted his poems to sound like jazz music. James Weldon Johnson combined poetry and politics. He also worked as an organizer for the NAACP.
Zora Neale Hurston was one of the most important women writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston recorded folk songs and folk tales to preserve and analyze them. She is most remembered for her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 
Art & Literature of the 1920s

The Ascent of Ethiopia
by Lois Mailou Jones
Terms and People

• **installment buying** – buying on credit

• **bull market** – a period of rising stock prices

• **buying on margin** – borrowing money in order to buy stocks
Companies made lots of consumer goods. Prices on most goods dropped. At the same time, American incomes rose.

Americans spent more of their money on consumer goods.
New machines and production methods turned out products faster and cheaper. Once-costly items were now available and affordable to many consumers. Some people used credit and paid for their purchases through installment buying. This allowed repaying the amount borrowed in small monthly payments.

As electricity became widely available, vacuum cleaners, washers, sewing machines, toasters, and fans made life easier. However, it was mostly the white middle class that could afford these new products.
Advances in technology improved American life. National advertising helped to promote the new products.
The advertising industry expanded after World War I. With the help of psychologists, advertising produced glamorous ads that tempted Americans with exciting new products. New payment methods convinced people they could afford to buy them. What image of Americans is the advertisers portraying?
Increased spending had both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, the economy improved. On the other hand, Americans began spending recklessly.

**Source:** *Historical Statistics of the United States*
With a strong economy, more Americans invested in the stock market.

This created a **bull market**, a period of rising stock prices.

![Average Price of Selected Stocks, 1921–1929](chart)

*Source: Standard and Poor’s*

Stocks were so profitable that many people began **buying on margin**, or borrowing money to buy stocks.
The Process of Buying on Margin

**Investor buys stock on margin**
Investor pays for part of the stock and takes out a loan from a broker for the rest.

**Stock Price Rises**
Investor pays off the margin loan and earns a profit.

**Stock Price Falls**
Investor must put more money into the margin account, or sell stock, losing part or all of the original investment.
Not all Americans shared in the prosperity of the 1920s. **Most farmers at this time lived in poverty.**
American farmers began to struggle after the end of World War I.

**Before the War**
- U.S. farmers sold many of their products overseas.
- Many farmers took out loans for new lands and equipment.

**After the War**
- Many nations were too poor to buy U.S. farm products.
- Sales fell, and farmers could not repay their loans.
The 1920s were years of mixed results for American workers.

Positive Changes

Wages were rising, and companies began to offer **benefits** such as paid vacations.

Negative Changes

Unemployment was high. The assembly line system put many skilled laborers out of work.