

8:1a—Modern Period, Part 1—Historical Background

Modern Period of American literature--the result of a number of factors:

- World War I—a war fought to “make the world safe for democracy”.
- “Jazz Age,” also known as the “Roaring Twenties”.
- “Harlem Renaissance”.
- Stock Market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression.

Substantial number of Americans—notably writers, artists, musicians, and the like—disillusioned by the horrors of modern warfare.

Expatriated themselves to Europe—notably Paris and the French Riviera—became known as the “Lost Generation”.

Included writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein

8:1b—Modern Period, Part 1—Historical Background

Change in the “American Dream”—originally a vision of America as a vast Eden in which anyone who was willing to work hard and to adhere to certain basic human values could attain a goodly measure of success and concomitant wealth.

Now became marked by cynicism and a rejection of some of the basic values that had ruled generations of Americans up to this point.

Result—much of the writing of the period reflects cynicism and interest in examining new “values”.

“Jazz Age”—characterized by preoccupation with amassing wealth, having a good time, and pursuing a more lifestyle marked by leisure pursuits

Officially marked by prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages

More typically marked by bootlegging speak easies, gangsters, and a new role of American women, as typified by the cropped hair and short skirts of the “Flappers”.

Captured most memorably in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

8:1c—Modern Period, Part 1—Historical Background

“Harlem Renaissance”—movement among African-American poets, originating in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City

Black writers for too long denied opportunities available to their white counterparts

Inequity began to change with advent of such writers as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and James Weldon Johnson, among others.

Stock Market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression—a sizable number of Americans lost everything for which they had worked their entire lives.

Resulting suffering and despair were—themes for writers such as John Steinbeck.

Wrote with great feeling and insight of the common man who was most affected by the collapse of the economy and the loss of his modest fortune.