

21 | Prosperity and Change in the Twenties



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 21-1 Describe the consumer economy that developed in the United States during the early twentieth century, especially after World War I.
- 21-2 Explain the experiences of the nation that effectively put an end to the Progressive movement during the 1920s.
- 21-3 Describe the various kinds of leisure activities that became popular in the U.S. during the 1920s.
- 21-4 Discuss the strong reactions among various groups to the changing cultural mores of the 1920s.

AFTER FINISHING
THIS CHAPTER
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FOR STUDY TOOLS

During the decade after the First World War, America became the richest society in the history of the world. It had entered what many observers believed was a “new era” of unending prosperity. As always, economic changes prompted social and cultural changes. Exhausted by constant efforts at reform, postwar politicians from both parties largely gave up on the idea of “progressive” change, which had dominated national politics since Teddy Roosevelt. They were tired of moral crusades. Instead, voters elected a series of Republican presidents who promised to facilitate business expansion rather than impose Progressive regulations. Corporations responded by accelerating production and advertising their goods from one end of America to the other, with unbounded boosterism and pep that masked potential troubles within an increasingly unregulated economic system. As a result, the United States witnessed an intensification of the mass consumer culture that had been growing since the start of the Industrial Revolution.

With this backdrop of “good times,” new ideas that questioned the established order, such as pluralism, psychoanalysis, and relativity, entered the American lexicon. A series of American writers picked up these themes and made American literature respected throughout the world for the first time, mostly by critiquing America’s developing consumer culture. Also in 1920, for the first time, a majority of Americans were living in cities, creating a clash of values between those who lived in cities and those who remained in rural parts of the country. African Americans were attempting to refashion mainstream perceptions of their group, too. Women were looking to establish a new place in society as well. And the culture as a whole seemed to be liberalizing, a development that led to widespread backlashes and America’s first culture war between religious conservatives and religious liberals.

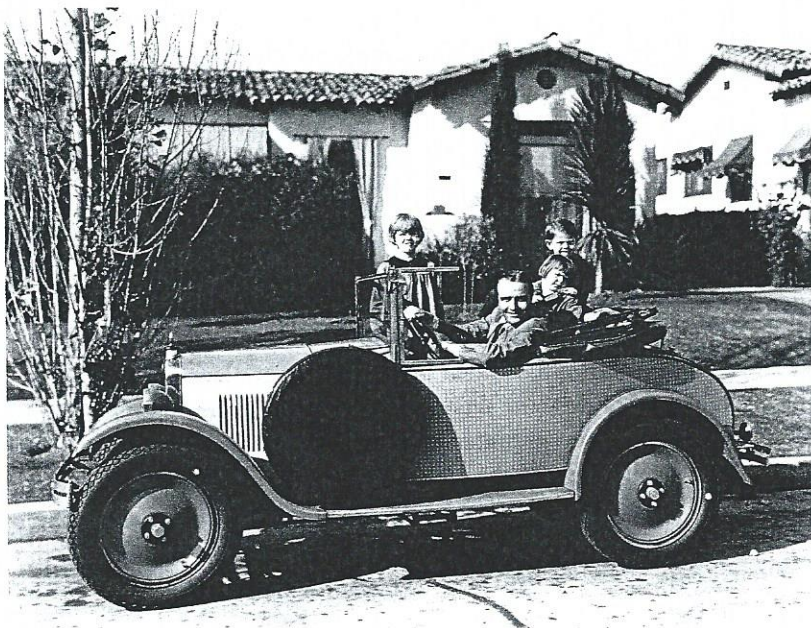
In all this turmoil, the 1920s have been depicted by historians as many things: a “new era,” a “return to normalcy,” the “Roaring Twenties,” a period of isolation. This variety of descriptions suggests that the period was characterized by many simultaneous changes. Most of the changes can be described as major shifts

inward, toward private consumption, privatized business practices, an inwardly facing foreign policy, a widespread dislike and fear of “outsiders” (variously defined), as well as an end to the calls for broad social justice that had animated the Progressive era. Ultimately, this swirl of cultural newness came to a halt with the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression that followed. But, before then, America had begun its transition into what one historian has called “the first years of our time.”

21-1

THE CONSUMER ECONOMY

During the 1920s, the United States became the wealthiest nation in the world. It took several years for the American economy to recover from its conversion to wartime production during World War I, when goods like guns and naval ships were produced in lieu of consumer items. But by 1921, the American economy was on an upward surge. American per capita incomes grew by more than 30 percent during the decade, industrial output increased by 60 percent, and unemployment in most



Hulton Archive/Getty Images

>> Car ownership expanded tremendously in the 1920s, serving as a marker of American success. Here, the actor James Hall drives his children around Hollywood, California.

◀◀ Jazz swept through the nation in the 1920s, putting on display the prosperity of the era, as well as the general acceptance of a new role for women and the celebration and abduction of African American cultural forms.

parts of the country stayed below 5 percent. Immense corporations dominated the economy, and most people enjoyed rising wages and rising standards of living. In 1929, five out of every six privately owned cars in the world belonged to Americans.

The improved economy was both uneven and unstable, however. Some benefited from it far more than others. Many Americans, especially farmers in the South and the West, still lived in poverty, and a recession in 1921 hit farmers particularly hard. Overall, the percentage of national wealth that went to the poorest 60 percent of the population fell by almost 13 percent during the 1920s, meaning that the wealthy were increasing their wealth at the expense of the poor. This poverty particularly affected many of the new immigrants, as well as Native Americans and Latinos living in the American Southwest. The wealth of the “Roaring Twenties” was stratified.

21-1a 1920s Work

GOOD TIMES

Nevertheless, the overall economy was healthy for several reasons. For one, the industrial production of Europe had been destroyed by the war, making American goods the dominant products available in Europe. New techniques of production and pay were another significant factor in the booming American economy. Henry Ford was a leader in developing both. First, he and his team of inventors revolutionized the automobile with his development of the conveyor-belt-based **assembly line**, a mechanized belt that moved a car chassis down a line where each man performed a single small task, over and over again. This innovation dramatically sped up production, reducing the time to produce a single car from more than 12 hours to just 93 minutes. It did come at a cost though, in that mass production of this sort alienated workers from the final product they were producing because they worked on only one small aspect of a larger product.

assembly line Mechanized belt that moved a product down a line where each worker performed a single small task, over and over again, until the product was completed

five-dollar day Initiative begun by Henry Ford in 1914 to pay his workers \$5 a day, more than three times the normal wage at the time. The initiative made Ford's workers consumers, while also ending any efforts to unionize Ford's plants

welfare capitalism Industry's strategy of improving working conditions and providing health insurance for workers

company unions Organizations of workers from a single company who represent workers' grievances to management

Ford had a wonderful solution to this problem: he realized that, in order to keep selling cars by the thousands, he would have to pay his workers enough for them to become *customers*, too. His 1914 innovation, the **five-dollar day** (when a salary of \$1.50 per day was standard), shocked other businessmen at first, but by the 1920s, other business owners were coming to understand that they could mass-produce consumer goods only if they also created a supply of consumers. In the 1920s, the economy began to transition from being driven by large industries (such as railroads and steel) to being driven by consumer dollars.

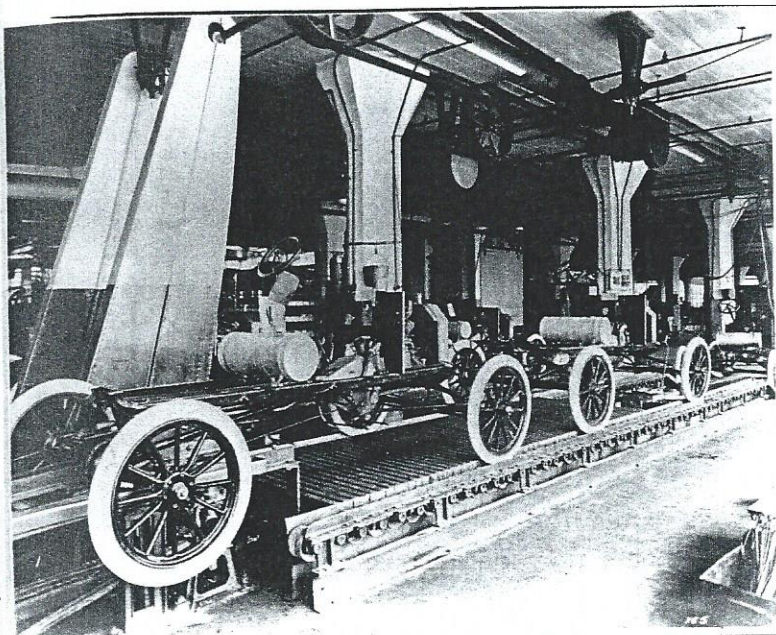
WELFARE CAPITALISM

Along with recognizing the need to pay higher wages, many manufacturers began to think of their factories not just as places of work but also as social settings, where men and women spent a large part of their waking hours. A handful of pioneers in **welfare capitalism**, such as the Heinz Company (producer of soup, ketchup, and baked beans), reasoned that happy workers would be more productive than resentful ones. Heinz and other companies improved lighting and ventilation and also provided company health plans, recreation centers, and even psychologists to tend to their employees. Many companies even shortened the workweek. And in some firms, **company unions** replaced the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in representing workers' grievances to management.

DECLINE OF UNION MEMBERSHIP

The combination of company unions, high wages, and the hunger to own a car and other luxury goods spelled hard times for traditional unions, as did a growing suspicion of communism (described in the section on the Red Scare). The decade witnessed a decline in the number of workers attached to the AFL, from 4 million in 1920 to 2.5 million by 1929.

Employers kept iron fists inside their new velvet gloves, though. They put men who were known union organizers on blacklists, spied on union activities, and pressured employees to sign anti-union pledges. Along similar lines, a group of manufacturers came together in the National Association of Manufacturers to promote what it called the “American Plan,” which forced the maintenance of an “open shop” labor environment, meaning that labor unions could not force all employees in a specific company to join their union in order to work there. In addition, pro-business courts in the 1920s struck down a series of Progressive-era laws against child labor. Abusive forms of child labor persisted, particularly



>> Henry Ford's assembly lines, such as the one pictured here, dramatically sped up the production of automobiles and became a sign that consumerism more than industrialization would drive the economy of the 1920s.

in the textile mills of the South. Working conditions in steel mills and coalmines remained atrocious as well.

21-1b 1920s Consumerism

Despite these obstacles, ordinary working-class people enthusiastically entered the consumer society of the 1920s, buying a wide assortment of laborsaving devices. Speeding this process, domestic electrification spread rapidly throughout the United States, giving most urban families electric lighting and power for the first time. People could now aspire to own new inventions like cars, refrigerators, toasters, radios, telephones, washing machines, vacuums, and phonographs, as well as nationally marketed foods, clothes, and cosmetics.

ADVERTISEMENTS

These new consumer products spawned advertisements, which appeared everywhere in the 1920s: on the radio and on billboards, in magazines and newspapers, even painted on rocks and trees. And with nationwide

By the end of the 1920s, Americans relied on credit to purchase nearly 90 percent of their major durable goods.

marketing came nationwide advertising campaigns by giant companies like Kellogg's, Gillette, Palmolive, and Nabisco. Most of the money consumers spent when they bought goods like toothpaste was used to pay for advertising rather than for the actual product. Supermarkets were another 1920s invention, replacing the old over-the-counter stores. Now the customer, instead of asking a clerk for items one by one, chose items from open shelves, put them into a basket, and paid for them all at once.

Albert Lasker, Alfred Sloan, and Bruce Barton were all pioneers of the field of marketing and advertising, heightening the American public's interest in orange juice (through a 1910s advertising campaign to increase consumption of oranges), tampons (by going into schools to explain to schoolgirls the process of menstruation—and how to manage it by using tampons), and baked goods (by inventing the maternal icon Betty Crocker). Bruce Barton's noteworthy 1925 book, *The Man Nobody Knows*, depicted Jesus Christ as the world's most successful businessman, who formulated a resonant

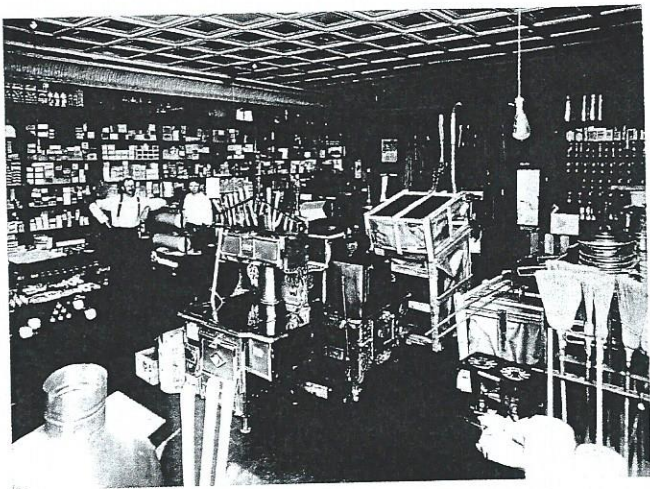
message (as revealed in the New Testament) and an institutional infrastructure (the Apostles) to spread the Gospel. According to Barton, Jesus was the businessman all Americans should emulate.

BUYING ON CREDIT

Equally striking was a decline in the historic American emphasis on thrift. Instead of saving money every month, buying on credit with installment payments became a socially acceptable way to acquire goods. For industrialists, it was necessary to stimulate demand by encouraging people to spend

money they hadn't yet earned. Car companies experimented with different forms of financing car purchases. The result was fantastic for car sellers, as more and more Americans bought cars on installment plans.

Issuing credit expanded throughout the 1920s. One leading historian of installment buying estimates that, by the end of the 1920s, Americans relied on credit to purchase nearly 90 percent of their major durable goods. Correspondingly, Americans saved a smaller percentage of their monthly income.



Glasshouse Images/Alamy Stock Photo



Library of Congress/Getty Images

>> During the 1920s, many grocery stores converted from small over-the-counter shops to larger supermarkets, such as the one pictured here, that allowed customers to peruse the aisles on their own. Here, shoppers walk the aisles at one of the first Piggly Wiggly stores.

The Library of Congress Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-114699

EARLY CAR CULTURE

In part because of things like installment buying and the five-dollar day, cars became very popular in the 1920s. By the late 1920s, there was one car for every five people in the country. A car was the key object of desire for anyone who could scrape together enough money to purchase one. A group of sociologists studying a small Midwestern town in the late 1920s found dozens of car-owning families still living in houses without bathtubs or indoor plumbing. Young people especially longed for cars; after all, cars bestowed freedom from watchful, restrictive parents. In fact, one preacher in the South called cars “rolling bedrooms.”

ADVENTURES IN REAL ESTATE

The economic boom boosted real estate as well as consumer products, and nowhere more so than in Florida. Florida was a remote backwater of the United States until the discovery of effective cures for yellow fever and malaria around 1900. By the 1920s, road and rail connections down to Miami made the area attractive for winter holidays, and between

1920 and 1925, parcels of land, or lots, began to change hands at rapidly escalating prices. In 1926, the weather intervened, as a pair of devastating hurricanes killed four



Lordprice Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

>> The glamour of Wall Street at the end of the decade is captured in this publicity poster for the 1929 movie *Wall Street*, the second of its name. As the poster says, it is about a ruthless “Napoleon of Finance” and a woman with ideals who “regenerates” him.

hundred people, destroyed hundreds of housing projects, threw boats into the streets, and wiped out an entire town. After that, land in Florida appeared less attractive as an investment. Prices began to fall as steeply as they had risen, and thirty-one local banks failed. Much of the area was left a ghostly ruin and did not recover until after World War II.

STOCKS AND SHARES

If speculating on real estate seemed too risky, buying stocks had broader appeal. The managers, lawyers, accountants, advertisers, brokers, and other “white-collar” professional workers whose ranks increased through the 1920s invested in the stock market in great numbers. This meant that they bought shares, or small percentages, of a company, hoping that the value of the company would increase, which would therefore lead to a rise in the price of a share. This would give the owners of these shares a tidy profit when they sold the shares they owned. Throughout most of the 1920s, the price of stocks and shares rose steadily, deceiving growing numbers of investors into thinking that the trend was destined to continue indefinitely.

At the same time, bankers in the 1920s devised the mutual fund, a professionally managed collection of stocks whose shares people could buy. The fund owned several stocks at one time, thus limiting the amount of risk involved for the individual investor. Because of this pretense of security and shared risk, mutual funds were a popular form of investment throughout the 1920s. Tens of millions of dollars poured into Wall Street from all over the world, inflating stock prices far above their realistic value. This would, of course, have dire consequences later on.

21-2

THE END OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

21-2a National Politics

These perilous but generally good economic times had a significant effect on politics. After the unprecedented challenges of the Progressive era, when politicians sought to rein in the most egregious effects of the Industrial Revolution, the 1920s witnessed the rise of a dominant Republican Party that embraced a “business-first” philosophy. These Republicans presided over national politics throughout the decade, holding the presidency from 1920 until 1933.

RED SCARE

Before the economic “good times” took hold, however, America confronted a **Red Scare**, or fear that the United States was vulnerable to a communist takeover. Why a Red Scare? In 1917, Vladimir Lenin and his Russian Bolshevik Party (who were called “Reds” during the Russian Civil War) seized power in Russia, declaring the advent of world communism and the end of all private property. According to the plan spelled out by the German philosopher Karl Marx, Lenin believed that his communist revolution would spread to all the major industrial nations, and he called for workers’ uprisings everywhere. This development prompted a number of American politicians and businessmen to fear for the safety of the American capitalist system.

On top of this, the pieces of a revolutionary puzzle seemed to be moving into place in the United States. American socialism had been growing alongside the labor movement. The Socialist Party presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, won almost 1 million votes in the election of 1920—from his prison cell. (He had been jailed for making speeches against U.S. participation in World War I, which he denounced as a capitalist endeavor.) Many towns elected socialist mayors and council members, especially in the industrialized Northeast and along the northern stretches of the Mississippi River. And during World War I a variety of anarchists had bombed courthouses, police stations, churches, and even people’s homes.

Politicians and businessmen reacted to these developments by initiating a hunt for potential revolutionaries. President Wilson’s attorney general, A. Mitchell Palmer, set up a federal bureau to seek out communists and anarchists, and the years 1918–1920 witnessed the arrest and deportation of several hundred union members and foreign-born radicals who had usually committed no crimes but were suspected of favoring a Russian-style coup. To be American, the **Palmer raids** suggested, was not to be communist.

SACCO AND VANZETTI

Fears of political radicals surrounded the famous court case of **Sacco and Vanzetti**. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were Italian immigrants living in Massachusetts. They became suspects

Red Scare Fear that the United States was vulnerable to a communist takeover

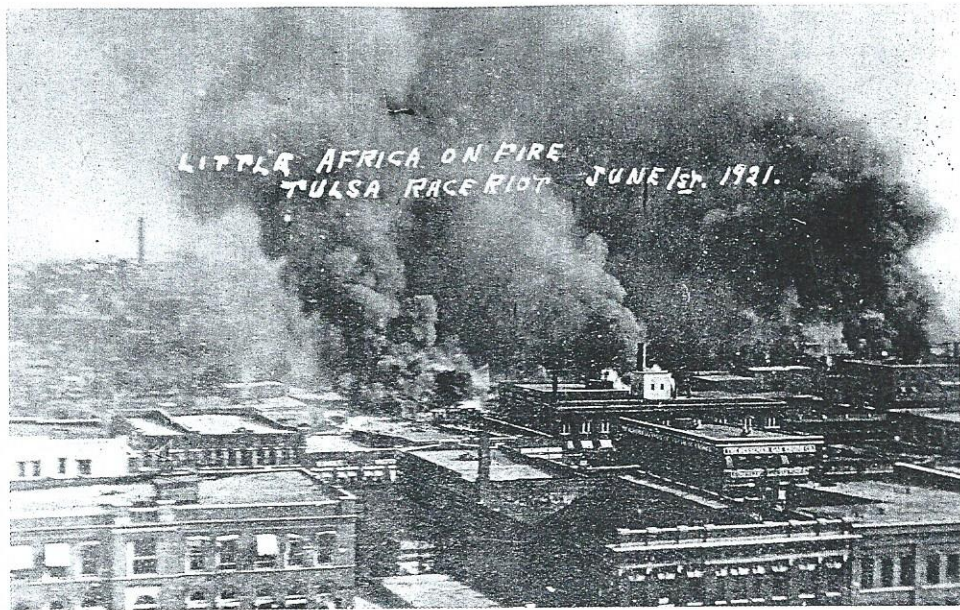
Palmer raids Anti-communist raids following World War I led by attorney general A. Mitchell Palmer, leading to the arrest and deportation of hundreds of suspected communists

Sacco and Vanzetti Italian immigrant suspects in a 1920 payroll heist, who were arrested, tried, and convicted of robbery and murder despite a flimsy trail of evidence

in a 1920 payroll heist and were arrested, tried, and convicted of robbery and murder of a guard and paymaster despite a flimsy trail of evidence. Under sentence of death, both proclaimed their anarchist beliefs but maintained their innocence in the heist. A long series of appeals followed, with civil libertarians and friends of the political left taking up the convicted men's cause, claiming it was the men's ethnicity and political beliefs that had convicted them, not the evidence in the trial. Nevertheless, a final committee of inquiry concluded that Sacco and Vanzetti were indeed guilty, and both were executed in the electric chair in 1927. Scholars continue to dispute the defendants' guilt (most believe Sacco was guilty while Vanzetti's guilt is less certain), but the case encapsulated the American public's fears about communists and foreigners in the early 1920s. Only in 1977, fifty years after their executions, did the governor of Massachusetts admit the trial was conducted unfairly.

Despite the paranoia of the Red Scare, it is obvious today that a "red" revolution was never a real possibility during these years. The economy was too good. Although some anarchists were willing to use violent methods to achieve their ends, and although a small American Communist Party did follow instructions from Moscow, most American socialists were Christian pacifists rather than atheist revolutionaries. For instance, America's leading socialist Eugene V. Debs had written a biography of Jesus, whom he depicted as a socialist carpenter and a model proponent of a more equitable way of distributing society's wealth.

Great Migration The movement of nearly 2 million African Americans out of the southern parts of the United States to the cities of the North between 1910 and 1930; most were rejecting Jim Crow segregation



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>> The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, in which 800 people were injured and 10,000 became homeless after the burning of the African American Greenwood neighborhood (pictured here), was just one of many race riots that followed the First World War, suggesting the deep fears embedded in an uncertain era of social change.

RACE RIOTS

Fears of change also prompted a series of violent race riots in the years following the First World War. Even before the war was over, in 1917, white workers in East St. Louis, who had kept African Americans out of their unions, were appalled when African Americans agreed to work for lower wages than white workers would accept. Tempers flared when African Americans then agreed to work as strikebreakers. Fears of white women and black men fraternizing together at labor meetings erupted quickly into a full-fledged riot. Three thousand men surrounded the labor meeting, and, in the end, roughly one hundred people died because of the ensuing violence.

The East St. Louis riot was only the beginning. In the summer of 1919 race riots broke out in more than two dozen cities across the United States. Chicago's were perhaps the worst, with dozens dying and hundreds more injured. But riots also broke out in Connecticut, Maryland, Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, and other states, demonstrating that racial tensions affected the nation as a whole, not just the South. They also put on vivid display the fact that many African Americans had begun to leave the South's system of Jim Crow segregation, heading to the supposedly more racially progressive parts of the country in the North, a broad movement called the **Great Migration**.

African Americans were not always welcome in the new locales, and in the heated atmosphere of industrial conflict combined with post-World War I fears of radicalism, they suffered most.

Even after race relations quieted down throughout much of the rest of the 1920s, they always remained potentially violent. In 1921, the most destructive of all the race riots took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the one-day riot led to 800 injuries and 10,000 people becoming homeless as the racially segregated Tulsa neighborhood of Greenwood was essentially burned to the ground. The sentiments of Jim Crow persisted long into the twentieth century.

WARREN G. HARDING

Once the economy settled down after two years of peacetime conversion, politics mellowed as well. Warren G. Harding won the presidential election of 1920 by campaigning largely from the front porch of his house in Marion, Ohio. Harding openly declared his intention to abandon President Wilson's Progressive ideals, including Wilson's idealistic international program, which had transformed American politics during World War I by expanding U.S. involvement in world affairs. Harding also signaled an end to Progressive politics by using the slogan of "a return to normalcy," and by "**normalcy**" (a newly coined word) he meant the pre-Progressive, pro-business politics of the late 1800s.

With the First World War over, Harding dismantled the National War Labor Board and other agencies designed to regulate private industry. Instead, he advocated independent control for corporations. After a two-year recession while the economy transitioned to peacetime production levels, the Republican ascendancy meant that politics in the 1920s would be predictably conservative.

Starting with Harding, three successive Republican administrations pursued limited government via conservative policies on tariffs, taxes, immigration restriction, labor rights, and business administration. For better or worse, these policies created a robust economy—one healthy enough to allow Americans to make light of a major scandal during Harding's administration, the Teapot Dome Scandal of the early 1920s. The scandal implicated Harding's secretary of the interior, Albert B. Fall, and Fall's willingness to lease government land to prominent American oil men in exchange for bribes. The scandal was exposed in the late 1920s, and Teapot Dome came to symbolize the cozy relations between big business and government that characterized the 1920s. Other scandals plagued the Harding administration, including one in which Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty resigned for taking bribes.

"Well, folks, do you think you could stand breaking the law a little?"

—GEORGE F. BABBITT, IN SINCLAIR LEWIS'S *BABBITT*, AS HE WENT TO POUR A DRINK.

"SILENT CAL"

In August 1923, President Harding died of an apparent heart attack in San Francisco during a tour of the West Coast (just before the Teapot Dome Scandal came to light). Harding's flinty vice president, Calvin Coolidge, heard the news in his hometown of Plymouth, Vermont, while visiting his elderly father. A notary public, Coolidge Sr. administered the oath of office to his son late that night, and "Silent Cal," as he was known, became the 30th president of the United States.

Known for his ability to solve political problems with a minimum of words and minimal effort, Coolidge won reelection in 1924, easily beating Democrat John W. Davis (who carried only southern states) and the new Progressive Party's Robert F. La Follette, whose loss signaled the death-knell of the Progressive era in national politics. Coolidge continued Harding's policy of minimizing the federal government's role in American life. He restored his party's reputation for scrupulous honesty and integrity, which had been damaged by Teapot Dome, by creating a bipartisan commission to investigate the improprieties of the Harding administration. Coolidge also avoided using the federal government to crusade for a cause, something that had ultimately damaged Wilson's presidency and reputation. Coolidge's presidency was notable for its paucity of action.

21-2b Prohibition

There was, however, one volatile issue that came to the forefront of American politics in the 1920s: prohibition, or the outlawing of alcohol. After extensive political lobbying extending back before the Civil War, and empowered by the anti-German sentiment of the First World War (Germans being known for their extensive brewing

normalcy A phrase popularized by Warren G. Harding during his 1920 presidential campaign promising a return to the business-friendly, pre-Progressive era politics of the late nineteenth-century

tradition), Prohibition became law of the land in 1919. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors” in the United States.

Prohibition was difficult to enforce. Congress passed the **Volstead Act** (1919), which laid down strict punishments for violating the amendment. But from the start there were problems, not the least of which was the fact that enforcement required a high degree of citizen cooperation. This was simply lacking in many parts of the country. Rural Baptists and Methodists were usually strong supporters of Prohibition, and Prohibition was most effective in small towns of the South and Midwest. But even there, farmers with long traditions of taking a surreptitious drink were reluctant to stop doing so. Stills making moonshine whiskey proliferated in mountain and country districts. The most prominent journalist of the day, H. L. Mencken, joked that Prohibition was the work of “ignorant bumpkins of the cow states who resented the fact that they had to swill raw corn liquor while city slickers got good wine and whiskey.”

Meanwhile, immigrants from societies with strong drinking traditions, such as Germany, Ireland, and Italy, hated Prohibition. They were demographically strong in cities and formed ethnic gangs (the most notorious of which was the Sicilian Mafia) that made and sold their own supplies of alcohol. Former saloonkeepers, who had been forced by Prohibition to close down, set up clandestine bars known as **speakeasies** and received their supplies from these gangs.

Police, customs officials, and Treasury agents pursued distillers and bootleggers, with little success. Gang leaders like Al Capone in Chicago bribed police and politicians to look the other way when alcohol shipments were coming into town. But bribery didn't always persuade public officials, and those who resisted bribes were often victims of intimidation and even murder.

A large part of the urban middle class found that, despite the problems associated with alcohol, the idea of *never* having a drink was generally unbearable. Novelist Sinclair Lewis described in his satiric novel *Babbitt* (1922) how a generally law-abiding real estate salesman went about preparing for a dinner party at his home. First he enters “a place curiously like the saloons

of ante-prohibition days.” Admitted to a back room, he persuades the owner to sell him a quart of gin, then mixes cocktails at home before his guests arrive. They are all longing for a drink and are delighted when he asks, “Well, folks, do you think you could stand breaking the law a little?” After a couple of drinks each, the men declare that they favor Prohibition as “a mighty good thing for the working class” because it “keeps ’em from wasting their money and lowering their productiveness.” But they add that Congress has interfered with “the rights—the personal liberty—of fellows like ourselves,” for whom a drink could do no harm.

After fifteen contentious and tumultuous years, Prohibition was repealed in 1933, with the Twenty-first Amendment.

21-3 A NEW CULTURE: THE ROARING TWENTIES

With the economy seemingly good, radical politics largely on the run, and national politics not terribly interesting, many Americans turned to a vast array of leisure activities. New technology, including movie-making equipment, phonographic records, and expanded



Photos 12/Alamy Stock Photo

>> In 1927, audiences flocked to see the first “talky” film, *The Jazz Singer*, which told the story of a second-generation Jewish immigrant who wants to become a modern singer, not a Jewish cantor like his father. He succeeds through the use of blackface, as the billboard shows.

Volstead Act Legislation passed in 1919 that laid down strict punishments for violating the Eighteenth Amendment

speakeasy Clandestine bar serving alcohol during Prohibition

"Go to a motion picture . . . and let yourself go. . . . Out of the cage of everyday existence! If only for an afternoon or an evening—escape!"

—SATURDAY EVENING POST, 1923

commercial radio, enhanced a vibrant social atmosphere, especially in the nation's cities. The "Roaring Twenties," as they were sometimes called, witnessed a dramatic expansion of popular culture. However, this interest in lighter fare led some to political and intellectual disillusionment, based on the sense that Americans were leaving behind the ideals of the Progressive era in favor of less socially engaged interests. Others were more interested in using culture to break stifling bonds of long-standing restrictions. African Americans, women, and leftist intellectuals were some of the groups pushing against the old social limitations.

21-3a 1920s Popular Culture

In the 1920s breakthroughs in several media allowed the public to enjoy new diversions.

MOVIES

Thomas Edison and other inventors had developed moving films at the turn of the century. After a slow couple of years, films caught on in the 1910s, and by 1920 a film industry had developed in Hollywood, California, where there was plenty of open space, three hundred sunny days a year for outdoor filming, and 3,000 miles between it and Edison's patents. Far away in California, ignoring the patents, which had made most of the top-quality moviemaking equipment very expensive, was relatively easy.

Once established in Hollywood, the movie industry made a series of artistic and technical breakthroughs that popularized the art form throughout the nation. Most exciting was the invention of talking pictures, which first appeared in 1927 with *The Jazz Singer*. At the same time, longer feature films with sophisticated plotting, by directors such as Cecil B. DeMille and D. W. Griffith, replaced the melodramas of the 1910s. Urban movie houses were built and decorated like oriental palaces,

far more lavish than they needed to be to show movies. This gave patrons, who regularly arrived in their best clothes, a sense of glamour and enchantment on their night out. Moviegoing was wildly popular, and stars such as Rudolph Valentino, Clara Bow, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks Sr. enjoyed worldwide fame.

MUSIC

Along with movies, **jazz** music came into vogue during the 1920s. Originally derived as part of African American culture, jazz followed ragtime music by "crossing over" to white audiences during the 1920s. Most jazz stars of the 1920s were black men such as pianist Duke Ellington and trumpeter Louis Armstrong, some of the first African Americans to have enthusiastic white fans. Before the 1920s, Americans who wanted to listen to jazz (or any other kind of music) had had to create their own sounds or attend a concert. The invention of the **phonograph**, pioneered by Edison in the 1870s and popularized in the first years of the 1900s, birthed the record industry. This enabled fans to listen to their favorite artists on their gramophones as many times as they wanted.

Furthermore, commercial radio began broadcasting in 1922, allowing people everywhere to hear concerts being played hundreds of miles away. That same year, Warren Harding became the first president to make a radio broadcast. Among the earliest groups to make use of the new medium were evangelical preachers. While they insisted on old, established virtues, they had no objection to using new-fangled methods such as radio to help them spread the Gospel.

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

Radio promoted an interest in professional and college sports in the 1920s, especially baseball, boxing, and college football. Listeners could get real-time play-by-play, hearing the actions of their favorite local team or boxer. The increased popularity of sports during the 1920s made celebrities out of the best players, the biggest of whom was the New York Yankees' slugger Babe Ruth. It was during the 1920s that baseball truly became "America's pastime," and the 1927 New York Yankees are still considered by many to be the best baseball team of all time.

jazz Rhythmic music derived as part of African American culture and popularized by both white and black musicians during the 1920s

phonograph Invention that played recorded music; pioneered by Edison in the 1870s

FADS, TRIUMPHS, AND SEX SCANDALS

Games such as bridge and mah-jongg became popular during these years as well, and a national craze for crossword puzzles began. The nation took pleasure in reading about the first flight over the North Pole by Admiral Byrd in 1926 and the first trans-Atlantic flight by Charles Lindbergh in 1927. Lindbergh became an international celebrity because of his aviation triumphs.

Americans enjoyed a steady stream of celebrity sex scandals too, like the one surrounding the disappearance of radio evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1926. A theatrical preacher who had built up a radio audience and constructed an auditorium called the "Angelus Temple" in Hollywood, she disappeared while bathing in the sea in 1926. Disciples, finding her clothes on the beach, feared that "Sister Aimee" had drowned. She reappeared a few weeks later, claiming that she had been abducted and imprisoned in Mexico, had broken free, crossed the desert on foot, and daringly evaded her kidnappers. Investigators knocked holes in the story almost at once, especially when evidence from Carmel, farther up the California coast, showed she had been enjoying herself in a love nest with an engineer from her own radio station. The widespread interest in this type of gossip-column fare was typical of a carefree, apolitical era.

21-3b The "New Negro"

African American jazz musicians blossomed as the musical facet of a larger ferment among African Americans in the 1920s, known collectively as the **Harlem Renaissance**. Following the First World War and the race riots that followed, many African Americans had grown frustrated with America's entrenched racism and became motivated to challenge the prevailing order. They sought to establish themselves as different from their parents' generation, which they saw as unnecessarily kowtowing to white interests in an effort to advance through accommodation. Instead, the younger generation of African Americans declared it would rather "die fighting" than be further subjugated in American society. This new generation epitomized what one Harlem Renaissance leader, the philosopher Alain Locke, called "the new Negro."

Harlem Renaissance A cultural and political endeavor among African Americans using art and literature to protest the perpetuation of racism in America and in African Americans' historic responses to it; its leaders demanded the rise of a "new Negro" who would stand up and fight American racism; lasted from 1919 to 1929



Granger, NYC—All rights reserved.

>> Aaron Douglas was one of the most prominent visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance,

creating images full of life and energy that often harked back to Africa, giving pride and a foundation to people often thought to be rootless.

Despite its seemingly political goals, the Harlem Renaissance was mostly a literary celebration, as prominent authors like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston emerged under its auspices. As African Americans moved north to escape sharecropping and the social segregation of the South, many headed to the large northern cities. No neighborhood grew more than Harlem, which was by real estate code the only large neighborhood in New York City where black people could live as a group.

Several intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, sought to politicize the growing number of urban black people, although few leaders had much luck organizing politically. The NAACP, meanwhile, pursued a legal strategy to end

forced segregation in America's cities. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the NAACP brought these challenges to America's courts, forcing the court system to evaluate the segregation that persisted in the United States. Whether the courts were willing to confront and overturn segregation was another matter altogether.

MARCUS GARVEY

The Harlem Renaissance was not a political movement, though, and the legal strategies of the NAACP were unlikely to provoke a social movement. Marcus Garvey occupied this vacuum. The first black nationalist leader to foment a broad movement in the United States, Garvey founded the **Universal Negro Improvement Association** in 1914 and moved its headquarters to Harlem in 1916. Through parades, brightly colored uniforms, and a flamboyant style of leadership, Garvey advocated a celebration of blackness, the creation of black-owned and -operated businesses, and the dream of a return of all black people to Africa. Indeed, he created his own line of steamships, the "Black Star Line," with the intention of tying together black-owned businesses in Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. His organization eventually counted more than 1 million members worldwide, although most mainstream American politicians ignored him. More damningly, the antipathy he suffered from other African American civil rights workers curtailed his power further. He suffered a harsh decline in the early 1920s, indicted for mail fraud while selling stock in the Black Star Line, and, in 1927, he was deported back to Jamaica, his birthplace.

On a variety of fronts, then, black urbanites, many a part of the Great Migration from south to north, struggled to locate their political and cultural voice. They also became keenly aware that racism did not stop north of the Mason-Dixon line.

21-3c Changing Roles for Women

Women won the right to vote with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, one of the final great reforms of the Progressive era. The first election in which they voted put Harding into office. Many people expected the amendment to have dramatic consequences in national politics, but the female vote was actually split evenly between the candidates. Rather than swaying the balance in any one direction, unmarried women generally voted the same as their fathers, and married women generally voted the same as their husbands.

But winning the vote marked the triumphant end of a long and frequently bitter campaign. Suffragists had hoped to transform politics for the better. They imagined national politics as a place where deals were brokered by unscrupulous groups of men in smoke-filled back rooms, and they intended to bring politics into the light of day and bring morality to bear. In light of the corruption scandals of the Harding administration (namely, Teapot Dome), winning the vote had not achieved this, so now what were activists to do?

ERA

Many activists turned their attention to economics and the job market. At the urging of Alice Paul, a former suffragist and now head of the **National Women's Party** (a political lobbying coalition founded in 1913), a group of congressmen proposed an **Equal Rights Amendment** to the Constitution in 1923. It read: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction." The amendment's objective was to eliminate all legal distinctions between the sexes, such as those that permitted different pay scales for men and women doing the same job. Some women, especially trade unionists, opposed the amendment because it would have nullified laws that protected mothers and working women from harsh working conditions and excessively long hours. In the end, however, Congress did not approve the amendment until 1972, and even then the necessary three-quarters of the states did not ratify it. In the years since, however, an equal-pay provision has become law, but the ERA never did pass.

THE "NEW" WOMAN

If the political successes largely stopped in 1920, the rest of the 1920s witnessed the development of a distinct youth culture, especially among young single

Universal Negro Improvement Association Marcus Garvey's black nationalist fraternal organization that advocated a celebration of blackness, the creation of black-owned and -operated businesses, and the dream of a return of all black people to Africa

National Women's Party Political lobbying coalition founded in 1913 that promoted women's right to vote and to share political and economic equality

Equal Rights Amendment Proposed amendment to the Constitution meant to eliminate all legal distinctions between the sexes, such as those that permitted different pay scales for men and women doing the same job



Burke/Triolo/Brand X Pictures/Getty Images

>> “Flappers” were the decade’s outspoken, independent women who openly displayed disregard for the Victorian ethos of the past and suggested one possible avenue for women’s roles in the future. This photo of a “modern woman” features a short dress, short hair, and an open sexuality that appalled women of a previous generation.

women. New fashions, notably short “bobbed” hair, knee-length dresses that seemed daringly short, public smoking, and dance crazes such as the Charleston all generated controversy. “Flappers” were the decade’s outspoken, independent women, who scorned the “Victorian” inhibitions of their parents’ generation. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922) evoked the cosmopolitanism of the era, especially its changing attitudes toward unchaperoned courtship and “petting.”

Margaret Sanger promoted the liberalizing culture of the 1920s as the leading advocate for birth control (a phrase she coined) and planned parenthood. Sanger became a touchstone for women’s rights in the period, lecturing all over the United States and Europe. Putting on display the often contradictory nature of a liberalizing culture, Sanger also favored some aspects of the eugenics movement, including sterilizing people with severe mental disabilities.

There are several reasons why the traditional Protestant morality that had dominated American mores throughout the second half of the nineteenth century came under assault in the early twentieth century (see “The Reasons Why . . .” box).

21-3d Disillusioned Writers, Liberalizing Mores

The 1920s also saw the coming of age of American literature. An influential group of writers, including poets T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and novelists John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein, found commercial America vulgar—so distasteful they declined to participate altogether. They went to Europe, usually to London and Paris, where they formed intellectual expatriate communities. But in their self-exile they remained preoccupied by their American roots and wrote some of the most effective American literature of their age. Together, the writers of the 1920s are referred to as “the Lost Generation,” mainly because of their disillusionment with the Progressive ideals that had been exposed as fraudulent during the First World War.

Other fine writers felt no desire to flee. Sinclair Lewis produced a long stream of satirical novels about 1920s America that won him a Nobel Prize for literature in 1930, America’s first. Literary critic Malcolm Cowley, himself a Paris expatriate in the 1920s, observed that American literature was maturing rapidly and that “by 1930 it had come to be valued for itself and studied like Spanish or German or Russian literature. There were now professors of American literature at the great European universities. American plays, lowbrow and highbrow, were being applauded in the European capitals.” It is, of course, ironic that most of the American writers of this formative period made their mark by deriding mainstream America for its conformity, stifling mores, bland commercialism, and empty boosterism. Their own erudition contradicted their claims that America was anti-intellectual.

The Reasons Why...

There were at least four reasons why traditional Protestant morality came under assault in the first decades of the twentieth century:

Loss of biblical authority. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which questioned the authenticity of the biblical story of creation, and therefore the Bible as a whole, was widely accepted in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, European historians and intellectuals were developing a school of biblical criticism that examined the Bible as a historical artifact worthy of investigation rather than a book of revealed divine truth. The loss of biblical authority unmoored many people's beliefs in Christian morality, and in Christianity in general.

Decline of universal morality. At the same time, anthropologists and sociologists like Franz Boas and Robert Park began arguing that other cultures were not any less valuable or moral than white Protestant culture,

just different from it. There were, these thinkers argued, no hierarchies of races or hierarchies of moral authority. If the value of a particular cultural was relative based on one's perception, this meant that any notion of universal morals was highly questionable as well.

Psychology. Meanwhile, psychologists like Sigmund Freud placed sexual desires at the heart of human urges, making sex a legitimate topic of discussion, indeed, a necessary one if someone wanted to learn the various drives that make one human. Sex was no longer an act to be held under wraps, but one worthy of exploration and even trial and error.

Consumerism. Nothing sells better than sex, a fact not missed by the new generation of advertising agents and marketers. At the same time, greater freedoms promoted by inventions like automobiles made it easier to escape the watchful gaze of parents. Meanwhile, movies promoted scintillating images of love and lust as well as valor and honor, at the same time providing a darkened environment for viewers, perhaps hand-in-hand, to enjoy these new images.

21-4 REACTIONS

With all these changes swirling around, many Americans felt uncomfortable with what they saw as the liberal mores of the youth culture and the erosion of community life prompted by the Industrial Revolution. Some of these dissenters found a home in Protestant fundamentalism. Others rejected what they viewed as an increasing acceptance of cosmopolitanism and moral relativity. If the 1920s were an age of social and intellectual liberation, they also gave birth to new forms of reaction that created a clash of values.

21-4a Religious Divisions

Protestants have always been denominationally divided, but in the 1920s, a split between modernists and fundamentalists became readily apparent, leading to a landmark court case.

MODERNISTS

On the one hand, a group of Protestants calling themselves **modernists** consciously sought to adapt their Protestant faith to the findings of scientific theories such

as evolution and evidence that called into question the literalness of the Bible, something called biblical criticism. As these twin impulses became increasingly accepted by scholars, some liberal Protestants stopped thinking of the Bible as God's infallible word. Instead, they regarded it as a collection of ancient writings, some of them historical, some prophetic, and some mythological. In the modernists' view, represented in the writings of preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick, God did not *literally* make the world in six days, Adam and Eve weren't *actual* people, and there was no *real* flood covering the whole earth. Men like Fosdick contended that these events were mythic explanations of human origins. Jesus was as central as ever, the divine figure standing at the center of history and transforming it, but Jesus would surely encourage his people to learn modern science and comparative religion, and to focus on other studies that enriched their knowledge of God's world and spread peace and tolerance far and wide. Not to do so was to be intolerant, and this was no way to act in a pluralistic world.

modernists Protestants who consciously sought to adapt their Protestant faith to the findings of scientific theories, such as evolution and evidence that questioned the literalness of the Bible



>> Former baseball player Billy Sunday grew to great fame as a dynamic preacher of what he called the Christian fundamentals.

FUNDAMENTALISTS

On the other hand, the group of Protestants who have come to be known as **fundamentalists** (after the publication in the 1910s of a series of pamphlets labeled “the Fundamentals”) insisted that the Bible should be understood as God’s revealed word, absolutely true down to the last detail. In their view, the main points of traditional Christian doctrine, including biblical inerrancy, the reality of miracles, and the Virgin birth, must be asserted and upheld. Most fundamentalists were

Fundamentalists Protestants who insisted that the Bible should be understood as God’s revealed word, absolutely true down to the last detail; they asserted and upheld the main points of traditional Christian doctrine, including biblical inerrancy, the reality of miracles, and the Virgin birth

Scopes Monkey Trial Famous 1925 court case that revolved around a state law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in Tennessee schools; John Scopes, a young teacher, offered to deliberately break the law to test its constitutionality

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Organization founded in 1920 that was dedicated to fighting infringements on civil liberties, including free speech

troubled by evolution, not only because it denied the literal truth of Genesis but also because it implied that humans, evolving from lower species, were the outcome of random mutations, rather than a creation of God in His own image. Traveling evangelists such as Billy Sunday, an ex-major league baseball player, and Aimee Semple McPherson denounced evolution and all other deviations from the Gospel as the Devil’s work. They also attacked the ethos of the social gospel (for more on the social gospel, see Chapter 19).

SCOPES MONKEY TRIAL

In 1925, the conflict between modernists and fundamentalists came to a head in Dayton, Tennessee, in the **Scopes Monkey Trial**. The case revolved around a state law that prohibited the teaching of evolution in Tennessee schools. John Scopes, a young teacher, offered to deliberately break the law to test its constitutionality (in order to obtain publicity for this struggling “New South” town) with the understanding that the **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** would pay the costs to defend him. The trial drew journalists from all over America and was one of the first great media circuses of the century.

At the trial, the nation’s most prominent defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow, volunteered to help Scopes. William Jennings Bryan, the three-time Democratic presidential candidate and former secretary of state, volunteered to assist the prosecution. Darrow, an agnostic, actually called Bryan as a witness for the defense and questioned him about the origins of the earth. Did not the geological evidence prove the immense age of its rocks? asked Darrow. “I’m not interested in the age of rocks but in the Rock of Ages!” countered Bryan, who believed the earth was about 6,000 years old. Scopes was convicted (the conviction was later overturned on a technicality) and fined \$100, and the law against teaching evolution remained in effect. Press coverage by urbane journalists such as H. L. Mencken and Joseph Wood Krutch ridiculed the anti-evolutionists, but fundamentalism continued to dominate rural Protestantism, especially in the South and Midwest.

21-4b Immigration Restriction and Quotas

If modern mores were one cause of fear, another was the transformation provoked by immigration. As we have seen in chapters past, millions of immigrants entered the United States between 1880 and 1920, and in the early 1920s many congressmen and social observers articulated a fear that the “Anglo-Saxon” heritage of

the United States was being “mongrelized” by “swarthy” Europeans. These Europeans (Italians, Russians, Greeks, or other people from southern and eastern Europe) would be considered white by today’s standards, but they were viewed as “others” during the 1920s because they were Catholics or Jews from countries in eastern and southern Europe, and they spoke foreign languages and cooked odd-smelling foods.

IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS

The ideology undergirding the fears of American politicians was the idea of **Americanization**. This was defined as the notion that all American immigrant groups should leave behind their old ways and melt into the Anglo-Saxon mainstream. Some intellectuals challenged this idea with concepts like the **melting pot** (in which all the nation’s people contributed their cultural traits to a single mix, creating something altogether new) and **cultural pluralism** (the idea that each cultural group should retain its uniqueness and not be forced to change by a restrictive state or culture).

Despite the power of these countervailing ideas, acts of Congress in 1921 (the Quota Act) and 1924 (the **National Origins Act**) for the first time in the country’s history greatly restricted the number of immigrants permitted to enter the United States, creating a series of quotas that mandated how many immigrants could come from each country. These limits were based on immigration figures from the end of the nineteenth century, when most immigrants were from Britain, Ireland, or northern Europe. And they appeased the widespread fear of “the alien” during these years, at a time when antisemitism, anti-Catholicism, nativism, and racism meaningfully influenced the ideas and positions of politicians and public figures. The idea, as one politician of the time put it, was to “shut the door” to immigrants in order to preserve the always-tenuous ideal that what it meant to be American was to be a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

One major result of the new immigration policy was that Italian, Polish, Hungarian, and Jewish communities no longer received a steady flow of “greenhorns” to keep them in touch with the old country. Instead, these communities gradually dissolved as their members learned English in public schools and followed work and housing opportunities into non-ethnically defined

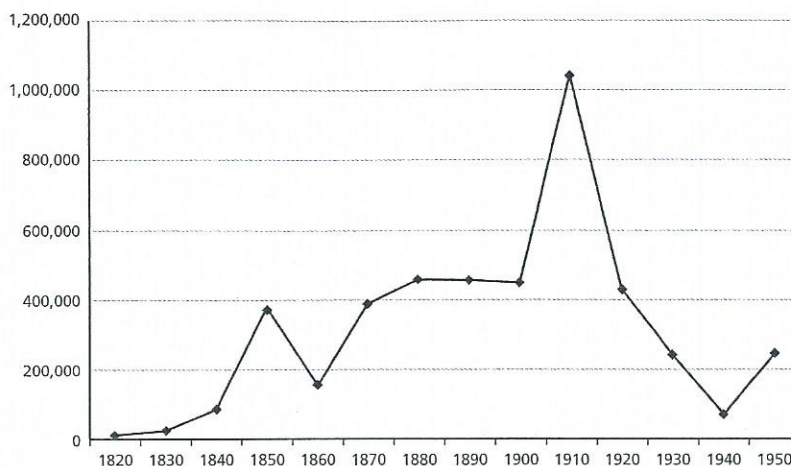


Figure 21.1 Number of Immigrants Entering the United States, 1820–1950

>> After peaking during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the number of immigrants coming to the United States declined precipitously as a result of the immigration restriction laws of the 1920s.

neighborhoods. This process of dissolution was mostly completed by the 1950s.

In addition to greatly limiting the number of immigrants allowed to come to the United States, especially from the predominantly Catholic and Jewish countries of southern and eastern Europe (see Figure 21.1), a second major result of the new immigration policy was to set up widespread institutions for controlling the country’s borders, including the U.S. Border Patrol (1924) and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (1933). While the 1920s immigration laws did not restrict the number of immigrants coming from Latin America, the creation of patrols and the mandating of documented paperwork would greatly alter what had been a relatively fluid border between the United States and Mexico.

Americanization Notion that all American immigrant groups should leave behind their old ways and melt into the Anglo-Saxon mainstream

melting pot Concept that all the nation’s people contributed their cultural traits to a single mix, creating something altogether new

cultural pluralism Idea that each cultural group should retain its uniqueness and not be forced to change by a restrictive state or culture

National Origins Act Legislation that restricted the number of immigrants permitted to enter the United States, creating a series of quotas in 1924

QUOTAS

Alongside Congress's implementation of immigration quotas, many colleges and universities, especially in the Northeast, began instituting quotas to limit the number of Jews who could attend. Social fraternities and housing developments limited membership by racial and religious restrictions, and most attempts to circumvent these restrictions were met with strong resistance and sometimes violence. The boosterism and "pep" of the 1920s extended only so far. For many Americans, the national narrative only concerned the advancement of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

21-4c Social Intolerance

Perhaps unsurprisingly, alongside immigration restriction, a new nativism emerged in response to all the economic and social changes taking place.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE KLAN

For example, the **Ku Klux Klan**, an organization formed to "redeem" the South after Reconstruction, enjoyed a revival in the 1920s after being reborn in a ceremony on Georgia's Stone Mountain in 1915. Attesting to the power of movies during this era, the Klan's resurgence was in part inspired by the positive portrayal it received in D. W. Griffith's three-hour film *Birth of a Nation*. This movie is often considered the most influential film in American history for its innovative techniques and sweeping dramatic arc—despite the fact that it was overtly racist and lionized the Klan. The Klan of the 1920s saw itself as the embodiment of old Protestant and Southern virtues. In the new era of the 1920s, however, the Klan enlisted members in the North as well, especially in cities, thus reemerging in response to the new urban culture of the time. Hiram Wesley Evans, a Texas dentist, was the Klan's Imperial Wizard during these years. He declared he was pledged to defend decency and Americanism from numerous threats: race-mixing, Jews, Catholics, and the immoralities of urban sophistication.

Ku Klux Klan A quasi-military force formed immediately after the Civil War by former Confederate soldiers in order to resist racial integration and preserve white supremacy; after a temporary decline, the group reformed in 1915 and sporadically returned to prominence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

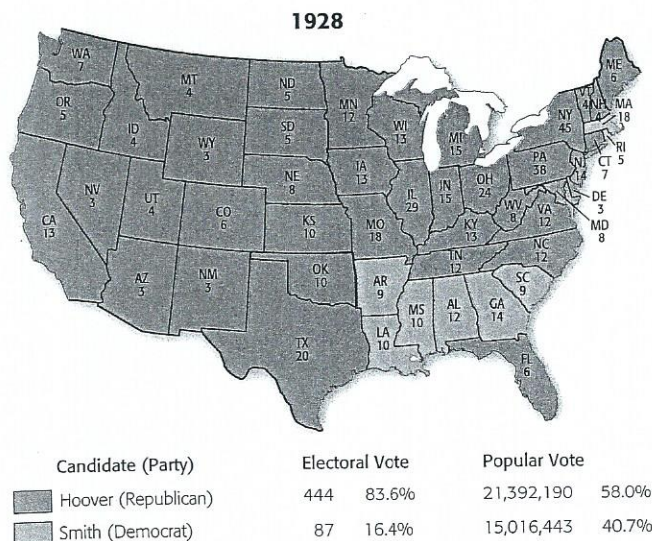
The Klan was mainly anti-Catholic in northern and western states. For instance, Klan members won election to the legislature in Oregon and then outlawed private schools for all children ages eight to sixteen. This was meant to attack the Catholic parochial school system that had been established in response to the overt Protestantism taught in public schools in the 1800s. Oregon's Catholics fought back, eventually battling to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in the case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), upheld the Catholic Church's right to run its own school system.

This wave of Klan activity came to a highly publicized end when one of the organization's leaders, David (D.C.) Stephenson, was convicted of the abduction, rape, and second-degree murder of a woman who ran a literacy program in Indiana. When Indiana governor Ed Jackson refused to commute his sentence in 1927, Stephenson released the names of several politicians who had been on the Klan's payroll, leading to the indictment of many politicians, including the governor, for accepting bribes. Both the Klan and several Indiana politicians were shamed in the debacle.

21-4d The Election of 1928

The multitude of modernizing changes during the 1920s and the variety of reactions against them were symbolized by the candidates in the presidential election of 1928. The election pitted the Democrat Al Smith against Republican Herbert Hoover. Hoover was idealized as a nonpolitical problem solver and an advocate of big business. He represented the freewheeling Republican values of the 1920s and also epitomized America's Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage. Smith, meanwhile, was the Democratic governor of New York and the first Catholic to be nominated for president by one of the major parties. He represented the surging tide of social change. Although no radical, he was known to be a friend of the immigrant and a supporter of civil liberties and Progressive-era social welfare.

During the election, the major issue dividing the two men was Prohibition. More than anything else, that issue symbolized the clash of values that had surfaced in American life in the 1920s: Hoover represented the rural and Protestant population that advocated and understood the reasons for Prohibition, while Smith represented the ethnic and urban groups who viewed it as restrictive and racist. Although Smith had a surprisingly strong showing in every large city, Hoover won in a landslide (see Map 21.1).



Map 21.1 The Election of 1928

>> The election of 1928, which pitted Herbert Hoover versus Al Smith, the first Catholic presidential nominee from a major political party, was not close. Hoover won 83.6% of the electoral vote.

>LOOKING AHEAD . . .

The Democrats, with their hodgepodge of supporters, were on the rise, but as yet they lacked an issue that would propel them to power. They wouldn't have to wait long. In October 1929, the stock market, rising steadily from 1925 to mid-1929, began a steep drop. On October 29, later known as "Black Tuesday," 16 million shares changed hands and countless stocks lost almost all of their value. During the next three years, the supply of capital flowing into the economy contracted sharply, dozens of businesses went bankrupt, factories with inventory closed down, and growing numbers of men and women lost their jobs. Complex problems in the American and international economy meant that the crash wasn't just one of the periodic "adjustments" the market always experiences, but something much more serious: an economic depression that would affect the entire world for a decade. The Great Depression would cause Democratic political landslides throughout the 1930s, which saw the rise of Franklin D. Roosevelt as president and his New Deal plan of social action. It is to the Great Depression that we turn next.

STUDY TOOLS 21

READY TO STUDY? IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN:

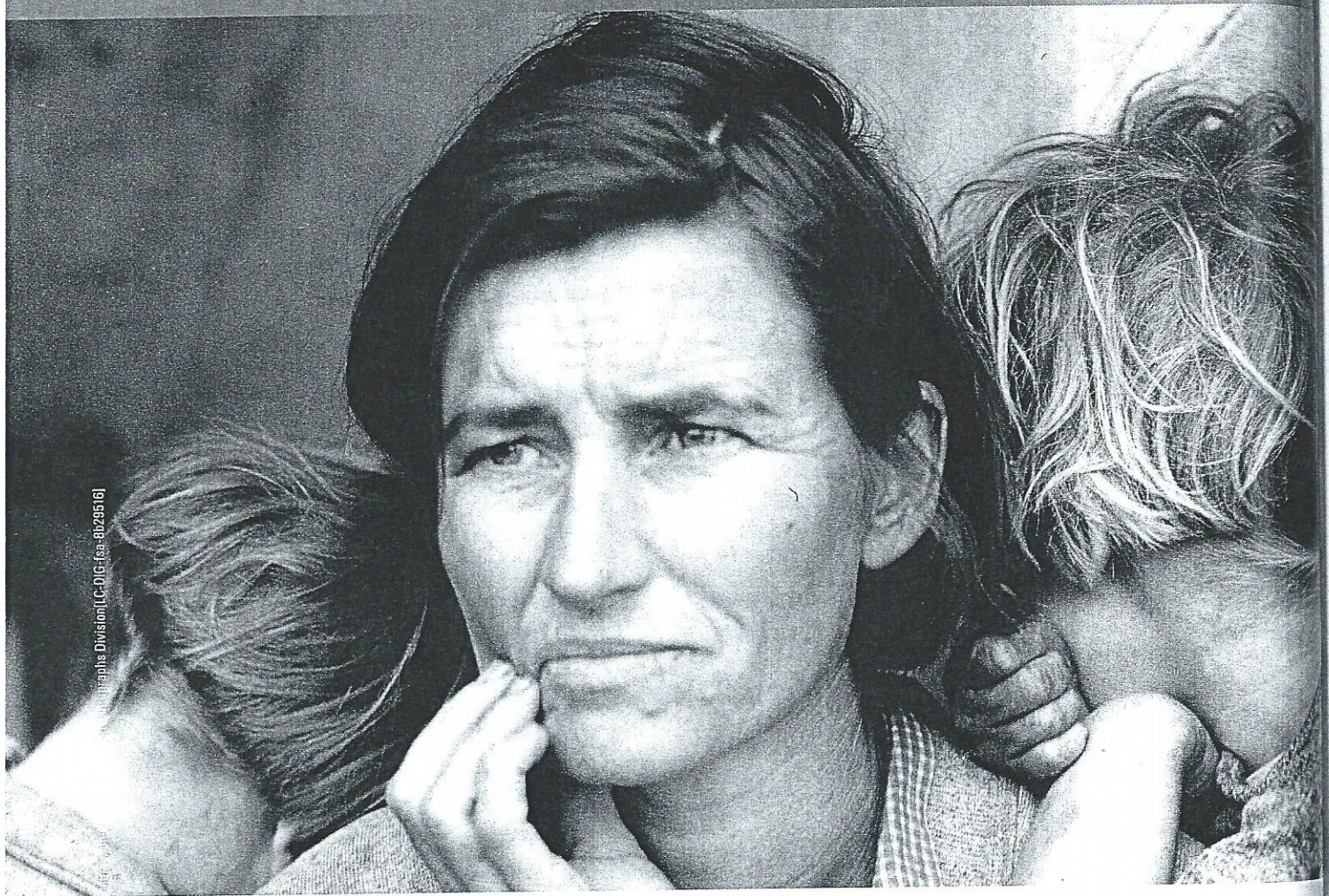
- ☐ Rip out the Chapter Review Card, which includes key terms and chapter summaries.

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- ☐ Read a 1931 report on the difficulties of enforcing Prohibition.
- ☐ Read advertisements from the 1920s.
- ☐ Read a congressman's denunciation of quotas.
- ☐ Read H. L. Mencken's account of the Scopes trial.

22 | The Great Depression and the New Deal



Photographs Division (LC-DIG-fsa-8b29516)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 22.1 Explain the underlying causes of the economic depression, and evaluate President Hoover's attempts to help the economy recover.
- 22.2 Describe the experiences of both urban and rural Americans during the Great Depression, and explain ways in which the Great Depression affected American politics.
- 22.3 Evaluate FDR's actions designed to alleviate the effects of the economic decline, and discuss the opposition he faced.
- 22.4 Discuss the most significant long-term effects of the New Deal.

AFTER FINISHING
THIS CHAPTER
GO TO PAGE 434
FOR STUDY TOOLS

In 1928, when Herbert Hoover defeated Al Smith for the presidency, Hoover had every reason to believe the future of the country was bright. In his Inaugural Address, he expressed his belief that the United States was “rich in resources; stimulating in its glorious beauty; filled with millions of happy homes; blessed with comfort and opportunity.” He later added, “We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in any land in history. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us.”

Just eight months after his inauguration, Hoover was facing a very different situation. The stock market had crashed, the bottom had fallen out of an already weakened housing market, markets for agricultural goods stalled, demand for consumer goods fell precipitously leading factories to slow production, and the United States entered into the Great Depression.

The Great Depression caused massive unemployment and declining wages. People lost their homes, their savings, their aspirations, and their dreams. The poorest faced the literal threat of starvation. Breadlines became common. Nearly one in four working Americans was out of work, and in some cities it was nearly every other person.

The Great Depression affected people’s everyday lives in ways that are hard to describe. Americans were terrified of succumbing to a disaster they did not understand. In the 1920s, many things seemed possible. You were sure that if you worked hard you would have a job, and maybe even prosper. Now the hurdles seemed insurmountable. Year after year colleges and universities produced graduates with little to no prospects for jobs. The birthrate declined. In an effort to increase prices by limiting the amount of goods that reached markets, farmers in Iowa, Indiana, and elsewhere destroyed livestock and let milk rot, all while many urban dwellers teetered on the edge of starvation. Even Babe Ruth took a significant pay cut, while moderates, not used to having a radical thought cross their minds, began to wonder if democracy and capitalism were somehow fatally flawed. Fear overcame hope.

In the end, hope was revived before the economy was. The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 inaugurated a new era of social and economic experimentation. Under Roosevelt’s guidance, a “New Deal” of government intervention into the economy and everyday lives of Americans attempted to rein in the economic collapse. This chapter examines the causes and effects of the Great Depression before turning to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s attempts to control them.

22-1

THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF DEPRESSION

There was no single cause of the Great Depression. Instead, a series of events combined to cause the economic crisis (see “The Reasons Why . . .” box).

22-1a Statistics

The stock market crash and the collapsing world economy pushed the United States into the deepest economic decline in its history. The simplest statistics explain the disaster: between 1929 and 1933, about 9,000 banks closed. Business investments in industrial construction declined from \$23.3 billion in 1929 to \$10.1 billion in 1932. The automobile industry’s earnings dropped 40 percent between 1929 and 1930. Between 1929 and 1932, the United States gross national product declined from \$103.1 billion to \$58 billion. The national unemployment rate skyrocketed from 3.2 percent in 1929 to nearly 25 percent in 1933. In some areas, the rate was even higher. In Detroit, for example, unemployment was more than 50 percent in the early 1930s. When people lost money, they could not buy products, forcing industries to slow production and lay off workers, which left even fewer consumers.

22-1b Hoover

Naturally, most Americans looked to the president to solve the national crisis. But Hoover had a difficult time. An orphan as a young man, Hoover had worked his way up from the bottom, becoming a millionaire in the mining industry and eventually becoming one of only two presidents to redistribute his presidential salary (John F. Kennedy was the other, giving it to charity). Hoover believed his success was due to self-reliance, hard work, and the fact that he always had to work his way out of his own problems. He was not anti-government, but he felt that government assistance would make people dependent on handouts and defeat the self-reliance he deemed sacrosanct. Instead, he, like most Republicans of the era, believed that citizens, businesses, and the government should work together voluntarily to overcome the economic depression, instead of being rescued through government-mandated programs. He thus formulated policies based on his idea of voluntary cooperation, which held that business leaders would make sacrifices for the benefit of the nation,

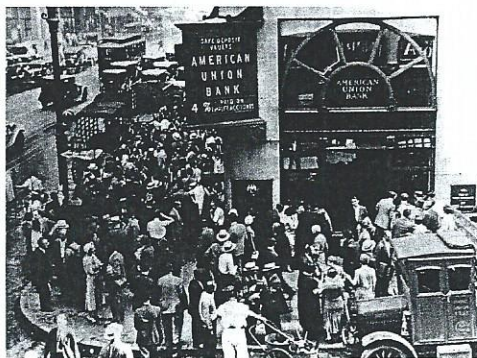
◀◀ Dorothea Lange’s famous photo of a 32-year-old mother of seven captured the pain and hopelessness of the Great Depression.

The Reasons Why...

Three events were of paramount importance in causing the Great Depression:

The stock market crash. Throughout the 1920s, the stock market seemed to reflect the strength of the U.S. economy, and stock investments increased dramatically. In part, this growth reflected the expansion of business profits during the 1920s. In addition, the federal government reduced taxes during the 1920s (especially for the wealthy), putting more money in the pockets of investors. But the most important factor affecting the rise of the stock market was credit. The most common form of credit for stock purchases was the **call loan**, which allowed a stock buyer to put down anywhere from 10 to 50 percent of a stock's price and borrow the rest of the money in order to make the full payment. The lender could then "call back" the loan and demand repayment when a stock fell below a certain price. By the end of 1928, there was nearly \$8 billion in outstanding call loans.

When, in September 1929, the Federal Reserve Board raised interest rates, a move they hoped would prevent over-speculation in the stock market, banks cut back on lending because costs had increased. With less money available for loans, fewer people were buying stock, so stock prices began to fall. Once they fell slightly, some banks began to call in their call loans, leading to more selling and further drops in the market, creating a cycle of selling and more selling. After a slight recovery of prices in late September, the market eventually collapsed. Journalists and social watchers had begun to spread word that the economic bubble was about to burst, prompting a selling frenzy. By early November, stock values had decreased an unimaginable \$26 billion, more than a third of what the stock market's value had been in August. It would only get worse during the next two years. When the stock market finally stabilized in 1932, stocks had lost nearly 90 percent of their value.



>> In this photo, groups of depositors congregate in front of the closed American Union Bank, New York City on April 26, 1932.

The National Archives and Records Administration

Internal weaknesses in the American economy. The stock market crash compounded existing problems within the American economy. The agricultural sector had been in a severe depression since the early 1920s. The industrial sector, including the vital home construction and automobile industries, was beginning to slow

down from its amazing growth in the previous decade. If these markets had been strong, the nation's economy would not have been as vulnerable to the decline of the stock market. Instead, because so much of the 1920s boom was attributable to consumption, when people stopped buying goods the economy ground to a halt.

The European economy. The third reason had to do with problems in Europe. The economies of Britain, France, and Germany experienced problems similar to the American economy in the late 1920s: (1) declining industrial

production, (2) low prices in agriculture, and (3) over-speculation in the stock market. But the biggest problem stemmed from the end of World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to pay back the costs of the war. These reparations were difficult for Germany to pay back because the war had destroyed its industrial infrastructure.

The solution came from U.S. banks. In order to pay the reparations, Germany borrowed from American banks. Britain and France, in turn, used that money to repay the debts they had incurred during the war, most often to the U.S. government. The United States was sending money to Germany, which was giving it to France and Britain, which were sending it back to the United States. This cycle of debt, though very unstable, was supported by U.S. businesses because the borrowed funds also allowed European countries to buy U.S. products.

When the stock market crashed, this system fell apart. U.S. businesses that had lost money in the crash cut back on production and stopped buying products from European countries. In addition, after the crash U.S. banks wanted their debts repaid. This was impossible. When European countries couldn't pay back those loans and U.S. banks began to fail, the economic decline of both the United States and other countries worsened.

just as workers would too. But in both farming and banking, the idea of **voluntary cooperation** failed to stabilize the troubled industries. Simply asking industry leaders and laborers to sacrifice for the good of the country was not going to be enough.

While he understood that he would have to do more than simply ask business leaders to help, one of Hoover's first efforts to help the American economy proved to be the most ruinous. In June 1930, Hoover signed the **Hawley-Smoot Tariff** (named for the congressmen who helped write the legislation). The bill raised American tariffs on foreign agricultural and manufactured goods by as much as 50 percent.

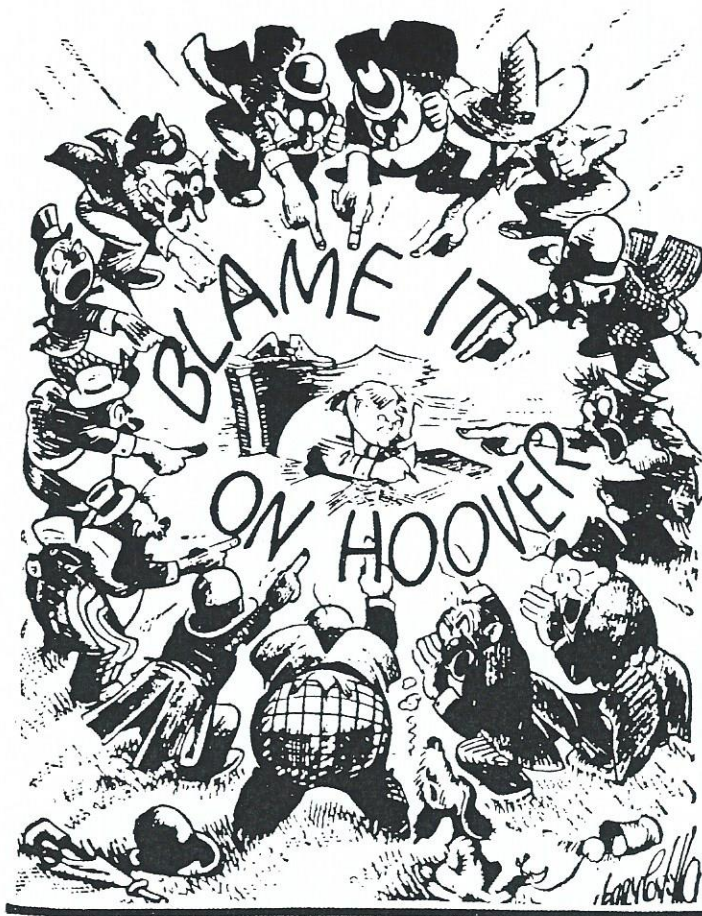
Hoover believed that raising prices on foreign products would protect American products from competition. But the effect was disastrous. European governments, already saddled with debts, were further damaged because the bill hurt their ability to earn money to pay back World War I debts. Furthermore, these nations retaliated with very high tariffs of their own, making it difficult for American businesses to sell their products overseas.

Hoover had better luck providing relief to the unemployed, but again, he relied most heavily on voluntary organizations rather than the federal government. Unemployed workers, the Red Cross, and church groups came together to offer surplus food to those in need. The Unemployed Citizen's League in Seattle, for instance, created a system whereby people could exchange work for food, clothing, and other goods.

Eventually responding to perpetual public pressure, Hoover pledged some federal funds to assist the worsening economic situation. By the end of his presidency, he nearly doubled the budget for public works expenditures, which funded the Hoover Dam, one of the largest government construction projects ever undertaken. He also established the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief (POUR), which persuaded local organizations across the country to raise money and form voluntary groups that would sponsor soup kitchens and clothing exchanges.

But Hoover's belief that the federal government should not come to the aid of its citizens because it would damage their capacity for self-reliance and hard work elicited a stern rebuke from the population. In the depths of the Great Depression, relying on volunteerism was not enough.

While running for reelection in 1932, Hoover realized he needed to do still more to ease people's financial



The Granger Collection, NYC

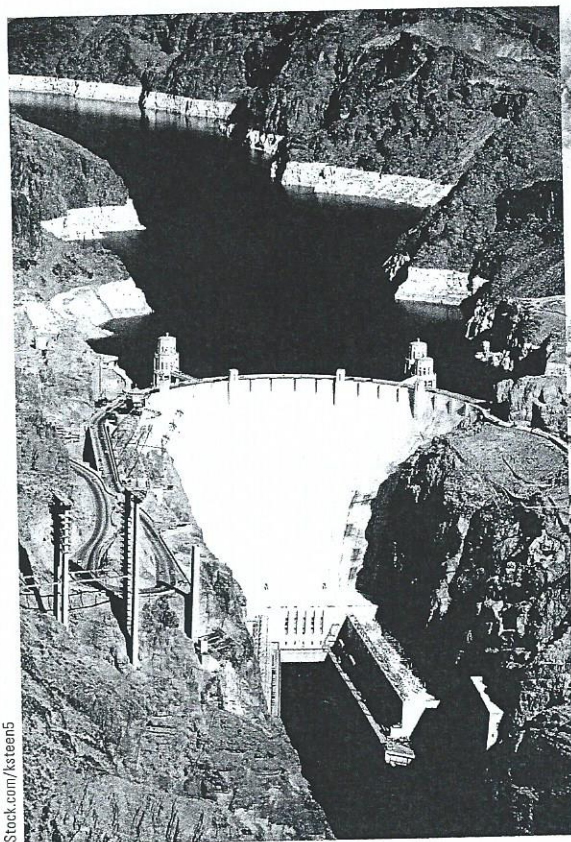
>> No matter what he tried, Hoover seemed ill-equipped to deal with the Great Depression, leading to much public scorn. In this political cartoon, a variety of American interests, from labor to business, all point the finger at Hoover.

woes. In January 1932, he established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), a federally funded agency that loaned money to businesses with the hope they

call loan Most common form of credit for stock purchases; allowed a stock buyer to put down from 10 to 50 percent of a stock's price and borrow the rest of the money in order to make the full payment; the lender could then "call back" the loan and demand repayment when a stock fell below a certain price

voluntary cooperation Name for Herbert Hoover's belief that the American economy could rebound from the Great Depression if people willingly worked together and made sacrifices in order to benefit the whole society, including asking business leaders to pay more and laborers to accept less

Hawley-Smoot Tariff Bill passed in 1930 that raised American tariffs on foreign agricultural and manufactured goods by as much as 50 percent; triggered European retaliation



ASSOCIATED PRESS

>> The Hoover Dam, begun in 1928, was the single largest public works project in American history up to that point. In the historical image, workers are constructing the retaining wall that gives support to the road leading over the top of Hoover Dam.

would hire more workers. The RFC also provided loans to states to undertake public projects such as buildings and roads.

But Hoover's plan, ambitious as it was, still didn't help the average American quickly enough. The RFC's cautious, business-centered approach defeated its purpose of helping as many Americans as possible. No matter what Hoover did, the Great Depression seemed hopeless to most Americans.

22-2 THE DEPRESSION EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

Numbers tell only part of the story. The experiences of millions of Americans suffering in terrible conditions between the late 1920s and the early 1930s tell the rest. As hundreds of thousands of people in the nation's urban areas grappled with homelessness, rural America was pounded by a series of environmental catastrophes that made the situation even worse and created the image that the government was powerless.

Hooverville Popular name for a shantytown built by homeless Americans during the Great Depression

22-2a Urban America

City life during the Great Depression was a stark contrast to the carefree 1920s. In many places, homeless Americans built makeshift towns on the outskirts of cities and in abandoned lots and parks. They derisively nicknamed these towns **Hoovervilles** after the president. These people built homes from abandoned cardboard boxes, scrap lumber and metal, and anything else they could find to devise shelter. In some places, Hoovervilles grew enormous. For many it was the only alternative to living on the street.

Hoovervilles existed in virtually all of the nation's cities, but homelessness was a problem much larger than these shantytowns. By 1932, there were an estimated 250,000 homeless children in the country. But the homeless problem was far greater than even these numbers indicate, because people living in Hoovervilles were usually not counted as "homeless."

AFRICAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS

In these hard times, African Americans generally suffered more than urban white people. African American neighborhoods were often already in a depressed state before the stock market crash, as business slowdowns and other signs of a weak economy in the 1920s hurt black

communities first. In most places, African Americans were routinely the “last hired and first fired” for jobs. Thus, even before the depression hit Chicago’s South Side, home to 236,000 African Americans, all the banks and businesses in the neighborhood had already closed.

Many African American communities turned to self-help. In Harlem, the African American spiritual leader Father Divine led his Divine Peace Mission and created a network of businesses, church groups, and self-help organizations, enabling him to serve more than 3,000 meals a day to the destitute and homeless in the neighborhood. Community members in Harlem began a campaign against white shop owners and landlords who charged too much for consumer goods and rent. The agitation led to the establishment of the Consolidated Tenants League (which organized strikes against landlords who charged too much) and the Harlem Boycott of 1934 (which discouraged consumers from purchasing products at white-owned stores).

HUNGER

In the cities, many people, white and black, suffered from hunger. Although the country’s farms produced plenty of food, the lack of funds to support commercial transportation prevented most food from reaching urban marketplaces. **Breadlines** formed in all of America’s cities. Hunger triggered a number of problems in the nation’s cities, ranging from malnourishment to riots and looting.

The problem of hunger triggered major political activity, especially among women, who actively partici-

“The depression brought everybody down a peg or two. And the Negroes had but few pegs to fall.”

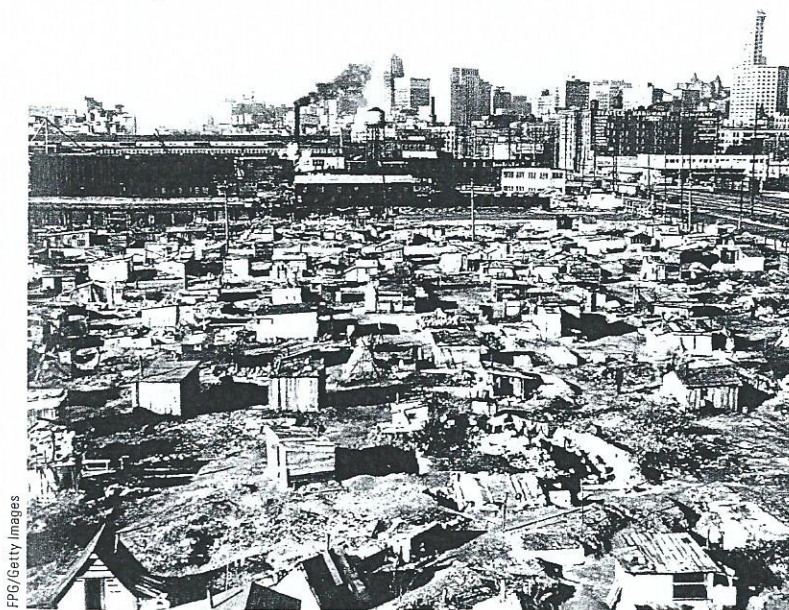
—LANGSTON HUGHES, POET

pated in a number of riots all over the country. In 1930, women in Minneapolis, Minnesota, marched on a local food store and raided its shelves. Food riots expanded to other parts of the country in 1931 and 1932; nearly every city in the country had some kind of protest movement driven by the lack of food.

22-2b Rural America

Americans in rural areas suffered as well. For the most part, the Great Depression simply exacerbated a decade-long problem of overproduction, which led to already low prices. Then, in the 1930s, rural poverty was intensified by a massive drought and a series of severe dust storms in the South and Midwest. Southern states like Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi received less than half their normal rainfall during the early 1930s. Crop failures became commonplace and reliance on one or two crops led to weakened root systems, which loosened the soil. From the early 1930s to the early 1940s, parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Texas were called the “**Dust Bowl**” because the dust storms and drought were so punishing.

Crop losses plunged farmers even deeper into the debts they had acquired early in the Industrial Revolution. Foreclosures on farms became commonplace, and the dust storms and drought prompted an exodus from the rural regions of the country to the Far West. John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) traced the story of Dust Bowl migrants making their way to California, where they hoped for a better life. The Okies (as the Midwest migrants were called) were not always welcome in California, however, and



>> Hoovervilles like this one in Seattle appeared in all major cities of the country.

breadline A line of people waiting to receive free food handed out by a charitable organization or public agency

Dust Bowl Parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Texas that suffered punishing dust storms and drought from the early 1930s to the early 1940s



Bettmann/Getty Images

>> Huge dust storms like the one in this photo conspired with the economy against many farmers, forcing refugees to flee with all their belongings to places like California in search of a new life.

many suffered discrimination, just as African Americans, Chinese, and Japanese did.

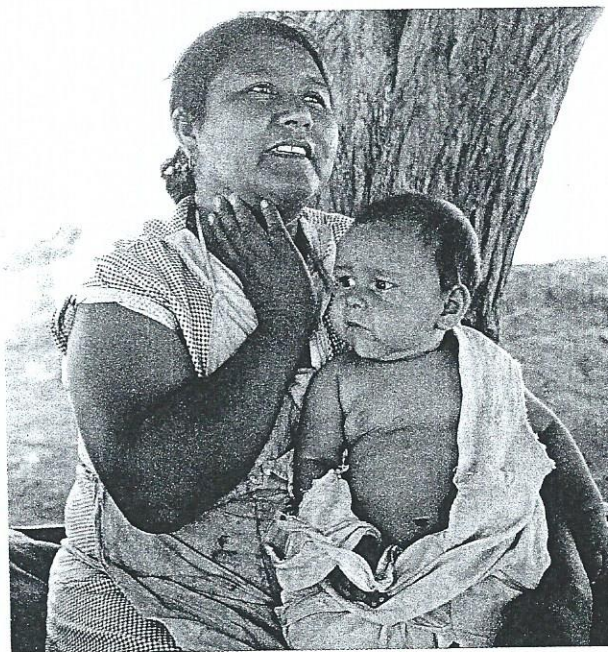
MEXICAN REPATRIATION

One group that perhaps suffered more than any other, though, was the large number of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the American Southwest, stretching from Los Angeles to San Antonio. As the American economy worsened in the 1920s and 1930s, local and federal officials, including labor leaders and relief workers, threatened and publicly abused widespread numbers of Mexican Americans, hoping they would return to their countries of origin and preserve what jobs there were for white Americans. Because the southern border of the United States had previously been porous and largely unregulated, many Mexican Americans had no documentation attesting to their status. Many in fact were in the United States legally, and indeed many were American citizens. Nevertheless, the federal government greatly increased the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The result of the heightened fear of immigrants and the development of an enhanced enforcement team was a series of public raids in predominantly Mexican American communities during which large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans were arrested and given a choice: return to their nation of origin or face expensive legal proceedings. Most simply chose to repatriate.

In the midst of this threatening environment, many localities simply provided free transportation to those willing to leave the United States of their own accord. They were thus not technically deported, but were under threat to repatriate. In total, during the 1920s and 1930s, between 500,000 and 2 million Mexicans and Mexican Americans left the United States and repatriated to Mexico, at least half of whom were U.S. citizens who left without access to due process of law. In 2006, the state of California became the first (and only) state to apologize formally for its actions.

22-2c Cultural Politics

While many businesses dried up during the Depression, people still found time for leisure activities like attending movies, reading fiction, or flipping through widely



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. [LC-DIG-tsa-8b26637]

>> During the Great Depression local, state, and federal government made concerted efforts to get Mexicans and Mexican Americans to go to Mexico, which, they felt, would open up jobs to non-Mexican Americans. Somewhere between 500,000 and 2 million Mexicans and Mexican Americans, including this mother and son, left the US and repatriated to Mexico, at least half of whom were U.S. citizens.

popular comic books. These cultural products responded to the psychological needs of the people by offering either dreamy escapism or a leftist political message that criticized the current capitalist order. Cultural outlets grew so popular during the Depression that one historian has argued that this "Cultural Front" helped move American politics as a whole to the left during the 1930s.

MOVIES

During the Great Depression, nearly 60 percent of the nation attended at least one film a week. Hollywood studios responded by churning out more than 5,000 movies during the 1930s. This prodigious output came courtesy of the "studio system." Just as Henry Ford had pioneered the assembly line to mass-produce his automobiles, studios learned to streamline their production process to make many more movies. Both sound and color techniques were mastered in this era; they were employed with increasing frequency throughout the 1930s.

Responding to the psychological needs of Depression-era audiences, Hollywood films served up seductive dreamscapes, most notably with stories of wealthy and carefree people. The "rags-to-riches" theme was immensely popular, as were musicals and gangster films. Hollywood films many times took gentle jabs at the upper classes, while reassuring the audience that the old rags-to-riches dream was still alive.

The films of Frank Capra are the most renowned of the era, and they often dramatized the fight to rise from poverty to success. At a time when many individuals felt powerless, Capra's films, such as perennial favorites *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), called for a return to the virtues of small-town communities, placing hope in the power of one man to stand up against the iniquities of big business, corrupt government, and a cynical media.

The struggle to realize the American dream was a popular theme in slapstick comedian Charlie Chaplin's films as well, most notably in his *Modern Times* (1936). Chaplin's character in the film, the Little Tramp, is rendered helpless in the face of daunting machines as the gears of business literally swallow him up. The Tramp is then thrown out of work and mistakenly jailed for being a dangerous radical. *Modern Times* captured the plight of American workers who were buffeted by the impersonal forces of modern industrial society.

Another performer who buoyed everyone's spirits with her carefree antics and her attempts to always remain on the sunny side of the street was Shirley Temple. Like many other performers, her work provided an escape from the harsh realities of the Great Depression,



>> Charlie Chaplin's iconic 1936 film *Modern Times* (publicity poster shown here) told the story of a likeable man besieged by the huge anonymous forces of the industrial era.

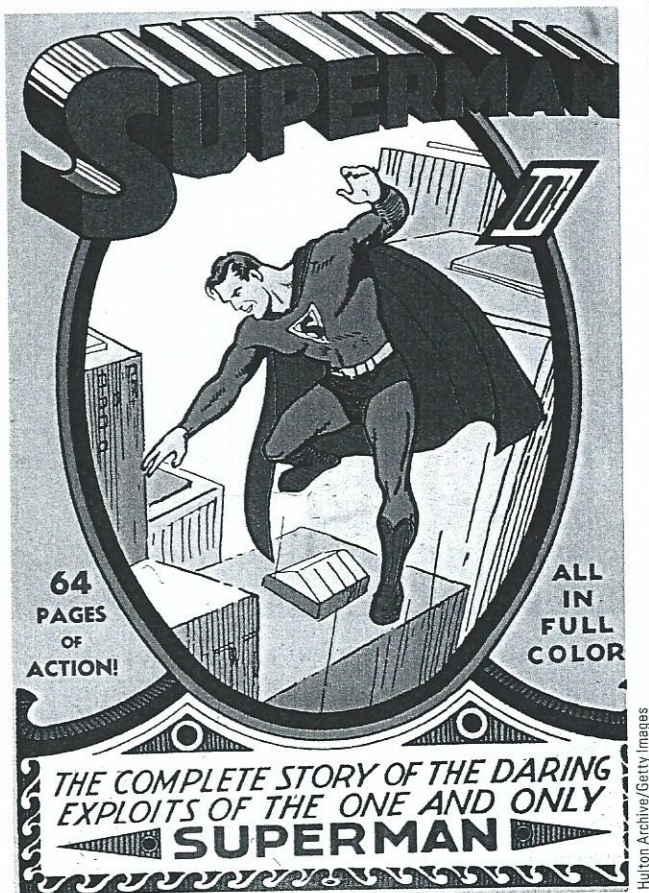
but she also came to symbolize the fact that Hollywood was not accurately portraying the real woes that most Americans faced in the 1930s. People often enjoyed the films of Shirley Temple, but it was obvious to many that she was too much a part of the Hollywood dreamscape to represent real problems.

WRITERS

In the 1930s a growing number of writers shared Chaplin's critique. During the prosperous 1920s, writers felt ignored in a society dominated by business concerns. When the stock market crashed and the Great Depression hit, many intellectuals felt energized. "One couldn't help being exhilarated at the sudden collapse of that stupid gigantic fraud," said the leftist social critic Edmund Wilson.

Intellectuals basically agreed on the cause of the economic depression: for too long, they said, the United States had been devoted to unbridled competition, sacrificing social good for individual wealth. Many intellectuals subsequently called for government control and greater centralized planning. This position was most skillfully articulated by philosopher John Dewey in many articles and his books *A Common Faith* (1934) and *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), and by writer Alfred Bingham in his journal *Common Sense*.

More radical critics were drawn to the Communist Party. During the 1930s, communism seemed an



>> What better time than the Great Depression for a superhero to come and save the day? Superman first appeared in 1938. Pictured here is one of the covers from the comic book.

attractive and plausible alternative to capitalism, mainly because the Soviet Union seemed to be thriving. There were certainly problems with this contention—namely, that the Soviet Union was not doing as well as it seemed (its successes were mostly a product of its international propaganda) and that what advances it did have were coming at a brutal human cost under the harsh regime of Josef Stalin. Nevertheless, many intellectuals drifted dramatically leftward during these years.

Fiction writers moved left as well. Chief among them was John Steinbeck, who aimed to create a proletarian literature that sympathetically portrayed the struggles of the working classes. African American authors such as Richard Wright used their writing to examine the political activities of the Communist Party and the struggles for African American civil rights. The Southern Agrarians, notably John Crowe Ransom and Allan Tate, wrote of their hopes for the nation to return

to its rural roots in order to address the problems caused by modern industrial society.

RADIO

Radio was wildly popular during the 1930s, too. By 1926, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) had hooked up stations around the country, creating the first nationwide radio network. The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) followed a year later.

The same songs were now popular nationwide, and a handful of them dealt with Depression-era themes (most notably, Bing Crosby's rendition of "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"). The songs of Woody Guthrie were generally about farmers affected by the Depression. His song "This Land Is Your Land," although today regarded as a celebration of the country, is actually about the nation's suffering during the 1930s. The most popular music of the day, however, usually avoided economics and advised listeners to, as songwriters Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh put it, stay "on the sunny side of the street." The upbeat grandeur of large swing orchestras dominated popular music, led by such masters as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Glenn Miller, and Tommy Dorsey.

Radio also featured sitcoms, the most popular of which was *Amos 'n' Andy*, which captured an amazing 60 percent of the American radio audience. Beginning in 1929, millions of Americans listened to the comical misadventures of two black friends (played by two white actors who mocked black speech) trying to make their way in Harlem. Most episodes focused on "getting ahead," a topic on the minds of Depression-era audiences. Amos was hardworking and hopeful, while his friend Andy was a lazy schemer, always looking to make a quick buck. Their elaborate plans inevitably failed for a variety of humorous reasons, but by the end of the show, offering a note of reassurance to their listeners, they always managed to salvage some self-respect.

In addition to its entertainment value, the radio also served as a key source of news. Over the course of the decade, a growing number of Americans, who had previously relied on newspapers to learn of daily events, preferred to get their news from radio commentators. Colorful personalities like Walter Winchell attracted listeners by freely combining the daily headlines with personal editorial opinions.

In total, American popular culture in the 1930s was deeply influenced by the Great Depression. All forms of popular culture, from movies to fiction to radio, helped Americans deal with the nation's economic crisis. They also helped push American politics leftward, something made evident by the radicalizing politics of the era.

22-2d Radicalizing Politics

Predictably, political events were especially contentious during the Great Depression. The political climate of the early 1930s created the impression of a nation out of control.

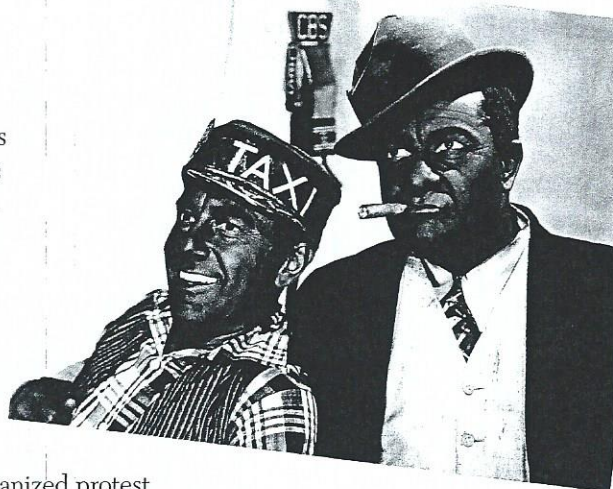
COMMUNIST PARTY

In the United States, the party leading most of the organized protest was the Communist Party of the United States, which, under the direction of Earl Browder and William Z. Foster, sought to eliminate all private property and make the state responsible for the good of the people. With capitalism experiencing violent turbulence, communism seemed a plausible alternative. The party had led hunger marches in the early 1930s and continued its activities into the presidential election year of 1932. Its actions gained it considerable attention from the American public, making communism a greater force in American politics than ever before.

The Communist Party intended to use its strength during the Great Depression to highlight racist dimensions of American society (which would show the worldwide communist effort to be the true egalitarian force in the world). Notably, the party funded the legal defense of nine African American boys accused of raping a white woman in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931. The convictions of the **Scottsboro Boys**, as the nine came to be called, served notice to the world that the United States retained its racist ways despite its efforts to promote an egalitarian rhetoric. The boys were tried separately, and four were released in 1937, after six years in jail. The other five languished in prison, their guilt never established conclusively, and remained imprisoned until the 1940s.

THE BONUS ARMY

But it was the gathering of the **Bonus Army** that became one of the most influential protests in American history. The Bonus Army consisted of World War I veterans who demanded the immediate payment of their military bonuses (which were scheduled to be paid in the 1940s). In the spring and summer of 1932, about 15,000 veterans converged on Washington, D.C., to push Congress and



>> Amos 'n' Andy, the most popular radio program of the 1930s, portrayed two black friends humorously trying to improve their lot in life. The actors, shown here, were actually white men who used blackface for their photo shoots.

Bettmann/Getty Images

the president to pass a bill authorizing early payment of the bonuses. Some illegally hopped on trains, and some came from as far away as California. When police attempted to evict the marchers, violence broke out and one police officer was killed. President Hoover then



Everett Collection/AGE Fotostock

>> Along with a wide range of programs and initiatives, FDR brought a smiling optimism and hope to the American people.

Scottsboro Boys Nine African American boys accused of raping a white woman in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931; they were imprisoned, although their guilt was never established conclusively

Bonus Army Group of 15,000 World War I veterans who staged a protest in Washington, D.C., in 1932, demanding immediate payment of their military bonuses

RELIEF

First, FDR tried to provide relief to suffering people and the industries whose weaknesses compounded that suffering. Congress's first act was to address the banking crisis. Many Americans, afraid that banks would collapse, refused to place their money in them. The Emergency Banking Relief Act, passed on March 9, 1933, established federal control over banks and, if necessary, rescued them from disaster with government loans. Roosevelt then took the United States off the gold standard, meaning that the government would no longer redeem paper money in gold. With the end of the gold standard, the price of silver, stocks, and commodities rose, encouraging investment in these areas and putting money back into the economy.

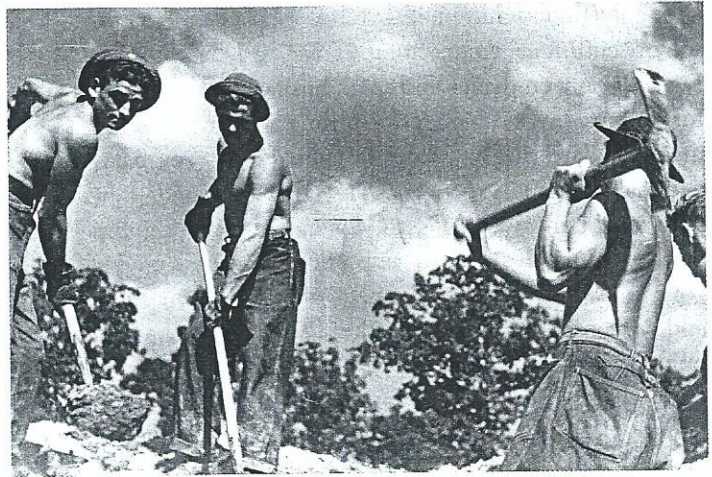
Roosevelt next turned to helping people directly. Congress increased the federal contribution to city and state relief agencies by creating the **Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)**, with funding of \$500 million. FERA's chief administrator, Harry Hopkins, preferred public works projects to direct payments to people, believing that the former were more considerate of the recipients' pride. Thus FERA set about creating economic programs that would directly employ the unemployed.

Reflecting this belief, one of FERA's most successful programs was the **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)**, established in March 1933. The CCC enlisted unemployed young men ages eighteen to twenty-five in building and repairing highways, forest service sites, flood control projects, and national park buildings. By 1941, 2.5 million young men had worked in military-style CCC camps. Enlistees received \$30 a month, part of which they had to send home. Other projects started in 1933 included the Public Works Administration (PWA), which built roads and buildings, and the Civil Works Administration (CWA), which provided seasonal employment.

In addition to financial relief, Roosevelt supported a proposal he felt would bring psychological relief to millions of Americans: the end of Prohibition. In February 1933, the Democratic majority in Congress submitted a constitutional amendment to the states that repealed Prohibition, and in December it was ratified as the Twenty-first Amendment.

RECOVERY

FDR then turned to recovery. His signature recovery act (and arguably the First New Deal's most meaningful piece of legislation) was the **National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA)**. Under the stewardship of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (the first-ever



>> The Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, put young men to work, like these pictured here excavating.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Reproduction number LC-USF33-T01-000067-M3 (b&w film dup. neg.) LC-USZ62-130370 (b&w film copy neg. from file print) LC-DIG-fsa-8a00075 (digital file from original neg.)

female cabinet member), the NIRA instituted programs to regulate industry, establish labor rights, and improve working conditions. **Section 7a** of the NIRA guaranteed the right of labor unions to organize. As a result, labor representatives sat down with business and government officials in committees to set working standards and wage levels. The codes drawn up by these committees in every American industry established a forty-hour workweek, banned child labor, and implemented a minimum weekly wage.

The NIRA's most important creation was the **National Recovery Administration (NRA)**. Led by

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) Federally funded department creating economic programs to employ the unemployed

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) New Deal program that enlisted unemployed young men ages eighteen to twenty-five in building and repairing highways, forest service sites, flood control projects, and national park buildings

National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) New Deal act that instituted programs to regulate industry, establish labor rights, and improve working conditions

Section 7a A component of the NIRA that legalized and granted rights to labor unions, leading to the dramatic expansion of labor unions across the nation

National Recovery Administration (NRA) Department that enforced fair-trade rules set by industry associations during the 1920s, encouraged companies and workers to meet and agree on prices and wages, and established a public relations campaign to mobilize support of the New Deal

General Hugh Johnson, the NRA focused on the issue of “cutthroat” competition. In the early years of the Depression, companies and small businesses had fought for survival by slashing prices, thus destroying profit margins, lowering workers’ wages, and preventing national economic recovery. The NRA responded by enforcing fair-trade rules set by industry associations during the 1920s. More importantly, it encouraged companies and workers to meet and agree on prices and wages. Additionally, the NRA launched a public relations campaign in mid-1933, encouraging participants to stamp their products with a blue eagle and the NRA’s slogan, “We do our part.” The blue eagle became a symbol of the progressive optimism spurred by Roosevelt and his New Deal.

REFORM

In addition to providing relief and prompting recovery, many of FDR’s most dramatic gestures came through several reforms intended to prevent an economic depression from happening again. In hindsight, we can see that these reforms changed the nature of American government

for the rest of the twentieth century. They inserted the federal government into the American economy more forcefully than ever before by managing, directing, or controlling parts of it outright.

The first big program FDR passed was a farm reform proposal called the **Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA)**. The AAA attempted to address the great problem of agriculture, which was excess supply. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration offered farmers cash subsidies to *not* grow crops or even to plow up crops already planted. With the drop in supply, the theory went, the cost of farm products would rise.

The AAA quickly became one of the most important New Deal agencies in the South and West, although reducing the amount of output hurt sharecroppers and tenant farmers more than more stable large landowners. Congress also created the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, which helped refinance farm loans and prevented a number of farms from being repossessed.

Second, an emphasis on cooperative planning found its broadest expression in the **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)**, created by Congress in May 1933. The TVA gave the federal government the power to build a series of dams on the Tennessee River in order to improve river navigation and, significantly, create electricity for the area’s rural residents, the achievement for which the TVA is best remembered. The TVA brought electricity to poor and isolated populations in seven states.

A third group of reforms governed banking. In May 1933, Congress passed the Federal Securities Act, which regulated the stock market and prosecuted individuals who took advantage of “insider” knowledge to enrich themselves in stocks and bonds. In June 1933, Congress

passed the **Glass-Steagall Banking Act**, which regulated the size of banks and created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), a program that guaranteed individual deposits of up to \$5,000. These steps reassured millions of Americans that it was safe to put their money in banks again.

THE HUNDRED DAYS

Congress adjourned on June 16, 1933. Although it would enact many laws during the subsequent years, few would have the dramatic impact of these acts, all of which were passed within Roosevelt’s first hundred days in office.

22-3b Critics of the First New Deal

Despite his enormous popularity, Roosevelt never lacked for critics, many of whom looked on the New Deal with horror.

CRITICISM FROM THE REPUBLICANS

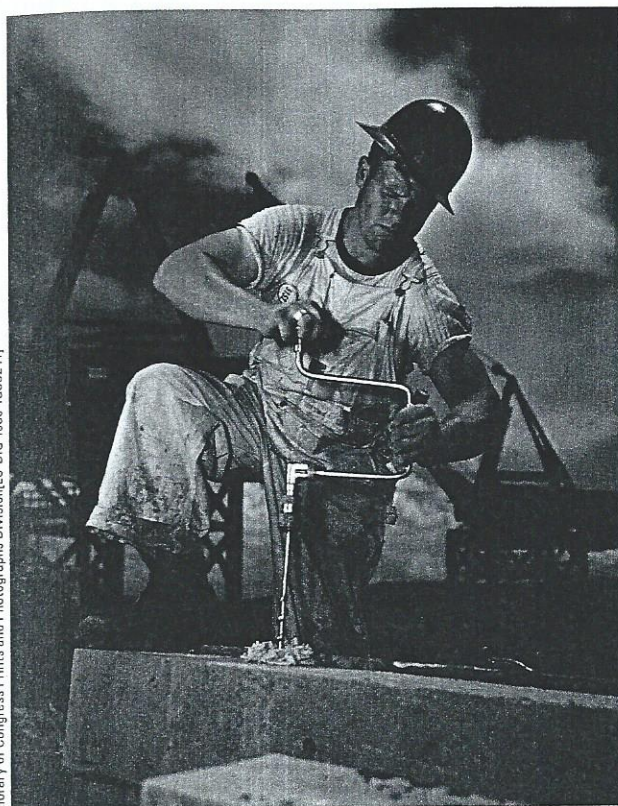
Republicans argued that periodic downturns were an inevitable part of the business cycle. In their view, the best cure for economic depression was to let market forces take their course, knowing that, in time, there would be growth and recovery.

Despite his enormous popularity, Roosevelt never lacked for critics, many of whom looked on the New Deal with horror.

Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) A transformative act of the New Deal that established an agency that, among other things, paid farmers not to grow crops in order to curb supply; was one of the most influential federal agencies in the South and West

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Department created in May 1933 to build a series of dams on the Tennessee River in order to improve river navigation and create electricity for the area’s rural residents

Glass-Steagall Banking Act A law regulating the banking industry, including its loans, and creating the FDIC to guarantee individual deposits



>> Carpenter at work on Douglas Dam, Tennessee, under the auspices of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

CRITICISM FROM CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS

Equally dismayed were conservative Democrats, who deplored Roosevelt's tampering with the gold standard and feared his programs were increasing the power of the federal government at the states' expense. In 1934, Al Smith, the unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate of 1928, and John W. Davis, the unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate of 1924, joined a group of conservative politicians and business leaders in the Liberty League, an anti-New Deal organization. The League argued that many of Roosevelt's measures were leading the United States toward socialism. Citizens' lives, those in the League believed, ought not to be too much in the hands of the federal government. They saw it as immoral that farm products and livestock were being stored away or killed while a great number of Americans were suffering from hunger.

Southern Democrats also had their complaints. They were concerned that the new federal mandates might threaten Jim Crow segregation in the South. Because of their seniority in Congress, they were successful in exempting farm workers and domestic servants (who

in the South likely would have been black) from receiving certain New Deal benefits.

CRITICISM FROM THE LEFT

If conservative Democrats saw the New Deal as an over-extension of federal power, other voices on the Left saw it as a timid set of reforms that merely reinforced the American status quo. America's small Socialist Party, led by Norman Thomas, believed that the Depression was evidence that capitalism was a failure. The New Deal, in the Socialists' view, had made the mistake of shoring up capitalism rather than getting rid of it once and for all.

The even smaller Communist Party, which favored the abolition of all forms of private property, used the Soviet Union as an example of an economic system that (in theory) had no unemployment at all. During these years, the Communist Party attracted support from numerous sources, including from African American sharecroppers in the South, mainly because of the party's opposition to racial segregation. Nevertheless, at its peak in 1938, Communist Party membership numbered just 75,000.

Another plan to redistribute wealth was proposed by novelist and Progressive crusader Upton Sinclair in his 1934 bid for governor of California. A former socialist, Sinclair championed a program called End Poverty in California (EPIC), which aimed to turn over idle factories and farms to workers' cooperatives. A powerful coalition of conservative business interests banded together to defeat Sinclair in the November election.

Another dramatic plan for reform emerged in 1934, when Senator Huey Long of Louisiana announced his "Share Our Wealth" plan. A former governor, Long proposed punitive taxation of the rich and a guaranteed yearly payment of \$5,000 to every American family. He wanted to go even further than the New Deal in making the national government every citizen's guardian. The colorful Long had a history of flamboyance and corruption, and his national stature was on the rise when he was assassinated in September 1935.

A more extreme rival of the New Deal was Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest from Detroit. Coughlin was a spellbinding speaker, as talented a public performer as Roosevelt, and his weekly radio show had a largely Catholic audience of more than 30 million. Coughlin went from being an early supporter of the New Deal to being one of its harshest critics, accusing Roosevelt of being in league with communists and Jewish bankers. In 1934, Coughlin founded the Union for Social Justice, which argued for radical redistribution of incomes and a nation free of bankers. Coughlin's conspiratorial antisemitism eventually prompted his censure by the Catholic Church.

CRITICISM FROM THE COURTS

Amid these voices of dissent, Roosevelt faced his largest challenge from the Supreme Court. In its May 1935 decision in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. U.S.*, the Court invalidated the NIRA on the grounds that it gave unconstitutionally broad powers to the federal government. The logic of the Court's decision, written by conservative Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, suggested that the other parts of the New Deal's legislation would be overturned when they came up for review. Of all the critiques Roosevelt faced, the Supreme Court's promised to be the most threatening.

22-3c The Second New Deal

Despite the Supreme Court's challenge, Roosevelt believed that, without a national plan for economic reform, the country would succumb to demagogues like Long and Coughlin. Emboldened by Democratic victories in the 1934 mid-term elections, Roosevelt laid out a new set of proposals in January 1935 that would push the New Deal even further in assisting the working and lower classes. Ultimately enacted by Congress in July and August of 1935, these new reform measures are known collectively as the "Second New Deal."

The Second New Deal can best be understood as Roosevelt's attempt to gain support from the working and lower-middle classes. Even if it cost him the support of the wealthy (whom he called "economic royalists"), Roosevelt decided to co-opt the ideas of some of his leftist critics by: (1) pressing for more jobs, (2) strengthening the position of labor, and (3) providing a greater social safety net.

MORE JOBS

One of the most notable programs of the Second New Deal was the **Works Progress Administration (WPA)**, which employed more than 8.5 million Americans before it closed in 1943. WPA workers built roads, dams, schools, subways, housing projects, and other federal projects. The WPA also sponsored cultural programs for

Works Progress Administration (WPA) New Deal agency whose workers built roads, dams, schools, subways, housing projects, and other federal projects; it also sponsored cultural programs for unemployed artists and writers

Wagner Act Legislation passed in July 1935, also known as the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA); strengthened the legal position of trade unions

Social Security Act Most far-reaching element of all 1930s legislation, passed in August 1935; intended to provide a "safety net" for citizens who could not financially support themselves

unemployed artists and writers, who worked on original plays and artworks, compiled historical records, wrote a series of guidebooks for tourists, and gave classes and performances to the public. In one of the most far-reaching WPA projects, the federal government hired historians and folklorists to interview former slaves about their journeys from slavery to freedom.

At the same time, Roosevelt established other agencies designed to help Americans cope with the continuing economic depression. In May 1935, the administration created the Resettlement Administration (RA), which provided assistance in relocating workers away from economically weak areas and funded flood control and reforestation projects. The National Youth Administration (NYA), founded in June 1935, provided work relief programs, job training, and part-time work for men and women ages sixteen to twenty-five, including high school and college students.

LABOR SUPPORT

Perhaps more significant than the creation of these jobs was Congress's strengthening, in July 1935, the legal position of trade unions with the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), also known as the **Wagner Act**. Even with the guarantees established under the NRA, unions had been vulnerable to court injunctions that prevented strikes. Plus, management had often refused to negotiate with them. The Wagner Act established a National Labor Relations Board to oversee industrial compliance and resolve employee grievances against management. In subsequent years, union membership grew dramatically (despite the unemployment rate), even among unskilled workers in the mining, steel, and automobile industries.

THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Along with creating jobs and supporting unionization efforts, a third aspect of the Second New Deal was the **Social Security Act**, passed in August 1935. This was probably the most far-reaching element of all 1930s legislation. Social Security was intended to provide a "safety net" for citizens who could not financially support themselves.

Different elements of the Social Security plan served different social needs. Social Security provided pensions to Americans age sixty-five and over. Unemployed people received assistance through a fund created by a payroll tax. Federal grants provided help for the disabled. Children of unwed mothers were covered under the Aid to Dependent Children Act (ADC), or "welfare." A federal program for national health insurance would have widened the social safety net even more, but Congress shelved the idea after complaints from the medical profession.

3 steps to Security IN YOUR OLD AGE

1 You FILL OUT THIS FORM now

2 Uncle Sam SETS UP YOUR SECURITY ACCOUNT AND GIVES YOU THIS IDENTIFICATION CARD

3 The Letter Carrier DELIVERS TO YOU AN OLD-AGE BENEFIT CHECK EVERY MONTH FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE BEGINNING WHEN YOU ARE 65 and STOP WORKING

WHO IS ELIGIBLE... EVERYBODY WORKING FOR SALARY OR WAGES (WITH ONLY A FEW EXCEPTIONS, SUCH AS AGRICULTURE, DOMESTIC SERVICE, AND GOVERNMENT WORK). APPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNTS ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH EMPLOYERS. IF YOU DO NOT GET ONE FROM YOUR EMPLOYER, ASK FOR ONE AT THE POST OFFICE.

HOW TO RETURN APPLICATION

1. HAND IT BACK TO YOUR EMPLOYER, IF
2. HAND IT TO ANY LABOR ORGANIZATION OF WHICH YOU ARE A MEMBER, OR
3. HAND IT TO YOUR LETTER CARRIER, OR
4. DELIVER IT TO LOCAL POST OFFICE, OR
5. MAIL IT IN A SEALED ENVELOPE, ADDRESSED, POSTMASTER, LOCAL.

DO IT NOW. NO POSTAGE NEEDED.

Social Security Board

INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED AT ANY POST OFFICE

Bettmann/Getty Images

>> Although retirement plans had existed in the industrialized countries of Europe for decades, they were new to the United States in the mid-1930s. This poster encourages the use of the new public benefit.

As a plan for social welfare, Social Security was cautious and limited in comparison to models in other nations. Germany, for example, had been putting many social safety net programs in place since the 1880s. But despite its limitations, in the United States, Social Security, particularly its old-age pension elements, proved to be the most popular and enduring of New Deal measures. Roosevelt himself said many times that the Social Security Act was the greatest legacy of his presidency.

ATTACKS ON THE WEALTHY AND LARGE CORPORATIONS

How did he pay for these increased programs and benefits? As he pushed these programs through Congress,

Roosevelt had observed the popularity of Huey Long's denunciations of big business and the rich. Hence, Roosevelt usurped Long's rhetoric and created a "soak the rich" tax reform plan (passed as the Revenue Act of 1935), which imposed steep income taxes (up to nearly 80 percent) on wealthy Americans and large corporations. The Public Utility Holding Company Act, passed the same year, placed rigorous political controls on utility companies and warned that if they did not offer good service at low cost to customers, they would be broken up.

THE NEW DEAL'S PEAK: 1935-1936

Congress passed a number of other New Deal measures as well, regulating specific industries, providing for further rural electrification, and carrying out additional farm reforms. This burst of political activity consolidated Roosevelt's reputation as a friend of the workingman and opponent of special privilege. All together, the passage of so many transformative laws was a testament to the growing expectation that the government would take responsibility for the social welfare of its citizens. This was a far cry from Hoover's volunteerism.

By mid-1936, Roosevelt's political successes had bestowed him with tremendous popularity with the public, even though the American economy had yet to substantially revive and some 80 percent of American newspapers (generally owned by Republicans) went on record as opposing his reelection. During that fall's presidential campaign, the Republicans nominated Alfred Landon of Kansas, who was considerably more liberal than his party. Meanwhile, Charles Coughlin attempted to get his followers to join up with Huey Long's and coalesce behind the new Union Party and its nominee, William Lemke.

In a landslide, Roosevelt won the election by 11 million votes, carrying every state except Maine and Vermont, which went to Landon. Lemke won fewer than a million votes, while the Socialist candidate, Norman Thomas, and the Communist candidate, Earl Browder, attracted barely a quarter of a million votes between them. Farmers and workers, who were pleased with the relief acts and the union protection, joined middle-class homeowners, who were bailed out by the mortgage protection laws, to support Roosevelt. The Democratic Party had more than three-quarters of the seats in both houses of Congress. In 1936, the New Deal appeared invincible.

22-3d Decline and Consolidation

After the election, the New Deal appeared to be at its height. But Roosevelt soon committed a series of political and economic errors that threatened some of the

most far-reaching elements of the New Deal. Thus, after 1936 the New Deal entered a period of consolidation, when its changes in culture, labor relations, and politics took firm root in American life.

COURT PACKING

In his second inaugural speech, Roosevelt declared an attack on standards of living that left “one-third of a nation . . . ill-housed, ill-clad, [and] ill-nourished.” Soon after, in February 1937, Roosevelt made what was for him an unusual blunder. Vexed by the Supreme Court’s decision against the NRA in the *Schechter* case, its overturning of the AAA in 1936, and its unfavorable decision in five of seven other cases testing New Deal laws, Roosevelt resolved to change the Court’s ideological makeup. The Constitution does not specify how many justices can sit on the Court, but by long-standing convention the number had been nine. Roosevelt now proposed laws that would allow him to appoint up to six new justices and would force judges to retire at age seventy. Given that the Court’s opinions reflected the Republican attitudes of the 1920s, Roosevelt felt the Court’s actions threatened American democracy in the 1930s. He felt he needed to fill the Court with supporters of the New Deal.

Congressional Democrats, arguing that Roosevelt had overreached, delayed considering this plan to “pack the Court.” Yet the need for the legislation seemed to diminish after March of 1937, when Justice Owen Roberts changed from his previous position and unexpectedly began voting to uphold New Deal laws, creating a 5-to-4 pro-New Deal majority on the Court. Some observers speculated that Roberts had changed his mind to protect the principle of a nine-judge Court. In any event, during the next four years, Roosevelt had the chance to appoint seven new justices, allowing him to change the political tilt of the Court.

But the Court-packing episode cost Roosevelt some popular support from Americans who were cautiously monitoring the rise of authoritarian dictators in Europe. New economic problems compounded the damage. In early 1937, satisfied that the nation was well on its way to recovery, Roosevelt cut enrollment in the WPA, and the Federal Reserve Bank raised interest rates in order to fight inflation. As a result, production slowed, unemployment increased, and critics declared a “Roosevelt recession.”

That fall, when Roosevelt called Congress into special session to pass emergency relief legislation, Congress failed to act on his proposals. The Democratic Party suffered losses in the 1938 election, and congressional conservatives of both parties joined together in order to block future New Deal measures.

CONSOLIDATION

But all was not lost for FDR. The Supreme Court’s new-found support of New Deal programs actually strengthened the New Deal and ensured that its reforms would last several decades. Also, the expenditures that were passed in reaction to the “Roosevelt recession” of 1937, although not as dramatic as Roosevelt had hoped, greatly eased the economic decline. They also lent new legitimacy to the idea that government spending could help induce economic recovery. This demonstrated a growing acceptance of the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who had long advocated that governments should engage in deficit spending in order to stimulate a depressed economy. His ideas have collectively come to be called **Keynesianism**.

22-4 THE EFFECTS OF THE NEW DEAL

Although the major political accomplishments of the New Deal had ended by the late 1930s, the programs that had already become law continued to influence American politics, society, and culture for the remainder of the twentieth century. The New Deal thus effected changes in the American landscape more far-reaching than just economics or legislation. Most especially, they affected culture, crime, labor, politics, race relations, and minorities.

CULTURE

The New Deal included a number of programs that examined social realities that Hollywood and other cultural outlets often ignored. Problems such as poverty, crime, prostitution, and suicide had always existed in America, but New Deal cultural programs focused on their effects and placed them in the center of American social consciousness. For example, the Resettlement Administration hired photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn (Lange’s photographs are represented in this chapter) to record the lives of Americans struggling through the Great Depression. By documenting the breadlines, migrant camps, and withered farms of the

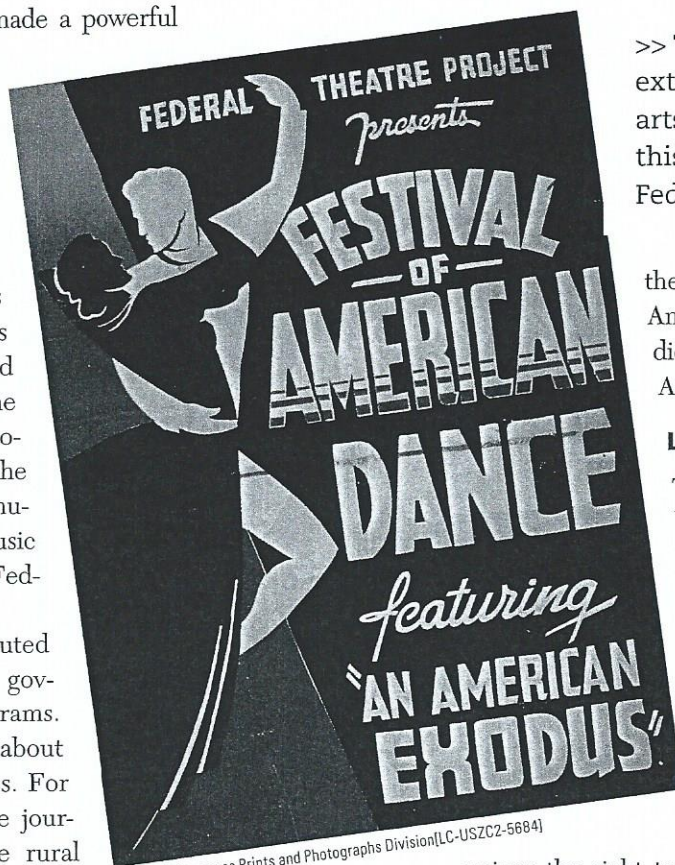
Keynesianism The belief that governments should engage in deficit spending in order to stimulate a depressed economy, premised on the economic thought of British economist John Maynard Keynes, upon which FDR in particular based his actions

era, these photographers made a powerful indictment of economic inequality. At the same time, the WPA hired artists to create murals, sculptures, and other artworks in post offices, airports, and schools. The best known of these works depicted American farmers and workers and celebrated the working classes. The federal government also provided funds for actors in the Federal Theatre Project, musicians in the Federal Music Project, and writers in the Federal Writers' Project.

Other writers contributed to the aesthetic of these government cultural programs. Magazines ran stories about Great Depression refugees. For instance, *Fortune* sent the journalist James Agee to the rural Deep South to write about poverty there. From his researches, he wrote a book that quickly became a classic: *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a dramatic tale of poverty that was made even more powerful by the stark photographs of Walker Evans. Rural poverty became a way to symbolize the experience of the Great Depression as a whole, as in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. This novel showed a newly responsive federal government sheltering migrants in a work camp and providing the poorest of Americans with decent living conditions.

CRIME

The New Deal also initiated a war on crime in an effort to snuff out the gangster-ridden crime syndicates of the 1920s. Spearheaded by U.S. Attorney General Homer Cummings and Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) J. Edgar Hoover, this initiative strengthened the FBI and led to the arrest and/or execution of notable American criminals Bonnie and Clyde (in 1934, for armed robbery), Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd (in 1934, for armed robbery and murder), and John Dillinger (in 1934, alleged leader of the violent Dillinger gang). These criminals had become something like folk heroes in the 1930s, both for their seeming invincibility and for their rebuke of the establishment. Removing



>> The New Deal extended into the arts as well, including this production of the Federal Theatre Project.

them from the scene assured Americans that the law would dictate right and wrong in America.

LABOR

The New Deal proved a huge boon for the American labor movement as well. Previous economic downturns had usually increased union rolls, but they had also made union members vulnerable to layoffs and replacement by strikebreakers. But after the New Deal, the NLRA guaranteed

unions the right to organize and negotiate with their employers. In 1935, a new, broadly based trade union, eventually to be called the **Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)**, began recruiting unskilled men and women on a large scale, particularly in the mining and clothing industries. Under the able leadership of John L. Lewis and advocating a "culture of unity" to bring workers together despite racial or ethnic differences, the CIO rapidly became the nation's most powerful labor union.

Greater size engendered greater militancy. On December 31, 1936, for example, workers at General Motors (GM), led by Walter Reuther, went on strike in Flint, Michigan, demanding better pay, better working conditions, and recognition of their union, the United Auto Workers (UAW). Rather than simply not show up to work, as previous generations of strikers had done, GM workers staged a **sit-down strike**, locking themselves in the factory so that strikebreakers could not take their places. Although Roosevelt was openly critical of the

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Broadly based trade union that recruited unskilled men and women on a large scale, particularly in the mining and clothing industries

sit-down strike Action in which workers stop working and lock themselves in the factory so that strikebreakers cannot take their places



>> Public support for American bank robbers Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, popularly known as Bonnie and Clyde, pictured here, demonstrated how the economic crisis prompted many people to root for and romanticize criminals.

strike, he refused to use federal troops to stop it. Roosevelt believed that industrial peace could be achieved only by integrating unions into the economy. Ultimately, GM gave in and negotiated.

Not all strikes concluded so peacefully. For example, on Memorial Day 1937, strikebreaking police fired on a line of picketers in front of the Republic Steel plant in Chicago, killing ten workers. Roosevelt stepped in and helped convince the steel factory and mine owners to come to terms with unions. Such successes led to a rapid rise in unionization. By the 1950s, more than 20 percent of all American workers belonged to unions.

POLITICS

The New Deal also dramatically altered American politics. Many workers revered Roosevelt, and his

photograph became an ubiquitous fixture in urban households and small businesses.

The result was a fundamental realignment of American politics. “New immigrant” Catholic and Jewish voters, many of whom had in the past been alienated by the Democratic Party’s tilt toward Southern conservatives, now flocked to the party. Democratic Southern whites, who would never countenance joining the Republican Party, which, after all, was the party of Lincoln, joined them. So did a large majority of African Americans, whose gratitude for New Deal relief programs led them to abandon the Republican Party in favor of the Democrats. The Democrats thus made a national majority by fashioning the alliance of the “producing” classes (farmers and laborers) they had dreamed of since the Populist movement.

CONTINUED SEGREGATION

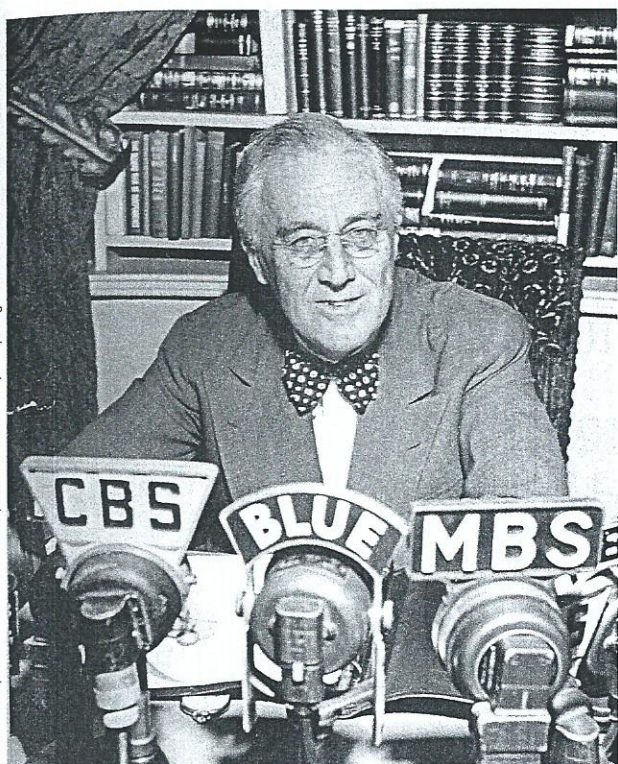
The successes of this New Deal coalition set in motion fundamental changes in the Democratic Party itself. The support of African Americans reflected the fact that some New Deal programs seemed to combat discrimination. The CCC, for example, briefly housed both black and white workers together. In addition, a number of black officials appointed to government posts assembled as an informal **Black Cabinet** to discuss African American issues, although FDR did not appoint a single black person to a cabinet position. Roosevelt relied especially heavily on his powerful wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, to serve as a conduit to the African American community.

Nevertheless, opposition to ending desegregation came from many quarters: labor unions, for example, consistently excluded African Americans from their ranks and prevented the inclusion of nondiscrimination clauses in the Wagner Act. At the same time, the Roosevelt administration often gave in to segregationist demands in the 1930s, meaning that many of the key benefits of the New Deal were denied to America’s black population. The doling out of benefits primarily to America’s white population has led one historian to label the New Deal as a time “when affirmative action was white.”

THE INDIAN NEW DEAL

At the same time, Roosevelt sought to address the concerns of other minorities. Shortly after his election in 1932, Roosevelt appointed John Collier as commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1924, Congress granted American citizenship to all Indians, an event that was thought to be the culmination in the perpetual attempt to incorporate Indians into American society.

Black Cabinet Informal group of black officials appointed to government posts who discussed African American issues with FDR



>> Although Roosevelt had an aristocratic background, the warmth of his conversational radio addresses, or “fireside chats,” made many Americans feel they had a personal connection with the man.

Collier took a different perspective. He sought to restore Indian culture and heritage and to regenerate tribal autonomy. He used a variety of New Deal agencies to create an Indian Civil Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration. He also lobbied for the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which authorized the acquisition of land for reservations and provided special federal appropriations for schools and other forms of Indian self-government. Collier faced stern critics, including assimilated Indians who tried to discredit his ideas as communist plots against America. But for the most part, his ideas began a new chapter in American Indian history, redirecting the federal government’s efforts from forcing assimilation to respecting self-reliance.

WOMEN

Women were also of course greatly affected by the New Deal. During the Great Depression, increasing numbers of women went to work. While economically

valuable, these efforts to support their families provoked hostility from many Americans who thought women workers were taking jobs away from men. Indeed, some scholars have seen within the Great Depression a “crisis of manhood,” where men were unable to feed and clothe their families and where women had to come in to shoulder these responsibilities. In this critical mold, many New Deal policies addressed women as mothers rather than as workers, creating jobs programs for men, for instance, while providing support for women primarily in their domestic roles. In the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, for instance, single mothers were eligible for aid only after they endured means and morals testing, testifying that they were not engaging in and benefiting from immoral behavior (such as premarital promiscuity). Similarly, many of the programs targeting women became derided as temporary relief efforts (such as welfare) rather than full-scale entitlements earned by workers (such as Social Security and unemployment insurance). In the words of one historian, women were “pitied but not entitled” to New Deal benefits.



Bettmann/Getty Images

>> FDR often used his wife Eleanor to reach out to the African American community. Here Eleanor Roosevelt awards the NAACP Spingarn Medal to singer Marian Anderson.

>LOOKING AHEAD...

The New Deal did not end the Great Depression. Throughout the 1930s, nearly 10 million men remained unemployed. What the New Deal did was bring the federal government closer to the lives of ordinary citizens than ever before, reshaping national politics and culture with a host of relief, recovery, and reform initiatives. In so doing, it transformed the way Americans thought about their government, leading them to assume that the government was there to prevent them from going without food or shelter, to assure them that they would not be helpless during times of unemployment, and to provide financial security when they got old. This change also inspired a movement to oppose the New Deal initiatives, although this “small-government” coalition would not mature until later in the twentieth century.

Emboldened by his successes, in 1940 Roosevelt decided to run for an unprecedented third term as president. Just as he had been willing to override tradition in his Supreme Court packing plan, so now he overrode the tradition established by George Washington of holding the presidency for no more than two terms. Running against Republican nominee Wendell Willkie, FDR urged voters not to “switch horses in mid-stream.” Americans overwhelmingly responded, voting him to a third term

as president. With the 1940 election, the nation left the problems of the 1930s behind and attempted to gain strength to meet the challenges posed by a world at war. And it is to that world conflict that we now turn.

STUDY TOOLS 22

READY TO STUDY? IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN:

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ONLINE AT WWW.CENGAGEBRAIN.COM, YOU CAN:

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- ☐ Quiz yourself on key concepts.
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- ☐ Read more on the Scottsboro Trial, including several primary sources.
- ☐ Read Roosevelt’s inaugural speech.

CH 22 TIMELINE

- ▶ **1929–1933** National GDP declines from \$103.1 to \$58 billion; 9,000 banks go bankrupt.
- ▶ **1930** Hawley-Smoot Tariff raises prices on imports, deepens international depression.
- ▶ **1931** Nine African American boys convicted on rape charges in Scottsboro, Alabama.

What Else Was Happening

Vannevar Bush at MIT invents the “differential analyzer,” or analog computer.

Japan, seeking raw materials for its own industrial growth, invades Manchuria, bringing Japan and China into conflict that would erupt into war in 1937.