Chapter 23: The Twenties, 1920–1929

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES The Movie Audience and Hollywood: Mass Culture Creates a New National Community

Every large community boasted at least one opulent movie theater such as Manhattan’s Roxy that opened in 1927. Producers found strong allies in the federal government, which touted the connections between the export of Hollywood movies and the growth of American trade around the world. Americans embraced the culture of Hollywood, which was an alluring alternative to the east coast cities where movies had been born. Hollywood films celebrating the pleasures of leisure, consumption, and personal freedom, redefined American cultural values in the 1920s. Ordinary Americans found it easy to identify with movie stars despite their wealth and status. Hollywood films offered nothing like an accurate reflection of American society, but presented a modern ideal often in tension with old-fashioned values.

II. POSTWAR PROSPERITY AND ITS PRICE

Despite Harding’s call for a “return to normalcy,” the 1920s were a period of rapid, profound, and disruptive change. Many benefited from increasing industrial efficiency, shorter working hours, and a booming consumer culture, while others lagged behind. But the uneven sharing of wealth helped bring on the Depression.

a. The Second Industrial Revolution

Much of the newer automatic machinery could be operated by unskilled and semiskilled workers, boosting industrial efficiency. The machine industry itself, particularly electrical machinery, led in productivity gains. During the late nineteenth century, heavy industries making producer-durable goods such as machine tools, railroads, iron, and steel had pioneered mass-production techniques. Other consumer-based industries, such as canning, chemicals, synthetics, and plastics, began to change the everyday lives of millions of Americans. With more efficient management, greater mechanization, intensive product research, and ingenious sales and advertising methods, the consumer-based industries helped to nearly double industrial production in the 1920s, making American efficiency the envy of the world.

MHL document: Frederick W. Taylor, “Scientific Management” (1911) at www.myhistorylab.com

b. The Modern Corporation

In the 1920s, a managerial revolution divorced stock ownership from the everyday control of businesses (see Figure 23.1). Car manufacturers, chemical companies, and
businesses expanded into overseas markets and exploited new mass media. After the war, Du Pont, Westinghouse, and General Electric all moved aggressively into the consumer market with a diverse array of products. Half of corporate wealth and industrial income was concentrated in 100 corporations. Four companies packed almost three-quarters of all American meat. National chain grocery stores, clothing shops, and pharmacies began squeezing out local neighborhood businesses.

c. Welfare Capitalism

The wartime gains made by unions with the aid of the National War Labor Board, troubled most corporate leaders. To challenge unions and undermine collective bargaining, large employers aggressively promoted a variety of new programs designed to improve worker well-being and morale. This “American plan” was an alternative to trade unionism and the class antagonism associated with European labor relations. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce promoted an “open shop” instead of the union-only “closed shop,” and U.S. Steel and International Harvester setup company unions. As union membership shrunk, most remaining members worked in skilled crafts. A conservative and timid union leadership was also responsible for the trend. Other programs offered workers insurance policies covering accidents, illness, old age, and death. Many plant managers and personnel departments consciously worked to improve safety conditions, provide medical services, and establish sports and recreation programs for workers. Yet welfare capitalism failed to address growing income inequality or to make industrial work more secure.

d. The Auto Age

In their classic community study Middletown (1929), sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd noted the dramatic impact of the car on Muncie, Indiana. In 1914, Henry Ford inaugurating a new wage scale: $5 for an eight-hour day. Ford’s mass-production system and economies of scale permitted him to progressively reduce the price of his cars, bringing them within the reach of millions of Americans. By 1927, Ford had produced 15 million Model Ts, while other manufacturers copied his methods. Low prices and consumer credit made cars affordable even to working-class and lower-middle-class buyers. Automobiles widened the experience of millions of Americans as the nation went on the road and obtained unprecedented personal freedom.

**MHL video: The Rise and Fall of the Automobile Economy** at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)

e. Cities and Suburbs

Cars also promoted urban and suburban growth. More revealing of urban growth was the steady increase in the number of big cities. Cities promised business opportunity, good jobs, cultural richness, and personal freedom. In a continuation of the Great Migration that began during World War I, roughly 1.5 million African Americans from the rural South migrated to cities in search of economic opportunities during the 1920s, doubling the black populations of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Houston.
Houston offers a good example of how the automobile shaped an urban community. It became the archetypal decentralized, low-density city, sprawling miles in each direction from downtown, and thoroughly dependent upon automobiles and roads for its sense of community. Suburban communities grew at twice the rate of their core cities, also thanks largely to the automobile boom. Undeveloped land on the fringes of cities became valuable real estate. Long Island’s Nassau County, just east of New York City, tripled in population.

III. THE STATE, THE ECONOMY, AND BUSINESS

In the 1920s, a dominant Republican Party took credit for a “new era” in American life. Warren Harding (1921–23), Calvin Coolidge (1923–29), and Herbert Hoover (1929–33) promoted close business-government ties and never tired of claiming that their policies were responsible for the nation’s prosperity.

a. Harding and Coolidge

Harding, the product of small-town life and machine politics, was ill prepared for the presidency. He surrounded himself with an “Ohio gang” of friends, delegating to them a great deal of administrative power, that they abused, leading to a series of sordid scandals. Secretary of the Treasury Mellon sharply cut taxes for businesses and the rich. When Calvin Coolidge became president after Harding’s sudden death, he seemed to most people the temperamental opposite of Harding and was easily reelected in 1924, beating Democrat John Davis and Progressive Robert La Follette. Confident that “the business of America is business,” Coolidge reduced federal spending, lowered taxes, and blocked congressional initiatives.

MHL document: Edward E. Purinton, “Big Ideas from Big Business” (1921) at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Herbert Hoover and the “Associative State”

Unlike earlier Republicans, Hoover wanted not just to create a favorable business climate, but to actively assist the business community, what he called an “associative state,” in which the government would encourage voluntary cooperation among corporations, consumers, workers, farmers, and small businessmen. This became the central occupation of the Department of Commerce under Hoover’s leadership. Under Hoover, the Bureau of Standards became one of the nation’s leading research centers, setting engineering standards for industries such as machine tools and automobiles. Hoover actively encouraged the formation of national trade associations. At industrial conferences called by the Commerce Department, government officials explained the advantages of mutual cooperation in figuring prices and costs and then publishing the information. The government thus provided an ideal climate for the concentration of corporate wealth and power. By 1929, 200 corporations owned nearly half of America’s wealth. Concentration was particularly strong in manufacturing, retailing, mining, banking, and utilities.
c. War Debts, Reparations, Keeping the Peace

The United States emerged from World War I as the strongest economic power in the world. The war transformed it from the world’s leading debtor nation to its most important creditor. By 1919, America had $3 billion more invested abroad than foreigners had invested in the United States. During the 1920s, war debts and reparations were the single most divisive issue in international economics. The Dawes Plan reduced Germany’s debt, stretched out the repayment period, and arranged for American bankers to lend funds to Germany, making the Allies better able to pay their war debts to the United States.

Despite not joining the League of Nations, the United States joined the league-sponsored World Court in 1926, and attended numerous league conferences. In 1928, with great fanfare, the United States and 62 other nations signed the Pact of Paris (better known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact), which grandly and naively renounced war in principle, even while appropriating $250 million for new battleships.

d. Global Commerce and U.S. Foreign Policy

Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes and other Republicans sought to expand American economic activity abroad. The focus was on friendly nations, and investments that would help foreign citizens to buy American goods. Hughes and Hoover urged close cooperation between bankers and the government to expand American economic influence abroad. Throughout the 1920s, investment bankers routinely submitted loan projects to them for informal approval, thus reinforcing the close ties between business investment and foreign policy.

American oil, autos, farm machinery, and electrical equipment supplied a growing world market, challenging Great Britain’s dominance in the oil fields of the Middle East, and in Latin America, forming powerful cartels with English firms. American corporate power had a dark side, though, as trading partners did little to promote democracy or domestic economic development.

e. Weakened Agriculture, Ailing Industries

Farmers in general lagged behind in the 1920s’ economy, especially in the cotton-dependent South, where sharecropping remained as common as electric service and good roads were scarce. Greater production of staples only contributed to a world glut and lower prices for cotton and other staples. The McNary-Haugen bills, designed to prop up and stabilize farm prices were vetoed by Coolidge, leaving farmers to their own resorts. Citrus, dairy, and truck farming did expand, profiting from the growing importance of national markets. Still, by 1929, the average income per person on farms was $223, compared with $870 for nonfarm workers. In 1930, 42 percent of all farmers were tenants, compared with 37 percent in 1919. Beyond the farms, the coal mining and textile
manufacturing sectors also stagnated, with falling employment and wages and job dislocation, although textiles did expand in the low-wage, non-union Piedmont South.

IV. THE NEW MASS CULTURE

New communications media reshaped American culture in the 1920s, and much of the new mass culture was exported to the rest of the economically developed world. As technologies of mass impression, the media established national standards and norms for much of our culture—habit, dress, language, sounds, social behavior, spreading the image, if not the reality of the “Roaring Twenties’’ good life, nationwide.

a. Movie-Made America

By 1914, there were about 18,000 “movie houses” showing motion pictures. With the shift of the industry westward to Hollywood, the business continued to expand, with Paramount, Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Universal, and Warner Brothers turning out longer and more expensively produced feature films. Most of the immigrant moguls had started in the business by buying or managing small movie theaters before beginning to produce films. Each studio combined the functions of production, distribution, and exhibition, controlling hundreds of movie theaters around the country. New genres—musicals, gangster films, and screwball comedies—soon became popular. The star system fed the fantasy lives of millions of fans, driven by studio publicity, fan magazines, and gossip columns. As the movie industry’s czar, Will Hays lobbied against censorship laws, wrote pamphlets defending the movie business, and began setting guidelines for what could and could not be depicted on the screen.

b. Radio Broadcasting

Commercial radio began in 1920 with Pittsburgh’s KDKA, transforming a fringe technology into a national craze. By 1923, 600 stations were on the air with 600,000 listeners; by 1930, there were 12 million, and the modern system of national networks (tied together with AT&T phone lines) with regular, sponsor-supported programming was in place. Listeners could choose from a range of genres and musical styles, but the vaudeville-inspired variety show dominated. As with movies, radio created a national community and even transcended national boundaries, as American radio dominated neighboring markets in Canada and Mexico, increasing American influence in the hemisphere.

c. New Forms of Journalism

The New York Daily News, founded in 1919 by Joseph M. Patterson, was the first to develop the tabloid style. With a terse, lively reporting style that emphasized sex, scandal, and sports, Daily News circulation reached 400,000 in 1922, and 1.3 million by 1929. Newspapers such as the Los Angeles Daily News brought the tabloid style to cities across America, while some older papers, such as the Denver Rocky Mountain News, adopted the new format. The circulation of existing dailies was little affected. Tabloids
had instead discovered an audience of millions who had never read newspapers before. Most of these new readers were poorly educated working-class city dwellers, many of whom were immigrants or children of immigrants. The tabloid style also gave rise to the “gossip column” invented by Walter Winchell, and dishing the dirt on celebrities, made him the most widely read—and imitated—journalist in America. Newspapers followed the trend of concentration of ownership, with the Gannett, Scripps-Howard, and Hearst chain—the last of which published one in four of Sunday papers sold in America.

d. Advertising Modernity

Advertising became more sophisticated, respectable, and influential in the 1920s, moving from merely providing information to shaping buyers’ beliefs and habits. Behavioral psychologist John Watson pioneered manipulating stimuli and responses to sell to customers’ desires and anxieties. Leading ad agencies did market research to understand and cater to buyers with carefully crafted ad copy, while new products like Kleenex and Listerine became household words. Above all, advertising portrayed consumption itself as a positive good, contributing to the individualism of 1920s culture.

MHL document: Advertisements (1925, 1927) at www.myhistorylab.com

e. The Phonograph and the Recording Industry

Originally marketed in the 1890s, early phonographs used wax cylinders that could both record and replay. Durable prerecorded discs transformed the business, displacing cylinders and sheet music in the home. Dixieland jazz, which recorded well, also captured the public’s fancy in the early 1920s, and records provided the music for new popular dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom. In 1921, more than 200 companies produced some 2 million titles, and sales exceeded 100 million.

Record sales declined toward the end of the decade, due to competition from radio. But records continued to transform American popular culture as companies discovered regional and ethnic markets for country music, popular with white Southerners, and blues and jazz, preferred by African Americans. African Americans Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington found a wide audience overseas as well, and jazz emerged as a uniquely American cultural form with worldwide appeal. The combination of records and radio started an extraordinary cross-fertilization of American musical styles that continues to this day.

f. Sports and Celebrity

As radio, newspapers, magazines, and newsreels exhaustively documented their exploits, athletes joined movie stars in the celebrity culture. Big-time sports, like the movies, entered a new corporate phase. Major league baseball had more fans than any other sport, and its greatest star, George Herman “Babe” Ruth, embodied the new celebrity athlete. Aided by the new “live ball,” Ruth’s prodigious home-run hitting completely changed baseball strategy and attracted legions of new fans to the sport. Ruth’s impact helped the
game recover from the serious public relations disaster of the “Black Sox” scandal. The attendance boom prompted urban newspapers to increase their baseball coverage, and the larger dailies featured separate sports sections. During the 1920s, black baseball players and entrepreneurs developed a world of their own, with several professional and semiprofessional leagues catering to expanding African American communities in cities. Radio broadcasts and increased journalistic coverage also made college football a big-time sport, as millions followed the exploits of Illinois’s “Red” Grange and Stanford’s Ernie Nevers, along with a range of newly famous boxers, golfers and tennis players.

g. A New Morality?

Media stars’ popularity made them cultural models in the 1920s ranging from Babe Ruth to gangster Al Capone. The “flapper” celebrated in movies and novels—a young, provocatively dressed and acting woman with bobbed hair and rouged cheeks—was not as widespread in reality as in the media, but did represent a new sense of personal and sexual freedom as middle-class women went to dances and clubs and smoked and drank with an abandon that shocked their elders.

The pioneering efforts of Margaret Sanger in educating women about birth control had begun before World War I (see Chapter 21). Sociological surveys also suggested that genuine changes in sexual behavior began in the prewar years among both married and single women. A study published in 1929 revealed that most used contraceptives and described sexual relations in positive terms. A 1938 survey of 777 middle-class females found that among those born between 1890 and 1900, 74 percent were virgins before marriage; for those born after 1910, the figure dropped to 32 percent. By the 1920s, the word “homosexual” had gained currency as a scientific term for describing romantic love between women or between men, and middle-class enclaves of self-identified homosexuals took root in cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.

MHL documents: History Bookshelf: Margaret Sanger, Woman and the New Race (1920) at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL document: Eleanor R. Wembridge, “Petting and the Campus” (1925) at www.myhistorylab.com

V. MODERNITY AND TRADITIONALISM

Deep and persistent tensions, with ethnic, racial, and geographical overtones, characterized much of the decade’s politics. The Red Scare strengthened antiradicalism in politics and traditionalism in culture. Resentments over the growing power of urban culture, on full display in Hollywood movies, modern advertising, and over the airwaves, were very strong in rural and small-town America, provoking both nostalgia and anger.

a. Prohibition
Prohibition was the culmination of a long campaign that associated drinking with the degradation of working-class family life and the worst evils of urban politics. The Volstead Act of 1919 established a federal Prohibition Bureau to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment. Illegal stills and breweries and alcohol smuggled in from Canada supplied the many Americans who continued to drink. Local law enforcement personnel, especially in the cities, were easily bribed to overlook “speakeasies.” And mobsters like Chicago’s Al “Scarface” Capone, became celebrities in their own right and received heavy coverage in the mass media. Organized crime’s profits from liquor led to corruption of legitimate businesses, labor unions, and city government, especially in large cities. By the time Congress and the states ratified the Twenty-first Amendment in 1933, repealing Prohibition, organized crime was a permanent feature of American life. Prohibition did, in fact, significantly reduce per capita consumption of alcohol but reinforced young people’s rebelliousness.

b. Immigration Restriction

Between 1891 and 1920, roughly 10.5 million immigrants arrived from southern and eastern Europe. The “new immigrants” were mostly Catholic and Jewish, and they were darker-skinned than the “old immigrants,” leading to a growing nativism and calls for restrictions. The Immigration Restriction League used flawed applications of Darwinian evolutionary theory and genetics in calling for immigration restriction, while the AFL proposed stopping all immigration for two years. Quotas adopted in 1921 limited annual immigration from any European country to 3 percent of the number of its natives counted in the 1910 U.S. census. The 1924 National Origins Act in effect limited immigration to white Europeans eligible for immigration by country of origin (nationality), while it divided the rest of the world into “five colored races” (black, mulatto, Chinese, and Indian) who were ineligible for immigration. By the 1920s, American law created the new racial category of “Asian” and codified the principle of racial exclusion in immigration and naturalization law.


c. The Ku Klux Klan

A revived Ku Klux Klan was the most effective force behind 1920s nativism. While the Reconstruction-era Klan had used racial terror against newly freed slaves, the “new” Klan advocated “100 percent Americanism” and “the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy.” Inspired by the racist film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and by professional organizers such as Hiram Evans, by 1924, the Klan had more than 3 million members. The Klan’s targets sometimes included white Protestants accused of sexual promiscuity, blasphemy, or drunkenness, but most victims were African Americans, Catholics, and Jews. On another level, the Klan was a popular social movement, a defensive bastion against forces of modernity. Perhaps a half million women joined the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, and women constituted nearly half of the Klan membership in some states. The Klan’s power was strong in many communities precisely because it fit so comfortably into the everyday life of white Protestants. After Indiana leader David
Stephenson was jailed for rape and murder in 1925, the Klan lost much of its luster and began to lose members and influence.

MHL document: “Creed of Klanswomen” (1924) at www.myhistorylab.com

d. Fundamentalism in Religion

Rejecting modern science and emphasizing a literal reading of the Bible, religious fundamentalism blossomed in the 1920s, particularly among southern Baptists. Fundamentalist especially targeted Darwinian ideas as contradicting the Book of Genesis, and by 1925, five southern state legislatures had passed laws restricting the teaching of evolution. When Dayton, TN, biology teacher John Thomas Scopes deliberately broke that state’s law, his defense team included attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union and Clarence Darrow, the most famous trial lawyer in America. The prosecution was led by William Jennings Bryan, the old Democratic standard-bearer who had thrown himself into the fundamentalist and antievolutionist cause. The Scopes “monkey trial”—so called because fundamentalists trivialized Darwin’s theory into a claim that humans were descended from monkeys—became one of the most publicized and definitive moments of the decade. Scopes’ guilt was never in question. Bryan died a week after the trial; his epitaph read simply, “He kept the Faith.” The struggle over the teaching of evolution continued in an uneasy stalemate; state statutes were not repealed, and while prosecutions for teaching evolution ceased, millions of Americans clung to fundamentalist ideas.

VI. PROMISES POSTPONED

Older, progressive reform movements that had pointed out inequities faltered in the conservative political climate. But the Republican new era did inspire a range of critics deeply troubled by unfulfilled promises in American life, including feminists, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. Many American intellectuals found themselves deeply alienated from the temper and direction of modern American society.

a. Feminism in Transition

Women reformers, having won the vote, split over whether activists should stress women’s differences from men and continue to press for protective legislation, or push for full legal equality without distinctions. In 1920, the National American Woman Suffrage Association reorganized itself as the League of Women Voters. Most league members continued working in a variety of reform organizations, and the league itself concentrated on educating the new female electorate, encouraging women to run for office, and supporting laws for the protection of women and children.

The rival National Woman’s Party opposed protective legislation for women and called for a Constitutional Equal Rights Amendment. Many older women reformers opposed the ERA as elitist, arguing that far more women benefited from protective laws than were injured by them. ERA supporters countered that these laws limited women’s employment
and advancement. The battle over the ERA polarized and divided the feminist community and the proposal failed to pass Congress. Opportunities for professional women expanded in some fields—real estate, banking and journalism—and flier Amelia Earhart become one of the few female media figures; however, men continued to dominate management and the professions. One of the few political successes of the movement—the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Act, establishing prenatal and childcare centers, was widely criticized for its paternalistic assumption that all women were mothers, and opposition from the AMA led to the program’s cancellation in 1929.

b. Mexican Immigration

Immigration from Mexico which had surged after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1911 continued to grow through the 1920s, with nearly half a million migrants between 1921 and 1930. Most came as agricultural laborers in the Southwest as well as in the sugar beet fields of Michigan, Minnesota, and Colorado. Permanent communities of Mexicans in the United States grew rapidly. One-hundred thousand Mexicans lived in central and East Los Angeles, including 55,000 who attended city schools. Other communities flourished in midwestern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, and Gary. Racism and segregation were widespread and most Mexicans were restricted to low-paying jobs and often denied public services. Despite the prevailing racism, nativist efforts to limit Mexican immigration were thwarted by the lobbying of powerful agribusiness interests. Mexicans formed mutualists, mutual aid societies as they built communities. A group of middle-class Mexican professionals in Texas organized the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929, the beginning of a long struggle for equality.

c. The “New Negro”

Previously a residential suburb, Harlem began attracting middle-class African Americans in the prewar years. After the war, heavy black migration from the South and the Caribbean encouraged real estate speculators and landlords to remake Harlem as an exclusively black neighborhood with a black population of roughly 200,000 by 1930.

Harlem emerged as the demographic and cultural capital of black America, but its appeal transcended national borders, as mass migration from the Caribbean helped reshape the community, leading to intraracial tensions and resentment between American-born blacks and an increasingly visible West Indian population. Along with other black Caribbean businesses, Harlem headquartered the Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association. A 1916 Jamaican immigrant, Garvey’s movement stressed economic self-determination and unity among the black communities of the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa. When Garvey was jailed for mail fraud and deported, his organization collapsed, but he left a legacy that “black is beautiful.”

The “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s was a notable outpouring of literature and the arts from figures such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston who celebrated the black experience and its cultural independence and helped to inspire a growing “New
Negro” intellectual and political activism, rivaling the NAACP. Likewise, jazz music went mainstream through the media of radio and recordings, reaching European enthusiasts and white audiences that flocked to the (ironically, segregated) Cotton Club to hear Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Louis Armstrong perform.

d. Alienated Intellectuals

Many intellectuals were troubled by the trends of the 1920s. The phrase “a lost generation” was widely adopted as a label for American writers, artists, and intellectuals of the postwar era, many of whom fled abroad, especially to Paris, which attracted a large émigré community. Novelists Hemingway (The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms) and John Dos Passos, who both served at the front as ambulance drivers, depicted the war and its aftermath in world-weary and unsentimental tones. F. Scott Fitzgerald became the most celebrated voice of the “Jazz Age” with The Great Gatsby (1925), written in southern France. At home, many American writers such as H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis (Main Street, Babbit) engaged in sharp attacks on small-town America and what they viewed as its provincial values, achieving commercial and critical success in the process. In 1930, Lewis became the first American author to win the Nobel Prize for literature. The Red Scare contributed to many intellectuals’ alienation, with the controversial Sacco and Vanzetti case gaining notoriety. Another group, the Vanderbilt University-based Fugitives, turned back to traditional southern values in their rejection of modernity (I’ll Take My Stand).

MHL documents: F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (1920) at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL document: Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (1922) at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL document: Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, “Court Statements” (1927) at www.myhistorylab.com

e. The Election of 1928

The contest reflected many of the deepest tensions and conflicts in American society in the 1920s: native-born versus immigrant; Protestant versus Catholic; Prohibition versus legal drinking; small-town life versus the cosmopolitan city; fundamentalism versus modernism; traditional sources of culture versus the new mass media (see Map 23.2).

Al Smith, the Democratic nominee, was an Irish Catholic opponent of Prohibition and an unashamed product of New York City’s Lower East Side. Herbert Hoover, who won the Republican nomination after Calvin Coolidge chose not to seek reelection, epitomized the successful and forward-looking American who ran a cautious race, taking credit for prosperity. Anti-Catholic nativists and Klansman attacked Smith and intimidated participants in Democratic election rallies. Smith ran a largely conservative race. With Democrats divided over Prohibition, Smith’s religion, and the widening split between rural and urban values, Hoover polled 21 million votes to Smith’s 15 million, and swept
the electoral college 444 to 87, including New York. One bright sign for Democrats was Smith’s urban appeal as he outpolled Hoover in big cities with their large ethnic populations.

**MHL map:** African American Population, 1910 and 1950 at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)

**VII, CONCLUSION**

America had become an urban nation, and urban areas increasingly dominated national cultural, economic, and political life. While a growing middle class of consumers enjoyed the products of mass production and embraced new technologies, women and minorities struggled to find their place in the “New Era.”

**Learning Objectives:**

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 23:

1. How did the “second industrial revolution” transform the American economy?
2. What were the promises and limits of prosperity in the 1920s?
3. How and why did the Republican Party dominate 1920s’ politics?
4. How did the new mass media reshape American culture?
5. Which Americans were less likely to share in postwar prosperity and why?
6. What political and cultural movements opposed modern cultural trends?

**Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers**

1. Describe the impact of the “second industrial revolution” on American business, workers, and consumers. Which technological and economic changes had the biggest impact on American society?

   **Answer:** The second industrial revolution made a wide range of products available to American consumers. Mechanization and mass production improved efficiency and lowered costs. Many Americans enjoyed the postwar prosperity as real wages rose and the number of hours worked declined. Corporations underwent a management revolution as company leaders were increasingly distinct from the company’s owners. Labor, too, enjoyed gains as companies tried to stop unionization efforts by improving working conditions and morale.

2. Analyze the uneven distribution of the 1920s’ economic prosperity. Which Americans gained the most, and which were largely left out?

   **Answer:** Prosperity was uneven, those who possessed skills and managerial experience could enjoy more of the postwar prosperity than unskilled workers who found themselves caught in industrial production. However, improvements in manufacturing made products like automobiles accessible to an increasing number of Americans. The 1920s were especially
prosperous for the wealthy and the inequality between rich and poor contributed to the start of the Great Depression in 1929.

3. How did an expanding mass culture change the contours of everyday life in the decade following World War I? What role did new technologies of mass communication play in shaping these changes? What connections can you draw between the “culture of consumption” then and today?

**Answer:** The new mass culture established national norms for things like dress, social behavior, and language. Movies were the most prominent as new genres like gangster films, musicals, comedies and the stars promoted by the studios became popular. Then, as now, millions of Americans were fascinated with the stars and what they wore and other gossip regarding their lives. Other technologies like radio, the phonograph, and tabloid journalism created a mass national culture, one that depended upon advertising and consumer consumption. The 1920s were a golden decade for baseball as Babe Ruth and others embodied the new celebrity athlete.

4. What were the key policies and goals articulated by the Republican political leaders of the 1920s? How did they apply these to both domestic and foreign affairs?

**Answer:** Republican leaders promoted a closer relationship between big business and government, which became the hallmark of both domestic and foreign policy. These leaders promoted lower taxes for high incomes and corporations. President Hoover promoted the “associative state” in which government would actively work to aid business. These policies led to a concentration of corporate power and wealth.

5. How did some Americans resist the rapid changes taking place in the post–World War I world? What cultural and political strategies did they employ?

**Answer:** In rural and small town America, many responded to the new national culture by turning to religious fundamentalism, most notably challenging the teaching of the theory of evolution, as well as nativism. The Ku Klux Klan enjoyed revitalization in northern states where whites felt threatened by the recent influx of southern blacks.

6. Discuss the 1928 election as a mirror of the divisions in American society.

**Answer:** The election of 1928 demonstrated many of the tensions in American society: Protestant vs. Catholic, urban vs. rural, fundamentalism vs. modernism, native-born vs. immigrant, Prohibition vs. legal drinking. The victory of Republican Herbert Hoover over the Democratic candidate, Al Smith, a Catholic from New York, was partly the result of the use of anti-Catholic strategies by the KKK and other religious fundamentalists. It also demonstrated splits within the Democratic Party, especially between rural and urban areas.
Lecture Outline

American Communities: The Movie Audience and Hollywood: Mass Culture Creates a New National Community

Postwar Prosperity and Its Price
- The Second Industrial Revolution
- The Modern Corporation
- Welfare Capitalism
- The Auto Age
- Cities and Suburbs

The State, The Economy and Business
- Harding and Coolidge
- Herbert Hoover and the “Associative State”
- War Debts, Reparations, and Keeping the Peace
- Global Commerce and U.S. Foreign Policy
- Weakened Agriculture, Ailing Industries

The New Mass Culture
- Movie-Made America
- Radio Broadcasting
- New Forms of Journalism
- Advertising Modernity
- The Phonograph and the Recording Industry
- Sports and Celebrity
- A New Morality?
- “Flappers”

Modernity and Traditionalism
- Prohibition
- Immigration Restriction
- The Ku Klux Klan in the North
- Fundamentalism in Religion

Promises Postponed
- Feminism in Transition
- Mexican Immigration
- The “New Negro”
- Marcus Garvey
- Alienated Intellectuals
- The Election of 1928
Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Films/Video

The Crash of 1929 (55 minutes). PBS Video, 2004. Documentary captures the optimism that fueled the growth of the 1920s and the consequences when reality hit and the stock market plummeted.

The Great Gatsby (144 minutes). Paramount Pictures, 1974. Starring Robert Redford, this film brilliantly captures the spirit of Fitzgerald’s novel and, with it, the Roaring Twenties.

My History Lab Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
Frederick W. Taylor, “Scientific Management” (1911)
Edward E. Purinton, “Big Ideas from Big Business” (1921)
Advertisements (1925, 1927)
Eleanor R. Wembridge, “Petting and the Campus” (1925)
Immigration Law (1924)
“Creed of Klanswomen” (1924)
Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, “Court Statements” (1927)

See the Maps
African American Population, 1910 and 1950

Research and Explore:

Read the Document
Exploring America: Harlem Renaissance

Read the Biographies
Mary Pickford
John B. Watson

History Bookshelf
W.E.B. DuBois, The Negro (1915)
Margaret Sanger, Woman and the New Race (1920)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (1920)
Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (1922)
Hear the Audio
Prohibition is a Failure

See the Video
The Great Migration
The Rise and Fall of the Automobile Economy
The Harlem Renaissance

Critical Thinking Exercises

This is a good place to connect history and literature. Students could examine the major writers of the period—Hemingway, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Stein, Eliot, Hughes, and Hurston—and try to connect what they were saying to the trends in their society. Students could report to the class the extent to which the writers reflected the direction of social change and the extent to which they criticized their society.