

American Fiction in the 20th Century



F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,
and America in the 1920s

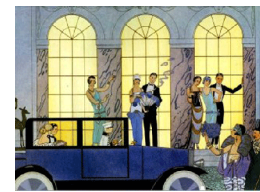
Lecture on Historical & Cultural Background



The Great Gatsby and the 1920s

How to Cite this Lecture:

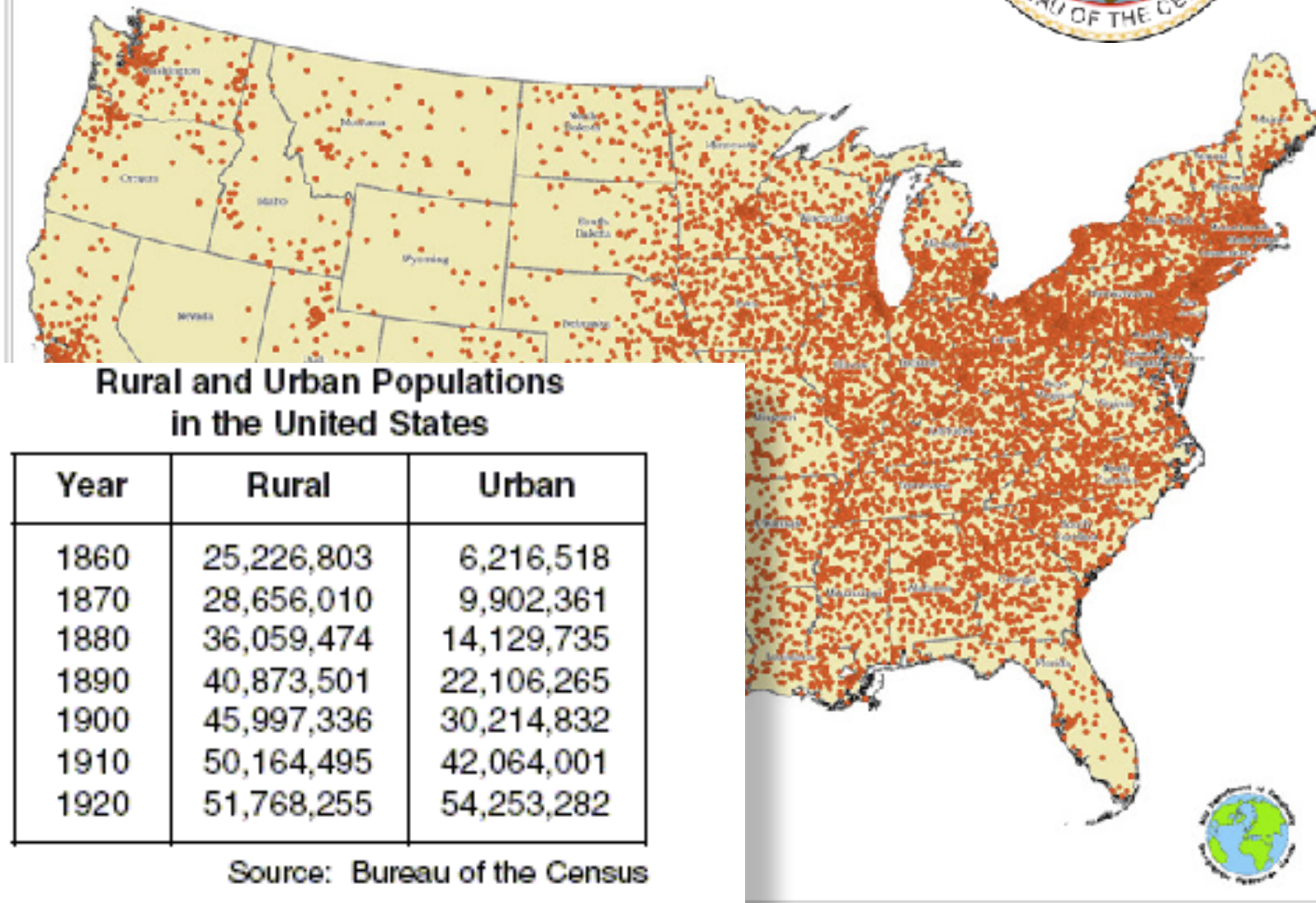
Armstrong, Christopher J. "*Historical and Cultural Background.*" *Chukyo University, American Literature A*, 19 April 2019.



The Roaring Twenties in the US



*Conterminus United States
Population 1920*



US Population, 1920:
about 106 million
people

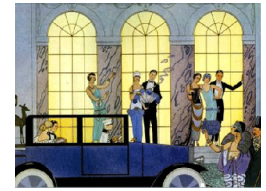
Top 5 States (millions):
1. New York 10.3
2. Pennsylvania 8.7
3. Illinois 6.5
4. Ohio 5.7
5. Texas 4.6

Minnesota 2.3

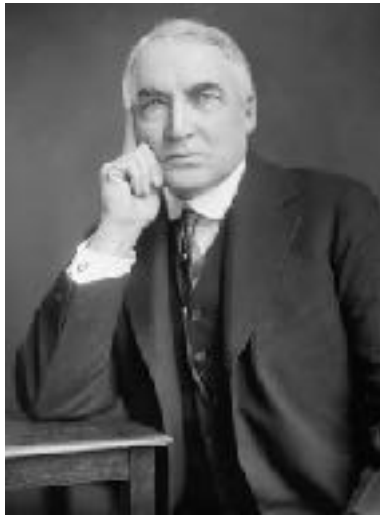
Population density of the US, 1920

1 point = 10,000 people

(Source: Geographic Resources Center & Missouri Census Data Center)



The Roaring Twenties in the US



Warren G. Harding
(1865-1923)
Republican
President from 1921-1923



John Calvin Coolidge, Jr.
(1872-1933)
Republican
President from 1923-1929



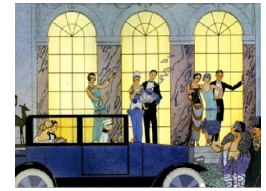
Herbert Clark Hoover
(1876-1964)
Republican
President from 1929-1933



Pro-business presidents
Big business = national interest
Non-intervention in economy

“The business of America is business”
(Coolidge)

“What we need in America is less
government in business and more
business in government” (Harding)



The US and World War I

“The Great War” 1914-1918

Germany vs England, France

Fighting focused in western
Europe

60 million soldiers of England,
France, Germany, and the US:

About 35 million casualties,
including about 17 million military
and civilian deaths

American participation, 1917-18:
Submarine attacks, German
alliance with Mexico



World War I recruiting
poster: “For Liberty,
Civilization and
Humanity” (c. 1917)



The Roaring Twenties in the US: The Illusion of Prosperity

High wartime production: Economic boom in US

Increased production of goods and low unemployment.

U.S. appeared prosperous: problems

(1) Low wages / income

Most families lived below the poverty level (about \$2500 per year): 60% below \$2000, 40% below 1500.

(2) Income among minorities and farmers: lowest.

(3) Farmers could not repay loans: Thousands of banks failed during the decade. Result: Small businesses failed because they could not get loans.

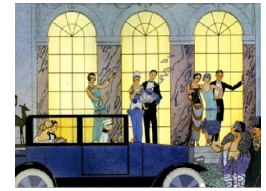


Production of cars tripled during the 1920s



Process of Maple Valley Historical Society

Farmers experienced difficulties during the 1920s



The Roaring Twenties in the US: The Illusion of Prosperity

Americans borrowed money to buy goods: cars, fridges, homes.

Many people had large debts.

(1) Debt led to reduced spending.

(2) Workers changed jobs often or lost jobs.

(3) Factories produced goods at a high rate. But many people could not afford to buy.



Americans wanted to buy goods on display in department store windows. Installment credit, introduced by General Motors in 1919.

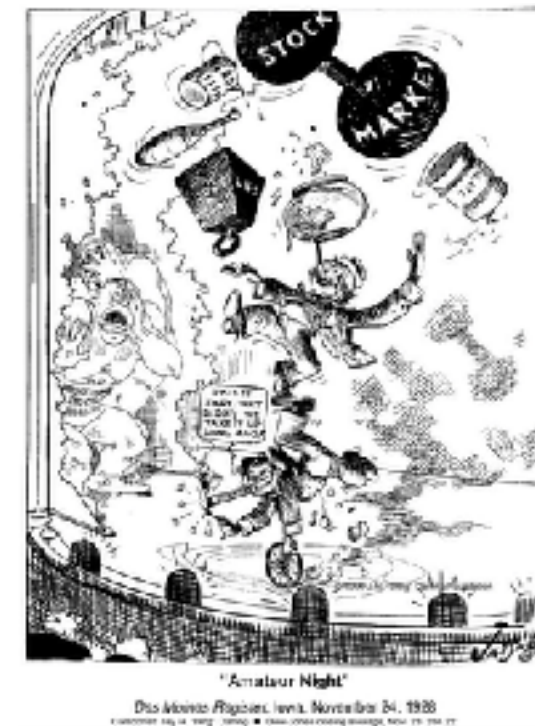
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Stock Market Trading and the “Bond Business”

After W.W.I., trading on the stock market was opened to the general public.

Many people participated in the market, sometimes buying stocks and bonds on loan.

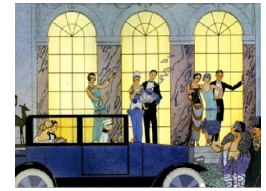


Risky business:
Investing in the stock market had dangers

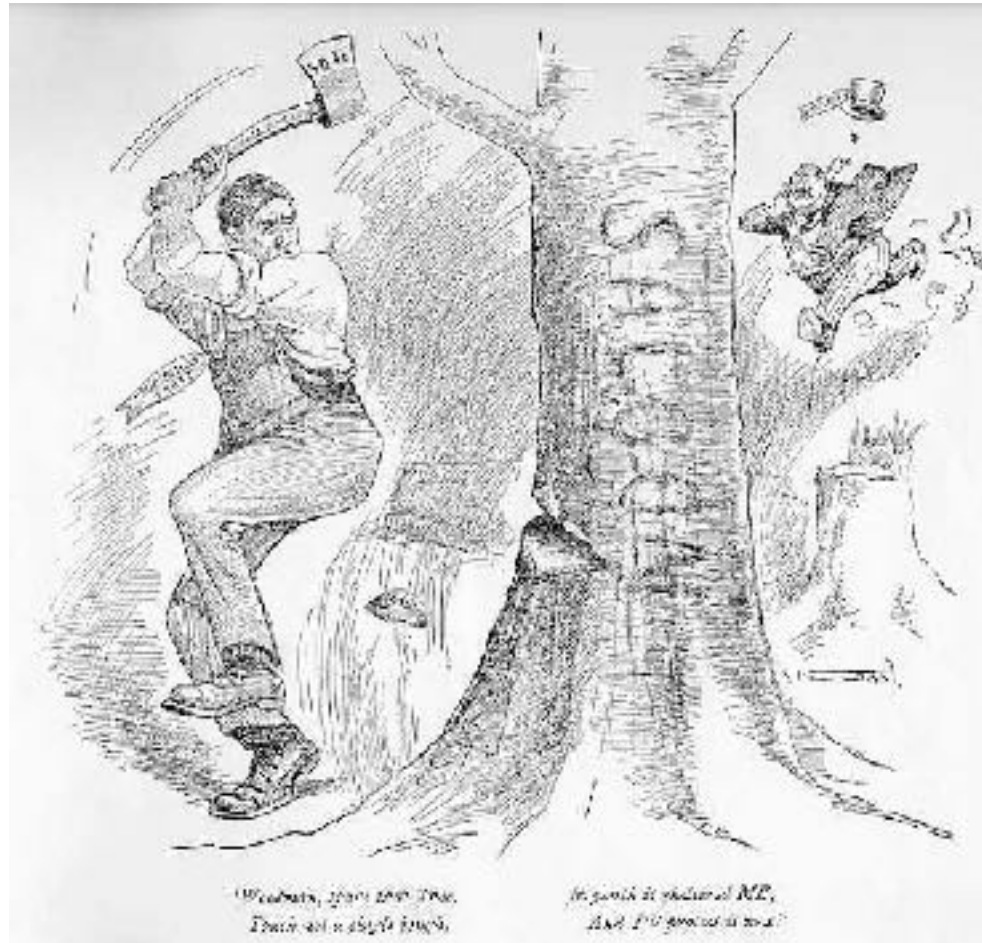


Bonds: A loan of money to a company over a period of years. Buyer receives fixed rate of interest yearly.

Stocks:	Purchase of shares in a company with regular payment (or return) to investors: (1) <i>Common stocks</i> (2) <i>Preferred stocks</i> .	
Common Stocks	Rate based on company performance	Vote on company leadership, direction
Preferred Stocks	Fixed rate of return	None



Some Important Events of the 1920s



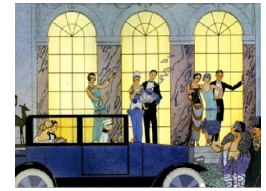
18th Amendment (Volstead Act): Prohibition of alcohol

Source: http://www.umich.edu/~eng217/student_projects/nkazmers/prohibition1.html

18th and 19th Amendments to the Constitution take effect in January of 1920.



19th Amendment:
Voting rights for
women



Some Important Events of the 1920s



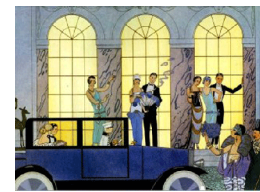
Source: *History of Women's Fashion, 1920-1929*

<http://glamourdaze.com/history-of-womens-fashion/1920-to-1929>

Changing Women's Fashions, 1900s vs 1920s



Lighter fabrics
Greater freedom of
movement
Greater visibility of the
female body



Some Important Events of the 1920s



BRUSHBACK



CHARLESTON



DUTCH BOB



ETON CROP



WIND-BLOWN

Women's Hairstyles



FRIZZ BOB



KISS CURL



ORCHID BOB



SHINGLE



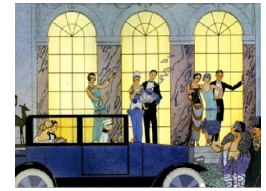
POODLE BOB

ICONIC HAIRSTYLES OF THE 1920S - GLAMOURDAZE.COM

<http://www.photodetective.co.uk/1920-Index.html>

Source: *History of Women's Fashion, 1920-1929*

<http://glamourdaze.com/history-of-womens-fashion/1920-to-1929>



Some Important Events of the 1920s



Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) popularizes
“the flapper”: “lovely,
expensive, and about nineteen”

"a giddy, attractive and slightly unconventional young thing who, in [H. L.] Mencken's words, 'was a somewhat foolish girl, full of wild surmises and inclined to revolt against the precepts and admonitions of her elders.'"



Wearing make-up
becomes fashionable
and respectable in
the 1920s. Cosmetic
industry booms.



Beach policeman: Some areas
have regulations about the
amount leg visible with the
new bathing suits

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Some Important Events of the 1920s



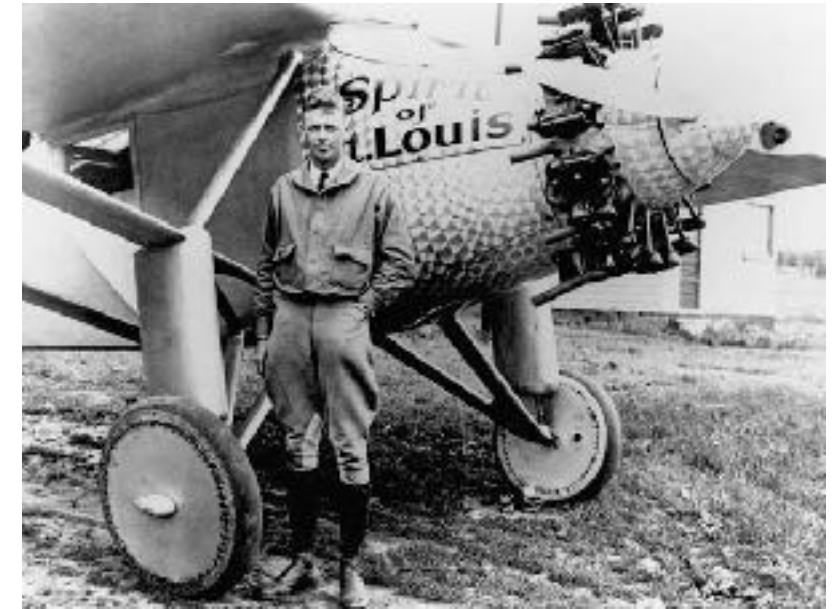
First “talking picture”
released: *The Jazz Singer*,
starring Al Jolson (1927)



KDKA Pittsburgh begins
first radio broadcasts in US,
1920

Ford Model A goes on sale
1927: base model US\$385,
over 1.5 million sold by 1929

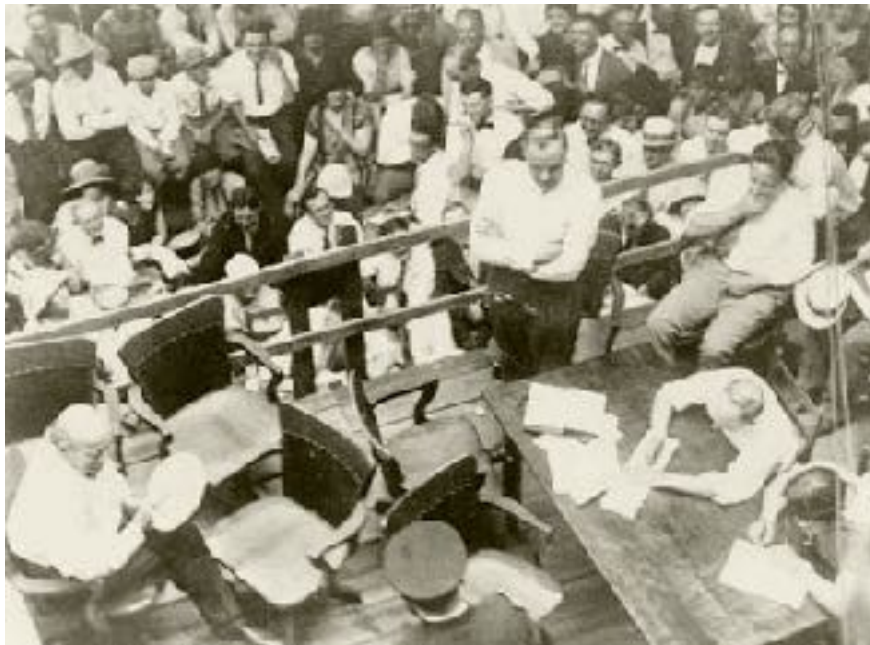
Inventions, Innovations and Accomplishments



Charles Lindbergh flies from
NY to Paris, 1927



Some Important Events of the 1920s



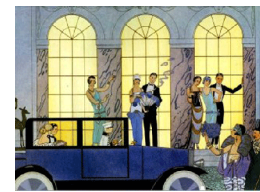
Scopes Trial in Tennessee,
1925: High school teacher
charged with illegally
teaching the theory of
evolution.

See: [http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/
projects/ftrials/scopes/evolut.htm](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/evolut.htm)



Emergency Quota Act limits
immigration to 3% of each foreign
nationality in the US, 1921. 1924:
reduced to 2%; Japanese immigration
stopped.

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New York in the 1920s



New York Skyline and Times Square, 1920s



Population: almost 6 million in the 1920s

Center of business, culture and entertainment, manufacturing

NYC Factories produced almost 10% of the nation's goods



Coney Island, beach and amusement park