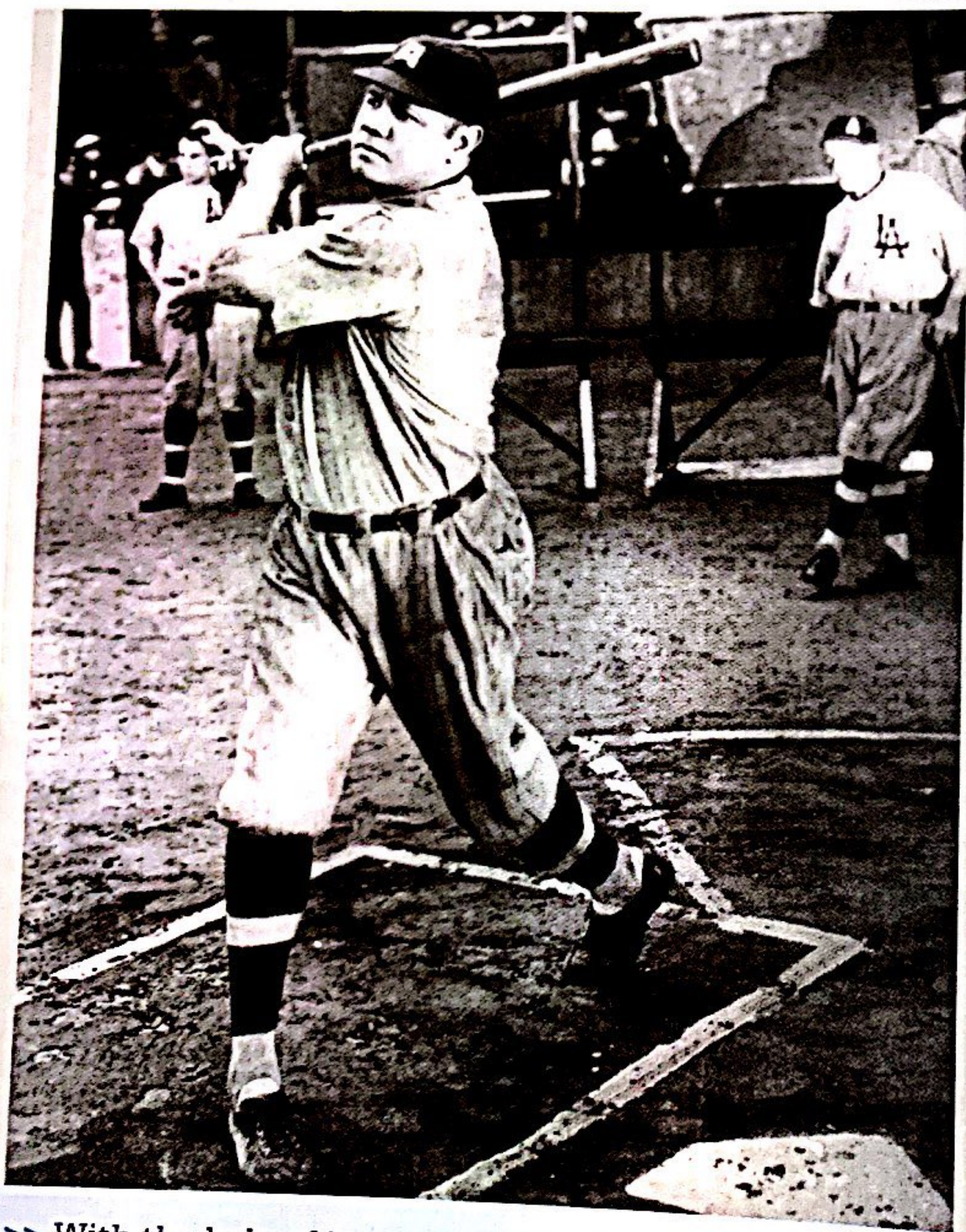


As the popularity of country-western music, one positive impact was that the uniquely American symbol of the cowboy and life on the western frontier was mythologized throughout the country. A negative impact was that stereotypes of westerners and country-dwellers sometimes also spread. Recordings helped bring country and western music from the South and West to the North and East, while pop tunes from New York City's Tin Pan Alley traveled in the other direction, creating national markets for different genres of music. As they listened to the same songs, Americans also learned the same fashionable dances, from the fox trot to the Charleston.

? IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS How did films like *The Immigrant* reflect the social issues of the time?

American Role Models

Hollywood's chief rivals for the creation of heroes were the nation's baseball parks, football fields, and boxing rings. Before the 1920s, there were relatively few nationally famous athletes, such as boxer John L. Sullivan and all-around athlete Jim Thorpe. Most sports stars were local heroes. This changed by the 1920s, often called the Golden Age of Sports.



>> With the help of increased newspaper readership and radio coverage, sports figures like Babe Ruth became national heroes and symbols of American culture.

to increased newspaper coverage, every major sport boasted nationally famous performers. Perhaps the leading sports hero was baseball home-run king **Babe Ruth**. Others included Red Grange in football, Jack Dempsey in boxing, Bobby Jones in golf, and Bill Tilden in tennis. Women athletes, too, contributed to the hero culture, from tennis player Helen Wills to Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel.

Why did athletes reach such heights of popularity? Part of the answer is that the Golden Age of Sports was also the Golden Age of the Sportswriter. Such journalists as Damon Runyon and Grantland Rice captured the excitement of sports events in their colorful prose. Turning the finest athletes into seemingly immortal gods, the sportswriters nicknamed Babe Ruth the Sultan of Swat and dubbed Notre Dame's football backfield the Four Horsemen.

The other part of the answer is that the decade needed heroes. World War I had shattered many Americans' faith in progress, making the world seem cheap and flawed. Athletic heroes reassured Americans that people were capable of great feats and lofty dreams. If in our heroes we see our idealized selves, the sports heroes of the 1920s gave Americans a sense of hope.

A Transatlantic Flight Even the biggest sports stars could not match the adoration given to aviators. In the 1920s, the airline industry was in its infancy. Flying aces had played a role in World War I, and a few small domestic airlines carried mail and passengers. But airplanes were still a novel sight to most Americans. The pilot became a new breed of hero, a romantic daredevil who risked death with every flight.

As aviation technology improved by leaps and bounds in the early twentieth century, many dreamed of flying across the Atlantic Ocean. These dreams were made possible by innovators such as Glenn Curtiss, who designed an aircraft engine capable of just such a flight. As flight crews were successfully flying longer distances across the Atlantic, daring aviators wondered if they could accomplish the same feat alone.

Then aviator **Charles Lindbergh** attempted the long journey alone. In May 1927, he took off from Long Island, New York, in his tiny single-engine plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and headed east—to Paris, France. Other pilots had flown across the Atlantic Ocean before, but Lindbergh was the first to do it solo and non-stop. The flight took more than 33 hours, and the lone pilot had to stay awake the entire time. He also recalled, "In the daytime I knew where I was going, but

When Lindbergh landed in Paris, he became an instant media celebrity, dubbed Lucky Lindy and the Lone Eagle. The radio reported on his landing, and movie newsreels showed his triumphant return home. The modest young man from the Midwest made an impact as the greatest hero of his time.

IDENTIFY For what accomplishment was Charles Lindbergh known?

The Role of Women Changes

In a 1931 book, *Only Yesterday*, journalist Frederick Lewis Allen attempted to make sense of the fads, heroes, and problems of the 1920s. Featured prominently was the New Woman. During the decade, many women challenged political, economic, social, and educational boundaries to prove that their role was as vital outside the home as inside it. Women's roles began to change in many ways, caused by the overall changes that society was undergoing, as well as the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. The effect of these changes was that women made more and more contributions to shape American culture.

Flappers Push Back Against Expectations During the Victorian Age of the late 1800s and early 1900s, middle-class women had been expected to center their lives on the home and family. The New Woman of the 1920s, noted Allen, was more liberated. She wore dresses with shorter hemlines, put on more makeup, danced to the latest crazes, and generally assumed that she had the same political and social rights as any man.

Popular magazines, sociological studies, novels, and movies all echoed Allen's observations. The rejection of Victorian morality seemed so total and the New Woman so novel that the change amounted to a "revolution in manners and morals." The symbol of all these changes was the **flapper**, a young woman with short skirts and rouged cheeks who had her hair cropped close in a style known as a bob.

There was only a germ of truth in the various observations. The Victorian code of separate spheres for men and women was disappearing but not as rapidly or as completely as Allen indicated. The flapper was undoubtedly more publicized than imitated. Still, the image of the flapper underscores an important aspect of the decade. Not all women aspired to be flappers, but many wanted more control over their lives—and got it.



>> The individualism and modernism of the early 1920s prompted many women to see themselves as equals to men, deserving the same political and social rights.

Women's Political Rights The great fight for suffrage had been won with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Soon women looked for a way to use their political rights to make an impact. But what was the next step? Some groups, such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association, called on women to work in reform movements, run for office, or fight for laws to protect women and children in the workplace. Some women had success in public life. In 1925, Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming and Miriam Ferguson of Texas became the first women to take office as elected state governors.

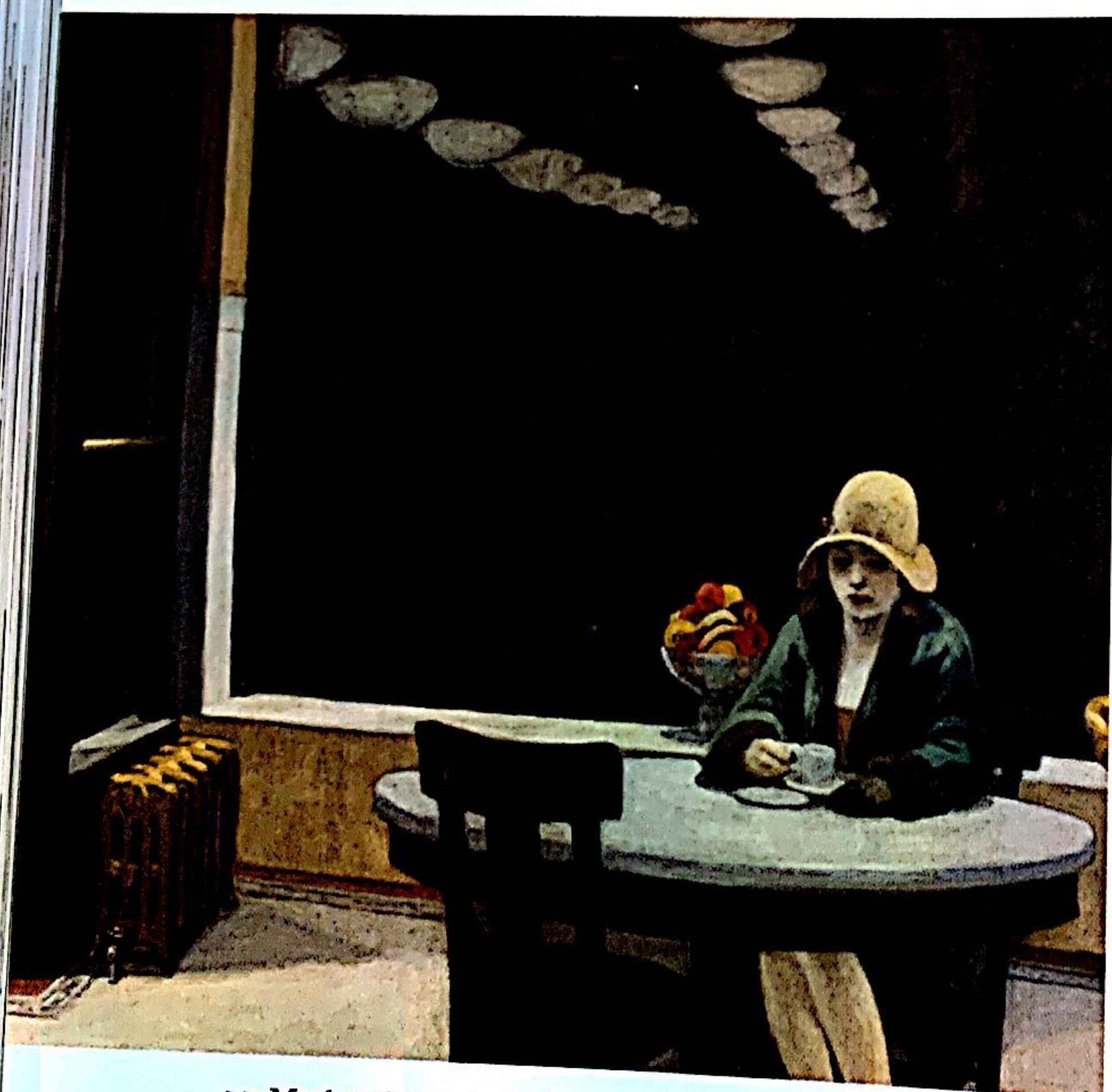
The National Women's Party took a more militant position, demanding complete economic, social, and political equality with men. Their primary goal was the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment. Many women, though, believed that a new constitutional amendment was premature. They set more achievable goals and made significant strides in employment. The efforts of these political organizations and women elected to public office redefined the role of women in American culture and opened doors through which others would walk in the decades to come. Although most working women continued to toil in domestic service and manufacturing, others moved into clerical, sales, and management positions. Women also won

jobs in journalism, aviation, banking, and the legal and medical professions.

Life at Home Changes Perhaps the most widespread revolution taking place in women's lives was a quiet one. During the decade, women tended to live longer, marry later, and have fewer children, freeing their time to pursue other interests. Some entered the workforce, others devoted more time to charitable work, and still others joined clubs that discussed books and ideas. All these pursuits enlarged the intellectual world of women.

The consumer economy of the 1920s benefited women. Electric vacuum cleaners and irons took some of the labor and drudgery out of household chores. Of course, not all women shared in the blessings of technology. Many homes in rural America had no access to electricity. For women in these regions, household labor continued to involve intense, even painful, work. They drew and carried water from wells, heated irons on stoves, and washed clothes by hand. Here again, the split between urban and rural Americans was distinct.

? RECALL Why would many who advocated for women's political equality have thought 1925 was a significant year?



>> Modernist painters like Edward Hopper expressed their reservations about the progress of civilization.
Evaluate Sources What themes does Hopper's 1927 painting "Automat" express?

 **Interactive Chart**

Social and Cultural Changes Reflected in Art and Literature

No area of American life, however, reflected the impact of World War I more than literature and the arts. The war altered the way writers and artists viewed the world, changed the way they approached their craft, and inspired them to experiment with new forms and fresh ideas.

Postwar Uncertainty During the Victorian era, most poets and novelists had expressed a belief in progress, placing boundless faith in human potential. But World War I called the notion of progress into question.

How could a society ruled by the idea of progress embark on a war that killed millions of people, destroyed monuments of civilization, and left survivors hungry, homeless, and hopeless? This was not an action of a rational people, a new generation of writers argued, but the irrational exploits of civilization without a sense of direction.

This pessimistic, skeptical worldview sparked an artistic movement known as modernism. Modernism in both art and literature to some extent also reflected some of the issues and characteristics of American society in the 1920s, from the renewed interest in new technology to the uncertainty of many in a rapidly changing world.

The theories of Jewish-Austrian psychologist **Sigmund Freud** (SIHG muhnd froid) also contributed to literary and artistic modernism. Freud argued that much of human behavior is driven not by rational thought but by unconscious desires. To live in society, people learn to suppress these desires. But the tension between outward behavior and the subconscious, said Freud, could lead to mental and even physical illness. Freud's theories led writers and artists to explore the subconscious mind.

Modern Art Moves in New Directions Modernism clashed head-on with traditionalism most dramatically in the field of modern art. Since the late 1800s, European painters had led the way in seeking a fresh visual idiom, or language. They moved away from representational paintings that simply reproduced real life and experimented with more abstract styles.

Most Americans got their first real glimpse of the new European approach at a major art show at New York's 69th Infantry Regimental Armory in 1913. Traditionalists were outraged by the Armory Show, and Theodore Roosevelt said that most of it represented the "lunatic fringe" of the art world. But many American painters and sculptors were inspired by the bold new styles. They began their own search for artistic

honesty in abstract patterns. In the 1920s, paintings by Edward Hopper, Man Ray, Joseph Stella, and Georgia O'Keeffe demonstrated the richness and varied styles of American artists. At the same time, the works of artists such as Archibald Motley and William H. Johnson portrayed African American perspectives on modern life.

Postwar American Literature Flowers American writers of the 1920s are often referred to as the "**Lost Generation**" because they no longer had faith in the cultural guideposts of the Victorian era. But many were inspired by their "lost" condition to search for new truths and fresh ways of expressing those truths. Never in American history had one decade seen the emergence of so many great literary talents. A list of writers who rose to distinction in the 1920s includes F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Eugene O'Neill, and T. S. Eliot. Each of these writers remains today on any list of distinguished American authors.

Novelist **F. Scott Fitzgerald** explored the reality of the American dream of wealth, success, and emotional fulfillment. In *This Side of Paradise*, he wrote that his generation had "grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, and all faiths in man shaken." In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), his most accomplished work, Fitzgerald showed the American dream ending in nightmare.

In the novel, through hard work and careful planning, James Gatz re-creates himself as Jay Gatsby, a successful tycoon. Gatsby fills his home with wild parties, dancing, bootleg liquor, and endless activity:

In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another. By seven o'clock the orchestra had arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones. . . . People were not invited—they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

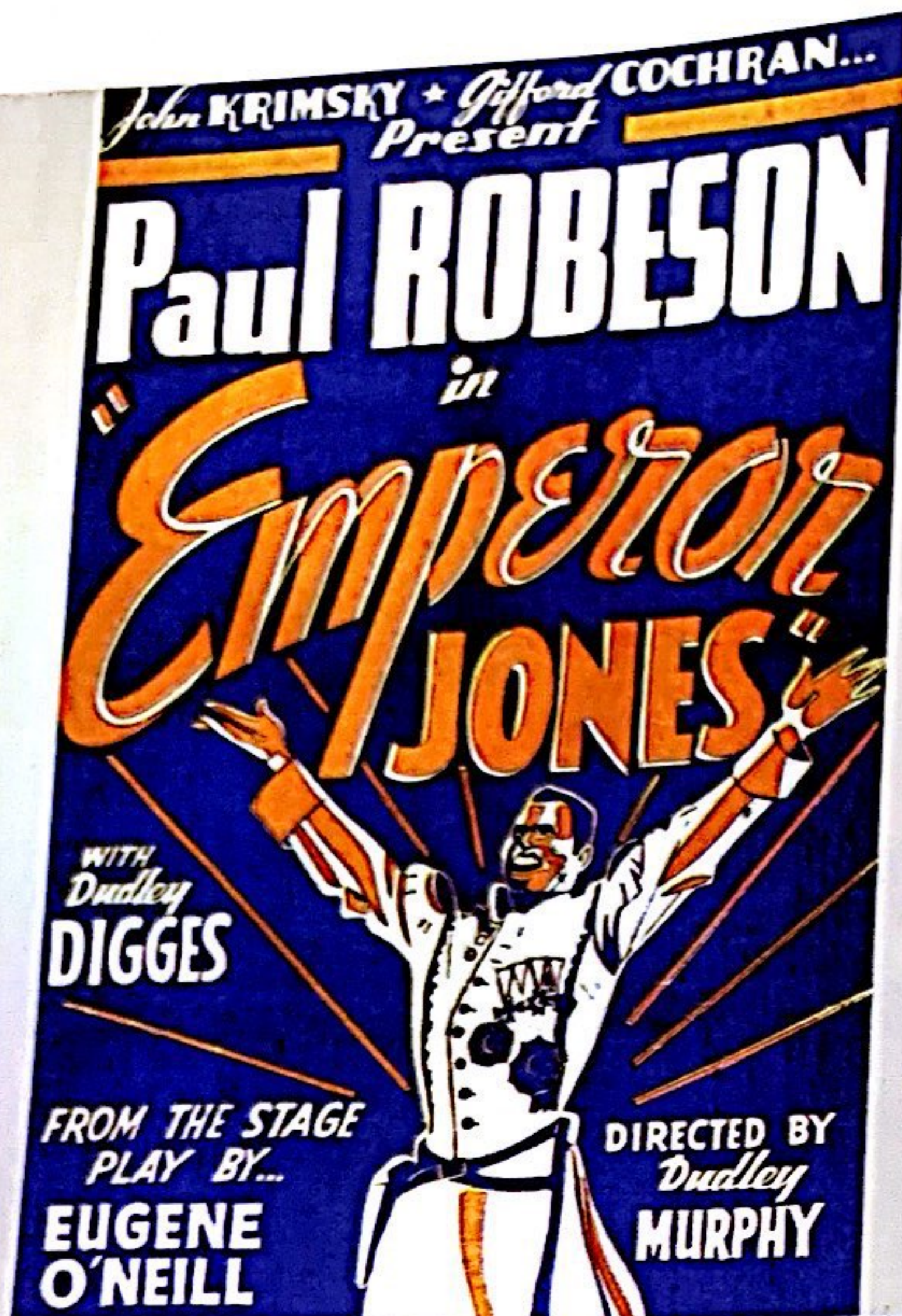


>> American writers F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda, visited the French Riviera often in the 1920s. In many ways, their turbulent life together mirrored Fitzgerald's stories of striving and tragedy.

But in the end, *Gatsby* is destroyed by the very things he hoped to achieve. His lofty dreams end in a violent, meaningless death.

Fitzgerald's fellow novelist and good friend **Ernest Hemingway** explored similar themes but in a new idiom. Hemingway felt betrayed, not only by the American dream, but also by literary language itself. In *A Farewell to Arms*, his 1929 novel about World War I, Hemingway's narrator says:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice. . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of



>> *The Emperor Jones* was Eugene O'Neill's initial attempt at expressionism. Starring Paul Robeson, it was the first play on Broadway with a racially integrated cast.

rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

—Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*

In his short stories and novels, Hemingway worked to develop a writing style that reflected his insights. He wrote in unadorned sentences, stripped of vague adjectives and adverbs. He created a style that was as concrete and as powerful as a rifle shot.

Influenced by Freud, other writers explored the subconscious mind. Playwright Eugene O'Neill experimented with techniques that put the subconscious right on stage. In *The Emperor Jones*, the title character gets lost in a jungle and is attacked by imaginary beings called Little Formless Fears. In *Strange Interlude*, characters turn away from their conversations with other people on stage and speak their thoughts directly to the audience.

Certainly, many poets and novelists of the decade were disillusioned. Like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, they wrestled with the meaning of the war and life itself. But in the end, their efforts resulted in the creation of literary masterpieces, not worthless products of aimless despair.

? CHECK UNDERSTANDING What themes did F. Scott Fitzgerald include in many of his stories?

ASSESSMENT

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Explain why silent pictures were an ideal form of entertainment during the 1920s.
- 2. Make Generalizations** Explain why sports heroes became popular during the 1920s.
- 3. Identify Central Issues** Explain how modernist literature related to the prominent issues and ideas of the 1920s.
- 4. Identify Cause and Effect** Explain how World War I led to the rise of modernism.
- 5. Draw Conclusions** Explain how the flapper related to the lives of most American women.