

The Artios Home Companion Series

Unit 16: The Decade that Roared

Teacher Overview

The 1920s saw the culmination of fifty years of rapid American industrialization. New products seemed to burst from American production lines with the potential for revolutionizing American life. Other products that had previously been toys for the rich were now available to a majority of Americans. The standard of living increased as the economy grew stronger and stronger. The results were spectacular. The America of 1929 was vastly different from the America of 1919.

The automobile was first and foremost among these products. The practices of Henry Ford made these “horseless carriages” affordable to the American masses. Widespread use of the automobile ushered in changes in work patterns and leisure plans. A host of support industries were launched. Dating customs and education were changed by the automobile. Radio usage brought further changes. For the first time, a national popular culture was supplanting regional folkways. Americans across the continent were sharing the same jokes, participating in the same fads, and worshipping the same heroes. Housework was reduced with the introduction of labor saving devices. As a result, leisure time was increased.

The bleak outlook and large sacrifices of the wartime era were now a part of the past. Young Americans were looking to cut loose and have a good time. Prohibition did not end alcohol usage. The subculture of the speakeasy kept the firewater flowing. Organized crime flourished as gangland violence related to bootlegged liquor plagued America’s cities. “Flapper” women strove to eliminate double standard values. Young females engaged in behaviors previously reserved for men, including smoking and drinking. Sigmund Freud’s assertion that sexual behavior was merely a natural instinct brought down more barriers as young Americans delved into promiscuity. The Harlem Renaissance brought a new form of entertainment. The sounds of jazz bands had appeal that transcended African American audiences, as thousands flocked to hear the new sounds.

The 1920s ushered in more lasting changes to the American social scene than any previous decade. Escapism loomed large as many coped with change by living in the present and enjoying themselves. The economic boom that unleashed the transformation and its consequences made the Roaring Twenties an era to remember.



Model T – 1919
(Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village)

Reading and Assignments

In this unit, students will:

- Complete seven lessons in which they will learn about **the 1920s**, journaling and answering discussion questions as they read.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Leading Ideas

Man’s discoveries and understanding will never outweigh God’s ultimate wisdom.

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

— Proverbs 3:7

Children and young people should be teachable and open to instruction.

A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

— Proverbs 13:1

Happiness and success is not found in the gathering of wealth.

To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner He gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

— Ecclesiastes 2:26

Key People, Places, and Events

Henry Ford	Federal Highway Act of 1921	Guglielmo Marconi
Prohibition	The Federal Radio Commission	Red Grange
Volstead Act	The Radio Corporation of America	Jack Dempsey
Al Capone	National Broadcasting Company	dance marathons
Frank Conrad	The Eighteenth Amendment	Gertrude Ederle
beauty pageants	flagpole sitting	Charles Lindbergh
Spirit of St. Louis	Ty Cobb	Babe Ruth
Duke Ellington	The Harlem Renaissance	Jelly Roll Morton
Jean Toomer	Langston Hughes	Bessie Smith
Louis Armstrong	Zora Neal Hurston	Harlem’s Cotton Club
Billie Holiday	Claude McKay	Paul Robeson

Vocabulary

Lesson 1:

assembly line
vulcanize
cuisine
licensure

Lesson 2:

profiteer
“turf wars”
bootlegging

Lesson 3:

teenager
exploitation

Lesson 4:

dispossessed
disenfranchisement
acrimonious
proximity

Lesson 5:

none

Lesson 6:

none

Lesson 7:

credo halitosis

Lesson One

History Overview and Assignments The Age of the Automobile

Perhaps no invention affected American everyday life in the 20th century more than the automobile.



The Duesenberg, popular for Sunday afternoon Cruising

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Age of the Automobile*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Vocabulary

assembly line
cuisine

vulcanize
licensure

Key People, Places, and Events

Henry Ford

Federal Highway Act of 1921

Discussion Questions

1. According to today's article, what invention affected American life in the 20th century more than any other?
2. What were some of the beneficial economic results of the invention and use of the automobile?
3. What were some of the business "casualties" that resulted due to the invention and use of the automobile?
4. How was cuisine transformed by the automobile?
5. What was the difference in the approach to mass transit between Europe and America?
6. List some of the effects of the automobile on society.

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

The Age of the Automobile

Although the technology for the automobile existed in the 19th century, it took Henry Ford to make the useful gadget accessible to the American public. Ford employed the idea of the assembly line for automobile manufacturing. He paid his workers an unprecedented \$5 a day when most laborers were bringing home \$2, hoping that it would increase their productivity. Furthermore, they might use their higher earnings to purchase a new car.

To keep automobile prices low, Ford reduced options, even stating that the public could choose whatever color car they wanted—so long as it was black. The Model T sold for \$490 in 1914, about one quarter the cost of the previous decade. By 1920, there were over 8 million registrations. The 1920s saw tremendous growth in automobile ownership, with the number of registered drivers almost tripling to 23 million by the end of the decade.



The suspension components of a Ford Model T. The coil-spring device is an aftermarket accessory, the "Hassler shock absorber."

Economic Spin-offs

The growth of the automobile industry caused an economic revolution across the United States. Dozens of spin-off industries blossomed. Of course the demand for vulcanized rubber skyrocketed. Road construction created thousands of new jobs, as state and local governments began funding highway design.



Ford Model T, 1927, regarded as the first affordable American automobile

Even the federal government became involved with the Federal Highway Act of 1921. Gas stations began to dot the land, and mechanics began to earn a living fixing the inevitable problems. Oil and steel were two well-established industries that received a serious boost by the demand for automobiles. Travelers on the road needed shelter on long trips, so motels (motor hotels) began to line the major long-distance routes.

Even cuisine was transformed by the

automobile. The quintessential American foods—hamburgers, French fries, milk shakes, and apple pies—were hallmarks of the new roadside diner. Drivers wanted cheap, relatively fast food so they could be on their way in a hurry. Unfortunately, as new businesses flourished, old ones decayed. When America opted for the automobile, the nation’s rails began to be neglected. As European nations were strengthening mass transit systems, individualistic Americans invested in the automobile infrastructure.

Effects of the Automobile

The social effects of the automobile were as great. Freedom of choice encouraged many family vacations to places previously impossible. Urban dwellers had the opportunity to rediscover pristine landscapes, just as rural dwellers were able to shop in towns and cities. Teenagers

gained more and more independence with driving freedom.



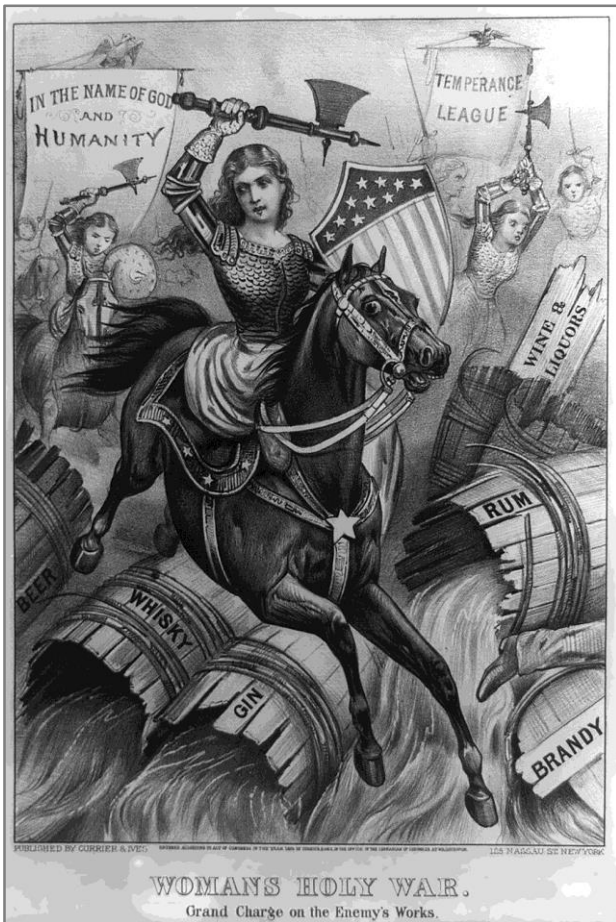
A typical fast food meal in the United States includes a hamburger, French fries, and a soft drink.

Americans experienced traffic jams for the first time, as well as traffic accidents and fatalities. Soon demands were made for licensure and safety regulation on the state level. Despite the drawbacks, Americans loved their cars. As more and more were purchased, drivers saw their worlds grow much larger.

Lesson Two

History Overview and Assignments The Fight Against “Demon Rum”

Saloons were closed, bottles were smashed, and kegs were split wide open. When the states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages was outlawed. Many Protestant ministers and progressive politicians rejoiced and proclaimed a holier and safer America. It was predicted that worker productivity would increase, families would grow closer, and urban slums would disappear. Yet for all its promise, prohibition was repealed fourteen years later, after being deemed a dismal failure.



An allegorical 1874 political cartoon print, which somewhat unusually shows temperance campaigners (alcohol prohibition advocates) as virtuous armored women warriors (riding sidesaddle), wielding axes Carrie-Nation-style to destroy barrels of Beer, Whisky, Gin, Rum, Brandy, Wine and Liquors, under the banners of "In the name of God and humanity" and "Temperance League"

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Fight Against “Demon Rum.”*
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Make a chart with two columns. In one column, list the advantages to prohibition. In the other column, list the disadvantages to prohibition.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Vocabulary

profiteer
“turf wars”
bootlegging

Key People, Places, and Events

Prohibition

Volstead Act

Al Capone

The Eighteenth Amendment

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the term “prohibition.”
2. What was the purpose of the Volstead Act? Was it successful?
3. Who profited the most from prohibition?
4. How was the 18th Amendment different from previous changes to the Constitution?
5. Do you believe that “social engineering” is effective?
6. What issues in our society today might be considered by some to be efforts at “social engineering”?

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

The Fight Against “Demon Rum”

Advantages to Prohibition

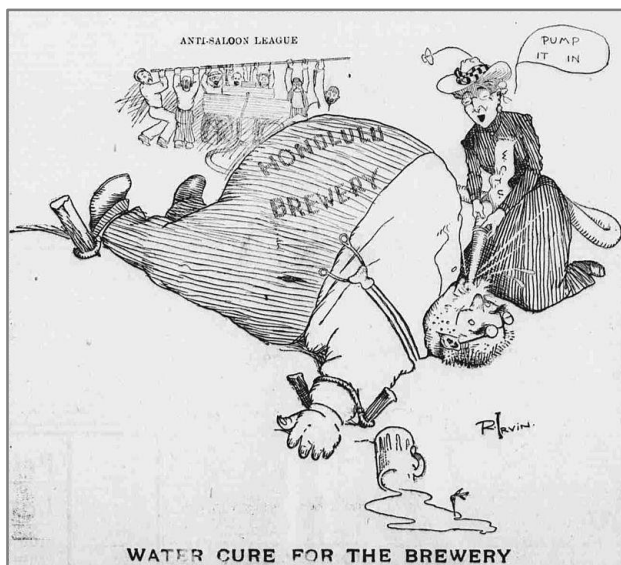
Disorderliness caused by drunkenness became a serious problem during the second half of the nineteenth century, and temperance organizations finally gained enough support to establish the prohibition of alcohol manufacture and sale with the Eighteenth Amendment, passed in 1919.

There were advantages to Prohibition. Social scientists are certain that actual consumption of alcohol actually decreased during the decade. Estimates indicate that during the first few years of Prohibition, alcohol consumption declined to a mere third of its pre-war level. Health records indicate a decrease in alcoholism and alcohol-related diseases such as cirrhosis of the liver. Family savings increased during the decade, but it was difficult to determine whether the increase was due to decreased alcohol consumption or a robust economy.

Disadvantages to Prohibition

Despite these advantages, the minuses seemed to outweigh the pluses. First, federal allocation of funds to enforce Prohibition were woefully inadequate. Gaping loopholes in the Volstead Act, the law implemented to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment, encouraged abuse. Alcohol possession was permitted for medical purposes, and production of small amounts was permitted for home use. The manufacturing of “near beer”—regular beer without the alcohol—was also permitted. The problem was that to make near beer, it was first necessary to brew the real variety, so illegal breweries could insist their product was scheduled to have the alcohol removed. Soon a climate of lawlessness swept the nation, as Americans everywhere began to partake in illegal drink. Every city had countless speakeasies, which were not-so-secret bars hidden from public view.

While the number of drinkers may have decreased, the strength of the beverages increased. People drank as much as they could as fast as they could to avoid detection. Because alcoholic production was illegal, there could be no regulation. Desperate individuals and heartless profiteers distilled anything imaginable, often with disastrous results. Some alcohol sold on the black market caused nerve damage, blindness, and even death. While women of the previous generation campaigned to ban alcohol, the young women of the twenties consumed it with a passion.



This illustration from the Hawaiian Gazette newspaper humorously illustrates the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union's campaign against the producers and sellers of beers in Hawaii.

Organized Crime

The group that profited most from the illegal market was organized crime. City crime bosses such as Al Capone of Chicago sold their products to willing buyers and

even intimidated unwilling customers to purchase their illicit wares. Crime involving turf wars among mobsters was epidemic. Soon the mobs forced legitimate businessmen to buy protection, tainting those who tried to make an honest living. Even city police took booze and bribes from the likes of Al Capone. After several years of trying to connect Capone to bootlegging, federal prosecutors were able to convict him for income tax evasion.

The Eighteenth Amendment was different from all previous changes to the Constitution. It was the first experiment at social engineering. Critics pointed out that it was the only amendment to date that restricted rather than increased individual rights. Civil liberties advocates considered prohibition an abomination. In the end, economics doomed Prohibition. The costs of ineffectively policing the nation were simply too high. At the deepest point of the Great Depression, government officials finally ratified the Twenty-First Amendment, repealing the ban on alcohol once and for all.



Al Capone, the Prohibition-era leader of organized crime in Chicago

Lesson Three

History Overview and Assignments

The Invention of the Teenager

The average number of years spent in school for young Americans was on the rise during the 1920s. Parents waited longer before encouraging their youngsters into marriage instead of pairing them off at the tender age of sixteen or seventeen. It soon became apparent that a new stage of life – the teenage phase – had become a reality in America. Although the word “teenager” did not come into use until decades later, the teenage mindset dawned in the 1920s.



The automobile – a blessing and a curse

Vocabulary

teenager
exploitation

Discussion Questions

1. What effect did a more leisurely approach to starting adulthood have on young adults during the 1920s and after?
2. How did the automobile lead to a more independent “teenager”?
3. Do you consider this a good development?
4. How did the development of the automobile and accompanying technology foster a subculture for teens?
5. Do you consider this a good or bad thing?

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Invention of the Teenager*.
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
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U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

The Invention of the Teenager

In the 19th century, the American world consisted of children and adults. Most Americans tried to allow their children to enjoy their youth while they were slowly prepared for the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. Although child labor practices still existed, more and more states passed restrictions against such exploitation. The average number of years spent in school for young Americans was also on the rise. Parents waited longer before encouraging their youngsters into marriage instead of pairing them off at the tender age of sixteen or seventeen. In short, it soon became apparent that a new stage of life—the teenage phase—had become a reality in America. American adolescents began to display traits unknown among children and adults. Although the word “teenager” did not come into use until decades later, the teenage mindset dawned in the 1920s.

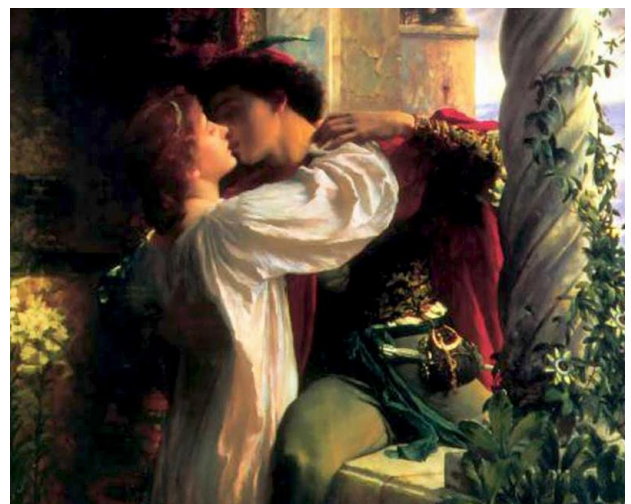


American 1920s woman's bathing suit

From Courtship to Dating

The single greatest factor that led to the emergence of the independent teenager was the automobile. Teens enjoyed a freedom

from parental supervision unknown to previous generations. The courtship process rapidly evolved into dating. In earlier times, young boys and girls typically spent their first dates at home. The boy would meet the girl's parents and they would have a sitting in the parlor, followed by dinner with the entire family. Later in the evening, the couple might enjoy a few moments alone on the front porch. After several such visits, they might be granted permission for an unchaperoned walk through town. The automobile shattered these customs, as dating could now be removed from the watchful eyes of parents. Privacy was available to teenagers as never before, and a sexual revolution swept America. Experimentation with sexual behaviors before marriage became increasingly common, and young Americans were now able to look beyond their own small towns at an enlarged dating pool.



Romeo and Juliet dated, but it did not end well.
Painting by Sir Frank Dicksee

Impact of the Automobile

Automobile technology led directly to the other major factor that fostered a teenage culture: the consolidated high school. Buses could now transport students farther from their homes, leading to the decline of the one-room schoolhouse. Furthermore, Americans came to recognize the benefits of a longer education, and states added more years to their compulsory

schooling laws. As a result, a larger number of teenagers were thrown into a common space than ever before. Before long, schools developed their own cultural patterns, completely unlike the childhood or adult experience. School athletics and extracurricular activities only enhanced this emerging subculture, and the American teenager was born.

Lesson Four

History Overview and Assignments The Harlem Renaissance

The artists of the Harlem Renaissance undoubtedly transformed African American culture. But the impact on all American culture was equally strong.



Savoy Ballroom at night

Image courtesy of Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Harlem Renaissance*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Choose an author or musician involved in the Harlem Renaissance and do additional research on him or her. Be prepared to share what you learned.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Vocabulary

dispossessed
acrimonious

disenfranchisement
proximity

Key People, Places, and Events

The Harlem Renaissance
Duke Ellington
Jelly Roll Morton
Jean Toomer

Langston Hughes
Bessie Smith
Louis Armstrong
Zora Neale Hurston

Harlem's Cotton Club
Billie Holiday
Claude McKay
Paul Robeson

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Harlem Renaissance significant to African American culture specifically and to American culture in general?
2. Describe the Harlem Renaissance.
3. What type of music gained popularity during the Harlem Renaissance?

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

The Harlem Renaissance

African Americans had endured centuries of slavery and the struggle for abolition, but the end of bondage had not brought the promised land many had envisioned. Instead, white supremacy had been quickly, legally, and violently restored to the New South, where ninety percent of African Americans lived. Starting in about 1890, African Americans migrated to the North in great numbers. This great migration eventually relocated hundreds of thousands of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North. Many discovered they had shared common experiences in their past histories and their uncertain present circumstances. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, the recently dispossessed ignited an explosion of cultural pride. Indeed, African American culture was reborn in the Harlem Renaissance.

The Great Migration

The Great Migration began because of a "push" and a "pull." Disenfranchisement

and Jim Crow laws mandating segregation led many African Americans to hope for a new life up north. Hate groups and hate crimes cast alarm among African American families of the Deep South. The promise of owning land had not materialized. Most blacks toiled as sharecroppers, or tenant farmers, trapped in an endless cycle of debt. In the 1890s, a boll weevil blight damaged the cotton crop throughout the region, increasing the despair. All these factors served to push African Americans to seek better lives. The booming northern economy forged the pull. Industrial jobs were numerous, and factory owners looked near and far for sources of cheap labor.

Unfortunately, northerners did not welcome African Americans with open arms. While the legal systems of the northern states were not as obstructionist toward African American rights, the prejudice among the populace was as acrimonious. White laborers complained that African Americans were flooding the employment market and lowering wages.

Most new migrants found themselves segregated in run down urban slums. The largest of these was Harlem. Writers, actors, artists, and musicians gathered there, where they glorified African American traditions and at the same time created new ones.

Writers and Actors

The most prolific writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes. Hughes cast off the influences of white poets and wrote with the rhythmic meter of blues and jazz. Claude McKay urged African Americans to stand up for their rights in his powerful verses. Jean Toomer wrote plays and short stories, as well as poems, to capture the spirit of his times. Book publishers soon took notice and patronized many of these talents. Zora Neale Hurston was noticed quickly with her moving novel, "Their Eyes Were Watching God." Music met prose in the form of musical comedy. The 1921 production of *Shuffle Along* is sometimes credited with initiating the movement. Actor Paul Robeson electrified audiences with his memorable stage performances.

Musicians

No aspect of the Harlem Renaissance shaped America and the entire world as much as jazz. This musical form flouted many musical conventions with its syncopated rhythms and improvised instrumental solos. Thousands of city dwellers flocked night after night to see the same performers. Improvisation meant that no two performances would ever be the same. Harlem's Cotton Club boasted the talents of Duke Ellington. Singers such as Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday popularized

blues and jazz vocals. Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong drew huge audiences as white Americans as well as African Americans caught jazz fever.



Langston Hughes

The continuing hardships faced by African Americans in the Deep South and the urban North were severe. It took the environment of the new American city to bring in close proximity some of the greatest talents of the day. Harlem brought notice to great works that might otherwise have been lost or never produced. The results were phenomenal. The artists of the Harlem Renaissance undoubtedly transformed African American culture. But the impact on all American culture was equally strong. For the first time, white America could not look away.



Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
at 6535 Hollywood Blvd

Lesson Five

History Overview and Assignments Radio Fever

Regional differences in America began to dissolve as the country was able to listen to the same radio programming simultaneously. Americans throughout the country listened to the same sporting events and took up the same fads. A mass national entertainment culture was flowing.



Caricature of a "ward heeler" politician haranguing voters by radio, from the cover of a 1922 American radio magazine. In 1922 radio was a revolutionary new technology. AM radio transmission only became widespread with the availability of amplifying vacuum tubes after WW1, and broadcasting had suddenly sprung up two year earlier, in 1920.

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions then read the article: *Radio Fever*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the beginnings of commercial radio in the United States.
2. What were some of the effects of radio on American society?

Key People, Places, and Events

Frank Conrad
Guglielmo Marconi
The Federal Radio Commission
The Radio Corporation of America
National Broadcasting Company

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

Radio Fever

Commercial radio in America had humble beginnings. Frank Conrad, an engineer for Westinghouse, set up an amateur radio station above his garage in a Pittsburgh suburb. Since the wireless technology was developed by Guglielmo Marconi in the late 19th century, thousands of enthusiasts across the world experimented with the new toy. After World War I, Conrad began broadcasting a variety of programming from his "station." High school music groups performed, phonograph records were played, and news and baseball scores were reported. Conrad had dramatically improved the transmitter, and soon hundreds of people in the Pittsburgh area were sending requests for air time. The bosses of Westinghouse knew that Conrad was on to something and

convinced him to make his hobby commercially profitable.

KDKA on the Air

On the night of November 2, 1920, Conrad and his Westinghouse associates announced that Warren G. Harding had defeated James Cox to become the next president. The message was heard as far north as New Hampshire and as far south as Louisiana. The federal government granted the call letters KDKA to the Pittsburgh station, and a new industry was born. For nearly a year, KDKA monopolized the airwaves. But competition came fast and furious; by the end of 1922, there were over 500 such stations across the United States. The federal government exercised no regulation over the budding enterprise, and

the result was complete chaos. Stations fought over call letters and frequencies, each trying to out-broadcast the closest competitor. Finally in 1927, Congress created the Federal Radio Commission to restore order.



Ad Time

One of the great attractions to the radio listener was that once the cost of the original equipment was covered, radio was free. Stations made money by selling air time to advertisers. The possibility of reaching millions of listeners at once had advertising executives scrambling to take advantage. By the end of the decade, advertisers paid over \$10,000 for an hour of premium time.

The Radio Corporation of America added a new dimension to the venture in 1926. By licensing telephone lines, RCA created America's first radio network and called it the National Broadcasting

Company, or NBC. For the first time, citizens of California and New York could listen to the same programming simultaneously. Regional differences began to dissolve as the influence of network broadcasting ballooned. Americans throughout the country listened to the same sporting events and took up the same fads. Baseball games and boxing matches could now reach those far away from the stadiums and arenas. A mass national entertainment culture was flowering.



Made in 1922: RCA Radiola Senior, one tube radio, and Radiola Jr., a crystal set (Bellingham Radio Museum)

Lesson Six

History Overview and Assignments

Fads and Heroes

During the 1920's, sometimes in an effort to obscure tensions, people sought outlets of escape. Fads — sometimes entertaining, sometimes senseless — swept the nation. Another coping strategy in a time of great uncertainty is to find role models who embody tried and true values. National heroes, unknown to peacetime America, began to dominate American consciousness.



Charles Lindbergh was honored with a ticker-tape parade in NYC, June 13, 1927, after returning from the world's first solo transatlantic flight.

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *Fads and Heroes*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Choose one of the people listed below and do additional research on him or her. Be prepared to share what you learned.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe some of the new fads that began as a result of the live and immediate communication that radio provided.
2. What was the nation's first weekly magazine?
3. What publication made a business out of condensing articles from other periodicals?
4. Who best personified the all-American hero during this time?
5. Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to do what?

Key People, Places, and Events

dance marathons
Spirit of St. Louis
Jack Dempsey

beauty pageants
Ty Cobb
Gertrude Ederle

Charles Lindbergh
Babe Ruth

flagpole sitting
Red Grange

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

Fads and Heroes

The Roaring Twenties was a time of great change. As exciting as dynamic times may seem, such turmoil generates uncertainty. Sometimes, in an effort to obscure tensions, people seek outlets of escape. Fads—sometimes entertaining, sometimes senseless—swept the nation. Another coping strategy in a time of great uncertainty is to find role models who embody tried and true values. National heroes, heretofore unknown to peacetime America, began to dominate American consciousness.



Flagpole sitting – a popular fad of the 1920's

New Fads

The radio created the conditions needed for national fads. Without such a method of live and immediate communication, fads could amount only to local crazes. Roaring Twenties fads ranged from the athletic to

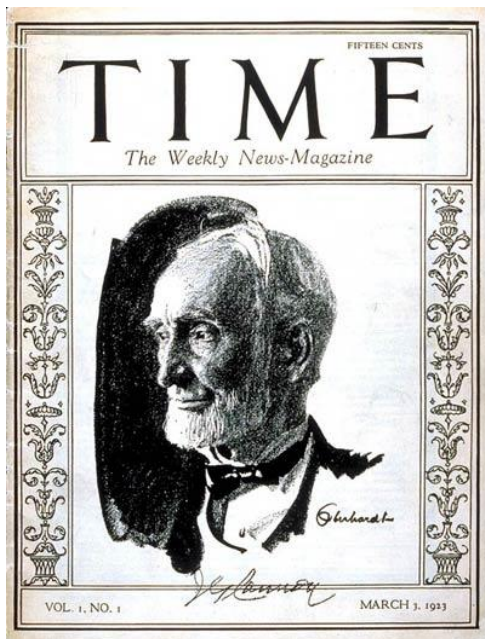
the ludicrous. One of the most popular trends of the decade was the dance marathon. New dance steps such as the Charleston swept the nation's dance halls, and young Americans were eager to prove their agility. In a typical dance marathon, contestants would dance for forty-five minutes and rest for fifteen. The longest marathons lasted thirty-six hours or more. Beauty pageants came into vogue. The first Miss America Pageant was staged in Atlantic City in 1921. One of the most bizarre fads was flagpole sitting. The object was simple: be the person who could sit atop the local flagpole for the longest period of time. Fifteen-year-old Avon Foreman of Baltimore set the amateur standard—ten days, ten hours, ten minutes, and ten seconds.



Flappers playing Mah-Jongg, a popular board game, in the 1920's

Mah-Jongg is a Chinese tile game. Colored tiles with different symbols are randomly arranged geometrically. The object is to pair and remove all the game pieces. Crossword puzzle fever swept the nation when Simon and Schuster published America's first crossword puzzle book. The Book-of-the-Month Club drew thousands of

readers into literary circles. Two new periodicals began to grace American coffee tables. The nation's first weekly news magazine, *Time*, was founded by Henry Luce and Briton Hadden. Their punchy writing on timely stories and eye-grabbing pictures hit the newsstands in 1923. DeWitt Wallace made a business out of condensing articles from other periodicals. His publication, *Reader's Digest*, began in 1921 and boasted a half million subscriptions a decade later.



The first issue of *Time* (March 3, 1923), featuring Speaker Joseph G. Cannon.

New Heroes

No individual personified the All-American hero more than Charles Lindbergh. His courage was displayed to the nation when he flew his *Spirit of St. Louis* from New York to Paris, becoming the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. National and international news was hidden in the back pages of the major newspapers while Lindbergh stole the front pages. Confetti flew and bugles sounded in New York City when he returned successfully,

and President Coolidge hosted a gala celebration. There was more to Lindbergh's appeal than his bravery, however. Throughout the ordeal, Lindbergh maintained an appealing hometown modesty. He declined dozens of endorsement opportunities, ever refusing to sell out.

Spectator sports provided opportunities for others to grab the limelight. Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth were role models for hundreds of thousands of American boys. Fortunately, Cobb's outward racism and Ruth's penchant for drinking and womanizing were shielded from admiring youngsters. Football had Red Grange, and boxing had Jack Dempsey. Gertrude Ederle impressed Americans by becoming the first woman to swim the English Channel. These heroes gave Americans, anxious about the uncertain future and rapidly fading past, a much needed sense of stability.



Babe Ruth (left) and Ty Cobb

Lesson Seven

History Overview and Assignments A Consumer Economy

New conveniences for the middle class made household chores easier, giving Americans more leisure time. Previously expensive products became affordable, and new forms of financing allowed every family to live above their means.



A 20th-century glass washboard



Electric wringer/mangle washing machine, 1930

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *A Consumer Economy*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Research one of the convenience appliances invented during the 1920's and how it affected work within the home. Be prepared to share what you learned.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the difference in household work both before and after World War I.
2. What does it mean to buy on credit?
3. How did the purpose of advertising change during the 1920s?

Vocabulary

credo

halitosis

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

A Consumer Economy

The 1920s was a decade of increasing conveniences for the middle class. New products made household chores easier and led to more leisure time. Products previously too expensive became affordable. New forms of financing allowed every family to spend beyond their current means. Advertising capitalized on people's hopes and fears to sell more and more goods.



The Regent Theater, America's first movie palace

Changing Housework

By the end of the 1920s, household work was revolutionized. A typical work week for a homemaker before the twenties involved many tedious chores. All the furniture had to be moved off the carpets, which were rolled up and dragged outside to beat out the week's dirt and dust. The ice in the icebox was replaced, and the water pan that lay beneath was repeatedly changed. The clothes were scrubbed in a washing tub on a washboard. An iron was heated on the stove to smooth out the wrinkles. Women

typically spent the summer months canning food for the long winter. Clothes were made from patterns, and bread was made from scratch. Very few of these practices were necessary by the end of the decade. Vacuum cleaners displaced the carpet beater. Electric refrigerators, washing machines, and irons saved hours of extra work. New methods of canning and freezing made store-bought food cheap and effective enough to allow elimination of this chore. Off-the-rack clothing became more and more widespread. Even large bakeries were supplying bread to the new supermarkets. The hours saved in household work were countless.

Buying on Credit

"Buy now, pay later" became the credo of many middle class Americans of the Roaring Twenties. For the single-income family, all these new conveniences were impossible to afford at once. But retailers wanted the consumer to have it all. Department stores opened up generous lines of credit for those who could not pay up front but could demonstrate the ability to pay in the future. Similar installment plans were offered to buyers who could not afford the lump sum, but could afford "twelve easy payments." Over half of the nation's automobiles were sold on credit by the end of the decade. America's consumers could indeed have it all, if they had an iron stomach for debt. Consumer debt more than doubled between 1920 and 1930.

Advertising

Fueling consumer demand were new techniques in advertising. This was not a new business, but in the increasingly competitive marketplace, manufacturers looked to more and more aggressive advertising campaigns. One major trend of the decade was to use pop psychology methods to convince Americans that a product was needed. The classic example was the campaign for Listerine. Using a seldom heard term for bad breath—halitosis—Listerine convinced thousands of Americans to buy their product. Consumers might not have known what halitosis was, but they surely knew they did not want it!

Advertisers no longer simply responded to demand; they created demand. Radio became an important new means of communicating business messages, and testimonials from Hollywood film stars sold products in record numbers.



Glass bottle with paper label. The screw top indicates that the bottle was manufactured post-1920s.