

2 Changes in Society

TERMS & NAMES

flapper
Prohibition
Al Capone
NAACP
Marcus Garvey
fundamentalism
Ku Klux Klan

MAIN IDEA

Changes in society in the 1920s brought new attitudes and lifestyles but also caused divisions and conflict.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many of the social issues of the 1920s continue to challenge American society today.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Poet Edna St. Vincent Millay was one of many young people who rebelled against traditional values in the 1920s. She had left her home in Maine to study poetry at Vassar College in New York. She graduated in 1917 as World War I neared its end. Then she moved to the Greenwich Village section of New York City. There Millay lived among artists and writers whose ideas were different from those traditionally held by society. She wrote poems about love and the carefree lifestyle of the 1920s.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!

Edna St. Vincent Millay, "First Fig," from *A Few Figs from Thistles*

Millay was a symbol of the 1920s woman. In this section, you will read about the changing roles of young people and women, problems facing African Americans, and conflicts that came to divide society.

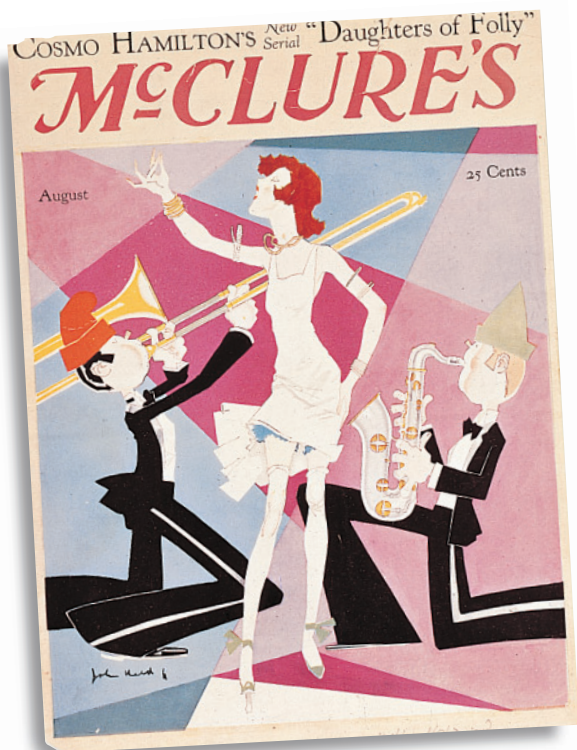


Edna St. Vincent Millay became a bestselling poet and a symbol of her time.

Youth in the Roaring Twenties

The 1920s were called the Roaring Twenties. According to author F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The uncertainties of 1919 were over. America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history." During the decade, youth and its culture were celebrated. For the first time, young people as a group rebelled against the values of the past and the authority of their elders. The under-25 generation wanted fun and freedom. Many of them experimented with new fashions, attitudes, and ways of behavior.

Young people stayed in school longer, and more went to college. School became a place for socializing as well as learning. Young people expressed their new freedom in daring new clothes, lively songs and dances, and silly fads. Men wore extra-wide floppy pants and sported hair slicked down close to the head. Women wore a shorter hairstyle called a *bob* to match the shorter dresses of the period.



The flapper appeared on many magazine covers during the 1920s.

The Charleston was a favorite dance. It involved wild, flailing movements of the arms and legs. Dance marathons became the rage. In these contests, couples would dance nonstop for days. Songs also captured the high spirits of the decade. Among the most popular tunes were “Runnin’ Wild” and “Ain’t We Got Fun.” Many young people imitated the behavior of favorite stars from Hollywood movies. Other fads included crossword puzzles, mah-jongg, and flagpole sitting (sitting on a platform on top of a flagpole for days).

The spirited behavior of young women during the decade was just one way women’s lives changed.

New Roles for Women

The symbol of the 1920s American woman was the **flapper**. The flapper was the creation of John Held, Jr., a magazine illustrator. Flappers often wore bobbed hair, makeup, and dresses that fell to just below the knee. They were always eager to try something new, whether it was a new fashion, behavior, dance, or fad.

During the 1920s, women took more active roles in their life than ever before. They had more personal freedom. They drove cars, played sports, went to college, and took jobs. Margaret Sanger, a reformer who focused on women’s health issues, described these women.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Today women are on the whole much more individual. They possess as strong likes and dislikes as men. They live more and more on the plane of social equality with men . . . [and] there is more enjoyable companionship and real friendship between men and women.

Margaret Sanger, quoted in *A More Perfect Union*

The prosperity of the 1920s opened new job opportunities for women in business offices, retail stores, factories, and various professions. College graduates most often became teachers and nurses, but also librarians, social workers, and bankers. Women with less education worked in factories or in offices as typists and secretaries or in stores as clerks and cashiers. Attitudes toward marriage also changed. Men and women came to view marriage as more of an equal partnership. Women still had the responsibility of housework and child rearing. But labor-saving appliances and timesaving convenience foods made life easier.

The 19th Amendment ensured women the right to vote. Some women even ran for political office. In 1924, two were elected governor—Nellie Tayloe Ross in Wyoming and Miriam “Ma” Ferguson in Texas. In 1923, an equal rights amendment was introduced in Congress. It would be almost 50 years, however, before such an amendment would pass Congress.

Background

Mah-jongg was a game from China played with small painted tiles.

ReadingHistory

A. Recognizing Effects What were some of the effects of women’s greater opportunities?

Prohibition and Lawlessness

Another change in American society came on January 16, 1920. That was the date when the 18th Amendment went into effect. The amendment was commonly called **Prohibition**, the ban on the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Many people saw Prohibition as a victory of small-town, Protestant Americans over city dwellers. Supporters felt that Prohibition would promote morality and good health. To enforce the ban, Congress had passed the Volstead Act in 1919.

Saloons were forced to close their doors. But many Americans did not consider drinking harmful or sinful. They resented government interference. People who wanted alcohol found endless ways to get it. For instance, illegal nightclubs known as speakeasies sold liquor. People called bootleggers made their living by transporting and selling liquor illegally. Others simply brewed their own homemade liquor.

One unfortunate result of Prohibition was the growth of organized crime. In nearly every major city, criminal gangs battled for control of bootlegging operations. The most ruthless crime boss of the era was **Al Capone** in Chicago. With a private army of 700 criminals, he violently seized control of the city's 10,000 speakeasies. By the late 1920s, most Americans had come to see Prohibition as a failure. It was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933. Prohibition ended, but organized crime did not end with it.

Marcus Garvey led a Back-to-Africa movement in the 1920s.

Background

Bootlegger came from the old smugglers' practice of carrying liquor in the legs of boots.

ReadingHistory

B. Reading a Map

Locate cities with significant African-American populations on the map on page 321.

Changes for African Americans

The 1920s also brought major changes to the lives of many African Americans. To find better jobs, African Americans had begun moving north in the early 1900s. As you read in Chapter 10, this movement was called the Great Migration. The jobs that they held in industries during World War I raised their expectations for a better life.

In the North, African Americans gained some economic and political power. But they still faced discrimination in jobs and housing. Rising tensions between African Americans and whites in Northern cities led to over 25 race riots in 1919 alone. The movement of an additional 1.5 million African Americans to these cities during the 1920s increased tensions even more.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (**NAACP**) tried to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans. The NAACP worked to make people aware of crimes against African Americans. But it was unable to get Congress to pass legislation to help African Americans fight against discrimination.

Daily threats and discrimination made some African Americans lose faith in America. **Marcus Garvey**, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, called for a return to Africa and the formation of a separate nation there. He said, "If Europe is for the Europeans, then Africa shall be for the black peoples of the world." Few African Americans migrated to Africa. But Garvey set an example for future black political movements.

ReadingHistory

C. Analyzing

Points of View

What action did Marcus Garvey believe would improve the lives of African Americans?





More than 40,000 Ku Klux Klan members march in Washington, D.C., in 1925, to show their growing political power.

A Divided Society

Some groups felt threatened by the changes in society in the 1920s. Conflicts developed over ideas and values. Divisions between groups resulted—between African Americans and whites, the native-born and immigrants, and the urban and rural communities. Science and religion also were in conflict.

In religion, a movement called **fundamentalism** gained both recognition and political power. Fundamentalists believed in a literal, or word-for-word, interpretation of the Bible. They did not want the theory of evolution taught in public schools because it opposed their belief in the biblical story of

creation. Evolution is the scientific theory that living things developed over millions of years from earlier and simpler forms of life.

Fundamentalists succeeded in banning the teaching of evolution in Tennessee and 12 other states. In 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, biology teacher John Scopes broke this law. He took this action to test whether the law could be enforced. Scopes's trial attracted national attention. The jury found Scopes guilty, but the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision. Controversy over the teaching of evolution continues today.

Another reaction to changes in society was the rebirth of the **Ku Klux Klan**. The Klan called for a “racially and morally pure” America. It became strong in several states, including some outside the South. By 1924, the Klan claimed as many as five million members. It tried to influence national, state, and local politics by using violence against African Americans and other groups. Its power began to decrease by the end of the decade because of personal and financial scandals in the organization.

In this section, you read about divisions in society. In the next, you will learn how mass media and popular culture brought Americans together.

ReadingHistory

D. Analyzing Causes What action taken by fundamentalists caused John Scopes to break the law in Tennessee?

Section 2 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- flapper
- Prohibition
- Al Capone
- NAACP
- Marcus Garvey
- fundamentalism
- Ku Klux Klan

2. Taking Notes

Use a cluster diagram to review the fads of the Roaring Twenties.



Which fads of the 1920s had lasting influence?

3. Main Ideas

- How did the Roaring Twenties change the lives of young people?
- What factors were responsible for the changes in women's lives?
- What were the conflicts that divided society?

4. Critical Thinking

Recognizing Effects How was American society transformed in the 1920s?

THINK ABOUT

- roles of young people and women
- migration of African Americans
- conflicts between groups

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

ART

MUSIC

Draw a **poster** with an image that represents the Roaring Twenties or write a **song** capturing the spirit of the times.