

Cultural Innovations

Guide to Reading

Connection

In the previous section, you learned about the social and cultural changes that occurred during the 1920s. In this section, you will discover cultural trends in art, literature, and entertainment during that time.

Main Idea

- New York City's Greenwich Village and Chicago's South Side became known as centers for new artistic work. (p. 419)
- Many people in the 1920s enjoyed new forms of entertainment. (p. 420)

Content Vocabulary

mass media

Academic Vocabulary

emerge, diverse, unify

People and Terms to Identify

Bohemian, Carl Sandburg, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Reading Objectives

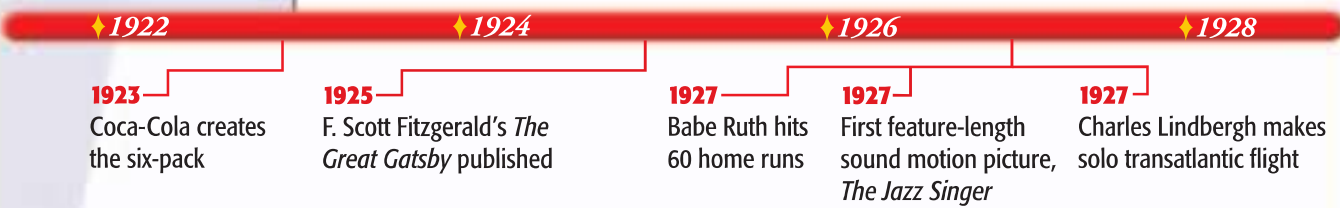
- **Describe** the explosion of art and literature and the disillusionment of 1920s artists.
- **Summarize** the effects of sports, movies, radio, and music on popular culture.

Reading Strategy

Organizing As you read about the 1920s, complete a graphic organizer like the one below by filling in the main characteristics of art, literature, and popular culture that reflect the era.

Cultural Movement	Main Characteristics
Art	
Literature	
Popular Culture	

Preview of Events



The following are the main History–Social Science Standards covered in this section.

11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

11.5.5 Describe the Harlem Renaissance and new trends in literature, music, and art, with special attention to the work of writers (e.g., Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes).

11.5.6 Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.

The Big Idea

People react to periods of breathtaking social and cultural change in different ways. New York City's Greenwich Village and Chicago's South Side developed into new artistic centers. There artists, writers, and intellectuals led new and unconventional lifestyles. A broad variety of artistic styles expressed the individual's role in the modern world. People also enjoyed new forms of popular culture and entertainment such as sporting events, motion pictures, radio shows, and music. Mass media spread new ideas and attitudes across the nation and helped instill a feeling of unity.

Art and Literature

Main Idea New York City's Greenwich Village and Chicago's South Side became known as centers for new artistic work.

Reading Connection What museums or art centers are you aware of in your community? Read on to find out about the flowering of the arts during the 1920s in the United States.

During this time, American artists and writers challenged traditional ideas. These artists explored what it meant to be “modern,” and they searched for meaning in the **emerging** challenges of the modern world.

★ An American Story ★

On May 20, 1927, a lanky, sandy-haired young man named Charles Lindbergh took off from an airfield on Long Island, New York, in a small, single-engine plane called the *Spirit of St. Louis* and headed east across the Atlantic Ocean. The next evening—more than 33 hours after Lindbergh left New York—thousands of people waited anxiously at the small Le Bourget airfield outside Paris, France. Attention was riveted on the sky, and the spectators strained their eyes as they watched Lindbergh's small airplane softly slip out of the darkness. When the plane landed, the crowd ecstatically greeted the pilot, who had just completed a historic event—the first solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean.

In an era when people questioned ideals and heroes, Lindbergh's historic flight symbolized American progress in the modern age, and his solo triumph restored Americans' belief in the courageous, pioneering individual. American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald said of Lindbergh:

“A young Minnesotan who seemed to have nothing to do with his generation did a heroic thing, and for the moment people set down their glasses in country clubs and speakeasies and thought of their old dreams.”

—quoted in *Echoes of the Jazz Age*

The modern age symbolized by Lindbergh's historic transatlantic flight was reflected strongly in American art, literature, and popular culture.

Greenwich Village and the South Side Many artists, writers, and intellectuals of the era flocked to Manhattan's Greenwich Village and Chicago's South Side. As writer Brooks Atkinson noted in a memoir,

“The Village was no prude . . . no matter what you did you could hardly be conspicuous. On my street the middle-aged lady in knickers who aired her cat on a pink ribbon twice a day and the rosy-cheeked damsel in overalls who split kindling wood on the side walk . . . were hardly more conspicuous than the formal citizenry. To become conspicuous you would probably have to shoot someone in the street.”

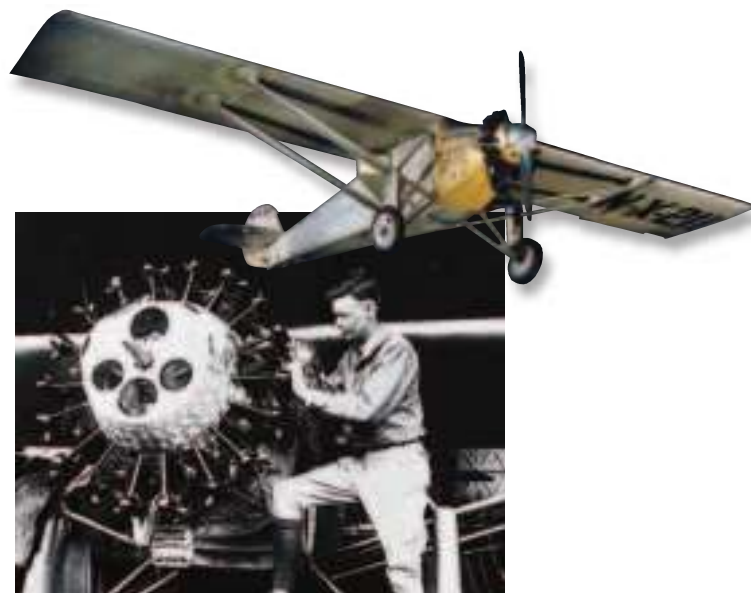
—from *New York's Greenwich Village*

The artistic and unconventional, or **Bohemian**, lifestyle of these neighborhoods offered young artists and writers new lifestyles.

Modern American Art European art movements greatly influenced the modernists of American art. Perhaps most striking was the **diverse** range of artistic styles, each attempting to express the individual, modern experience.

Taking his cue from the bold and colorful Impressionism of French artist Paul Cézanne, American painter John Marin drew on nature as well as the urban dynamics of New York for inspiration, explaining, “the whole city is alive; buildings, people, all are alive; and the more they move me the more I feel them to be alive.” Painter Charles Scheeler applied the influences of photography and the geometric forms of Cubism to

▼ Charles Lindbergh and his *Spirit of St. Louis*



urban and rural American landscapes. Edward Hopper revived the visual accuracy of Realism in his haunting scenes. His paintings conveyed a modern sense of disenchantment and isolation.

Poets and Writers Poets and writers of the 1920s varied greatly in their styles and subject matter. Chicago poet **Carl Sandburg** used common speech to glorify the Midwest. In Greenwich Village, Edna St. Vincent Millay, in her poem “First Fig,” expressed women’s freedom and equality and praised a life intensely lived:

“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.”

Several poets of this time had an important impact on the literary culture. Poets such as Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams used clear, concise images to express moments in time. Some poets concentrated on what they considered the negative effects of modernism. In his poem “The Hollow Men,” for example, T.S. Eliot described a world filled with empty dreams and “hollow men,” and he fore-saw a world that would end “not with a bang but a whimper.”

Among playwrights, one of the most innovative was **Eugene O’Neill**. His plays portrayed realistic characters and situations, offering a vision of life that sometimes touched on the tragic.

Many novelists, affected by the experiences of World War I, wrote about disillusionment and reevaluated the myths of American heroes. They often

created characters who were “heroic antiheroes”—flawed individuals who still had heroic qualities of mind and spirit. **Ernest Hemingway**, who served as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I, was one such writer. His fiction presented a new literary style characterized by direct, simple, and concise prose, as when he wrote about war in such works as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *A Farewell to Arms*.

John Dos Passos, a critic of America’s capitalist culture, experimented with the form of the novel in his innovative trilogy *U.S.A.*, which combined fiction, biography, news headlines, and prose poems. Sinclair Lewis wrote about the absurdities of traditional life in small-town America in his novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. **F. Scott Fitzgerald**, perhaps the most famous writer of the era, created colorful, glamorous characters who chased futile dreams in *The Great Gatsby*, a novel that poignantly exposed the superficiality of much of modern society.

Reading Check **Examining** Why did many artists, writers, and intellectuals flock to New York City’s Greenwich Village and Chicago’s South Side during the 1920s?

Popular Culture

Main Idea Many people in the 1920s enjoyed new forms of entertainment.

Reading Connection What new forms of entertainment make up today’s popular culture? Read on to learn about the ways that Americans spent their leisure time during the 1920s.

The economic prosperity of the 1920s provided many Americans with more leisure time and more spending money, which they devoted to making their lives more enjoyable. Millions of Americans eagerly watched and participated in sports and enjoyed music, theater, and other forms of popular entertainment. They also fell in love with radio shows and motion pictures.

Baseball, Boxing, and Other Sports

Thanks to radio and motion pictures, sports such as baseball and boxing reached new heights of popularity in the 1920s. Baseball star Babe Ruth became a national hero, famous for hitting hundreds of home runs. As one broadcaster later remarked, “He wasn’t a baseball player. He was a worldwide celebrity, an international star, the likes of which base-

History Through Art

Lonely People Like many of his works, Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* depicts isolated people. This piece is an example of an artistic style of the time that expresses the new modern environment. [How do you think this painting reflects the experience of small-town people who moved to the cities?](#)



ball has never seen since.” Sports fans also idolized boxer Jack Dempsey. Dempsey held the title of world heavyweight champion from 1919 until 1926, when he lost it to Gene Tunney.

Americans eagerly followed other sports and sports figures, too. Newspaper coverage helped generate enthusiasm for college football. One of the most famous players of the 1920s was Red Grange of the University of Illinois. Grange was known as the “Galloping Ghost” because of his speed and ability to evade members of opposing teams.

Millions of sports fans also were thrilled by the achievements of Bobby Jones, the best golfer of the decade, and tennis players Bill Tilden and Helen Wills, who dominated world tennis. In 1927 swimmer Gertrude Ederle enchanted Americans when she shattered records by swimming the English Channel in a little over 14 hours.

The Rise of Hollywood Although sports became increasingly popular in the 1920s, nothing quite matched the allure of motion pictures. Technology had not yet made sound possible in films, so theaters hired piano players to provide music during the feature, while subtitles revealed the plot. Audiences thronged to see such stars as Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, Tom Mix, Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, and Clara Bow. In 1927 the first “talking” picture—*The Jazz Singer*—was produced, and the golden age of Hollywood began.

Popular Radio Shows and Music Radio also enjoyed a large following during the Jazz Age. In 1920, in one of the first commercial radio broadcasts in history, listeners of station KDKA in Pittsburgh learned the news of Warren G. Harding’s landslide

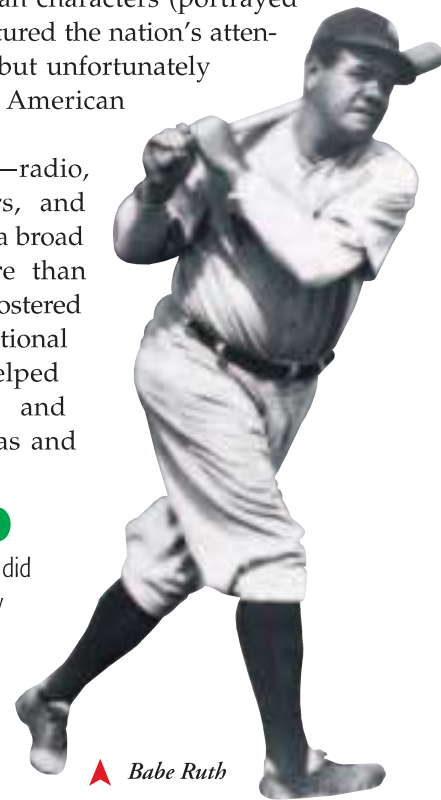
victory in the presidential election. Within two years, Americans could turn the dial to more than 400 different radio stations around the country.

Most stations in the 1920s played the popular music of the day, such as “Yes! We Have No Bananas” and “Lover Come Back Again.” Broadcasts such as *The Eveready Hour* offered everything from classical music to comedy. In one of the most popular radio shows, *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, the trials and tribulations of two African American characters (portrayed by white actors) captured the nation’s attention every evening, but unfortunately reinforced African American stereotypes.

The **mass media**—radio, movies, newspapers, and magazines aimed at a broad audience—did more than just entertain. They fostered a sense of shared national experience that helped **unify** the nation and spread the new ideas and attitudes of the time.

Reading Check

Summarizing How did the American economy of the 1920s affect popular culture?



▲ Babe Ruth

HISTORY Online Study Central

For help with the concepts in this section of *American Vision: Modern Times* go to tav.mt.glencoe.com and click on **Study Central**.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

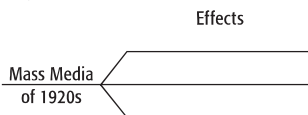
- Vocabulary** Define: emerge, diverse, mass media, unify.
- People and Terms** Identify: Bohemian, Carl Sandburg, Eugene O’Neill, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald.
- Describe** the main themes of artists and writers during the 1920s.

Reviewing Big Ideas

- Summarizing** How did writers, artists, and popular culture of the 1920s affect traditional ideas in the United States?

Critical Thinking

- Synthesizing** How did World War I influence the literature written during the 1920s?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the effects of mass media on American culture.



Analyzing Visuals

- Interpreting Art** Study the Edward Hopper painting, *Nighthawks*, on page 420. How do different elements of this piece work to convey a sense of isolation?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Imagine that you have moved to New York’s Greenwich Village in the 1920s. Write a letter to a friend describing the atmosphere in your neighborhood. **CA 11WS1.2**