

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Histories

Unit 4 of 5

For the United States, the years following World War I were a time of extraordinary change. The 1920s were a hectic period, from booming economies to financial devastation, new Constitutional amendments, and technological advancements. As the country changed socially and economically, people found themselves celebrating the end of the war while balancing fears that continued to ripple through the nation.

POST-WORLD WAR I

During World War I, the United States workforce went through a great shift due to the absence of men, who were now fighting over seas. When the U.S. joined the war in 1916, there was a need for more and more products -- new weapons, food, clothing, and everything else a country might need for war. This increase in manufacturing led to small developments that brought about major changes. One such change was that women stepped out of their role as housewives and into the workforce. There were also new opportunities for the still discriminated against African Americans. Despite many of their men being in a violent war, the people of the U.S. were doing better financially than they had been since the recession of 1897. People who had once been unemployed now found job openings, and technological innovations boomed.

1. Write a letter as someone living in the U.S. to a family member fighting in the war. Describe what life is like in America during the war.

When the war finally ended, the economy had to adjust to the influx of men wanting to come back to their jobs. The unemployment rate rose again, which foreshadowed the tragedy of the Great Depression of 1929. The soldiers wanted their jobs, but no one wanted to give them back. Women wanted to retain their independence even when the men returned, and President Wilson encouraged Congress to have an open mind about equal rights for men and women.

2. Do you think it's more unfair for women to have to give up their jobs or for them to have never been able to have jobs in the first place?

3. Imagine you are President Wilson. Write a brief speech to the public about the importance of equal rights.

Eventually, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, which gave women the right to vote. Along with this change in attitude toward women, there was a change in perspective on war. After the tragedies of World War I, many Americans felt they had rushed into the war in Europe. The new ideology was that America should not become involved in conflicts in Europe or any other country unless blatantly attacked. This idea lasted until Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, leading to America's involvement in World War II.

4. Do you think it's a nation's duty to look out for other nations, or should the nation not be involved in war unless directly provoked?

These changes toward equal rights and an anti-war attitude were made during a difficult time in the U.S. From 1920 to 1921, the nation suffered a brief economic depression due to the shortage of jobs for returning troops, changes in monetary policies, and severe deflation. The depression didn't last long, thankfully, and the U.S. began to recover, especially with the

help of the Dawes Plan. The Dawes Plan was a circular and beneficial way for America to gain financial prowess. The U.S. agreed to give Germany money so that Germany could pay off their debt to other countries. The other countries were then able to pay off their debts to the U.S., while Germany still needed to repay the U.S. in the future.

5. Try to think of a different way to remedy all the debts.

After the brief depression, America entered an often glorified era in its history, the "Roaring Twenties". The French called these years the "Années Folles", meaning the "Crazy Years". The 1920s were a time of economic prosperity and revolutionary technological changes, including the widespread use of the automobile. The radio also gained tremendous popularity during this time, as did going to the movies, which had become relatively inexpensive. Old traditions were broken with modern ideas, and America became known as a "consumer society." Between 1920 and 1929, America's wealth more than DOUBLED. People from opposite coasts were able to buy the same goods because of the advancements in transportation, and so the notion of "mass culture" emerged.

6. What do you imagine someone from California would want from the east coast? What would someone from Maine want from the west coast?

Women were gaining all kinds of independence. Many had white-collar jobs in offices, and their household work was greatly decreased because of inventions like the vacuum cleaner and washing machine. There was also an increase in birth control devices, so women did not have to fear having unwanted children at a young age. When many people think of the 1920s, a "flapper" comes to mind. Flappers were young women who drank, smoked, and said whatever they wanted. They generally had bobbed hair, wore short skirts, and had the reputation of engaging in promiscuous behavior.

7. Why do you think these girls were called "flappers"?



Flappers



Speakeasy

Speakeasies were another development of this racy time. In 1919, the 18th Amendment was added to the Constitution, "bann[ing] the manufacture and sale of 'intoxicating liquors'". Interestingly enough, there was only a ban on making and selling alcohol, but not on drinking it! Many people bought loads of liquor before the ban was put in place. The amendment came about with the belief that getting rid of alcohol would help the nation to return to its traditional roots and diverge from dangerous free-spirited and modern attitudes.

8. What was the most valuable tradition lost and the most valuable innovation gained and why?

On January 16, 1920, the Volstead Act had every tavern, bar, and saloon in the U.S. closed. Prohibition had begun. Shortly after, "speakeasies" popped up across the nation. Speakeasies were located in secret parts of buildings, such as a basement. People would have to give the password to the doorman so he would know they were not actually cops trying to

shut them down. Once inside, people were free to illegally sell alcoholic beverages. As people drank and talked they could listen to jazz performances and watch the flappers dance.

9. Write a ten-line dialogue between the doorman of a speakeasy and someone trying to enter.

The term "speakeasy" was coined by bartenders during the 1920s. When customers were sitting at the bar stool and wanted to order the illegal alcohol, the bartender would remind them to "speak easy". Essentially it meant to stay calm, don't look nervous, and don't speak too quickly, as if you were doing something wrong. And so "speakeasy" became the term for these illegal places. Because Prohibition fostered a disrespect for the government and did little to reduce alcohol consumption and violence (both actually *increased* in the 1920's), it was retracted in 1933.

10. Come up with another name for these secret places and tell us the origin of your name.

Prohibition caused some tension among the American people. There was also a growing concern among some white Americans about the introduction of black culture into mainstream American culture. As African Americans moved from the South to Northern cities, they brought their jazz and blues music with them. This time was often referred to as the "cultural civil war". As you read in a previous Unit, jazz and blues music gained tremendous popularity and paved the way for artists of all colors to be respected and idolized.

Another exciting development during this time was in airplanes and aviation. The airplane was invented in 1903 by the Wright Brothers, but the 1920s saw some incredible advancements. In 1927, Charles Lindberg, known as "Lucky Lindy", decided to fly across the Atlantic Ocean nonstop by himself, a feat that had never been done before. Meanwhile, another pilot, Amelia Earhart, was just starting her own remarkable flying career.



Amelia was born in 1897 to Amy and Edwin Earhart, and she and her sister had what some might call an "unconventional" upbringing. Amy did not want to raise her daughters as "good little girls", and instead allowed them to roam outdoors, climb trees, sled, and collect insects. Amelia's grandmother disapproved of this behavior, but Amelia continued her "tomboyish" ways under the guidance of her parents. In 1904, Amelia and Muriel went to the St. Louis State Fair with their father and rode a rollercoaster, inspiring them to make their own homemade rollercoaster in the backyard when they got home. Despite crashing at the end of their little, rickety "rollercoaster" every time, Amelia loved the feeling of swishing through the air. In 1908, Amelia saw her first airplane at an Iowa State Fair and became fascinated with the notion of flying. Unfortunately, she had a tough time making friends and her yearbook quote read, "The girl in brown who walks alone."

11. Do you think roaming outdoors, climbing trees, and collecting insects are still considered "boy activities"? Why or why not?

12. How would you have gone about building a homemade rollercoaster?



Amelia Earhart



Amelia Earhart and her plane



Amelia's home-made roller coaster

Amelia then went on to become a nurse for World War I soldiers before being drawn to planes once more through seeing them at various exhibitions. She took her first flying lesson in 1921. Over the course of a few years, Amelia set many records, won innumerable honors, and even wrote a book about her experiences. She also started The Ninety-Nines Inc, which was a club of women aviators. Later, Amelia and Fred Noonan planned to fly around the world, but their plane lost contact with its base somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. Amelia was declared dead in 1939, though her body was never found.

13. Imagine Amelia actually crashed onto an island in the Pacific and survived. Write a fictional story of what happened next.

Even as Amelia Earhart was achieving ever greater feats, there was trouble brewing in the U.S. On September 4, 1929, stock prices began to fall. The stock market finally crashed on October 29, 1929 (known as "Black Tuesday"), and America's economy entered into the Great Depression.

Unemployment rose to 25% in the U.S. and the effects were felt across the nation. Cities were struggling to afford basic services, and even farming communities were suffering as their crop prices fell by 60%. Personal incomes were taking a hit, profits and prices were dropping, and international trade went down by over 50%. In an effort to help American factories, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act was approved by Congress in 1930.

14. What would you suggest to help lift a country out of a Depression?

This Act made imported goods more expensive, with the aim of getting people to purchase more American-made products. The Great Depression, however, provided inspiration for some of America's greatest writers, among them John Steinbeck. Two of his most important novels, "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men", were set in and written during the Depression.

The Grapes of Wrath: Tom Joad and his family are forced from their farm in the Depression-era Oklahoma Dust Bowl and set out for California along with thousands of others in search of jobs, land, and hope for a brighter future. (cliffnotes.com)

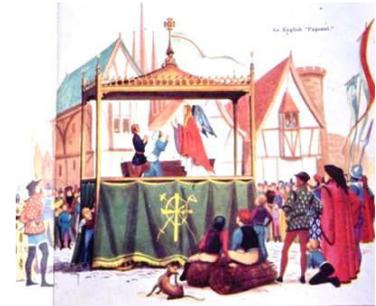
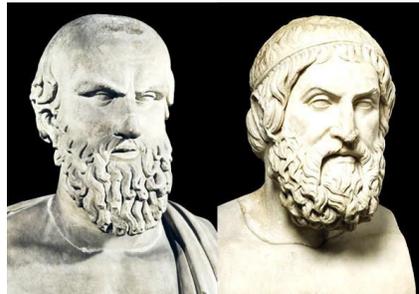
The Great Depression was also a time of tremendous productivity and creativity in American movie making. To take their minds off their problems and escape the drudgery of daily life (if only for a short time), Americans flocked to the movies by the millions. By some estimates, most Americans were attending shows at least once a week! Movie tickets were inexpensive, and new films were being released constantly. It's not surprising that so many people were going to the movies when you also consider that television wasn't available. But an even bigger factor was that live theater was now too

expensive. Before the Depression, live theater had been a mainstay of entertainment. From travelling vaudeville shows in the smallest towns to major productions on Broadway in New York City, Americans were going to the theater everywhere in the 1920's. Perhaps the most popular productions were the musicals.

MUSICALS

Musicals have been a form of entertainment in many civilizations for hundreds of years. Defined as "a form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting, and dance," musicals have been captivating audiences with their unique blend of emotions from love to humor to anger all wrapped up in a one to three-hour performance.

Musical theater began as early as the 5th Century BCE when the ancient Greeks performed on stages, often incorporating song and dance into their routines. The plays generally took the form of a tragedy or comedy, and were wildly popular within the society. Some advanced musical composers, such as Aeschylus and Sophocles, began to introduce the idea of having orchestral music composed directly for the songs and dances on stage. In the 3rd century BCE, another innovation by the Romans took musicals one-step further. They attached metal clips to the bottom of their shoes so their steps could be more audible when they performed on huge, open stages. Our modern tap dance can be traced back to this invention. In the Middle Ages (5th to 15th century), there were small groups of traveling performers in Europe who would sing and provide comedy for the towns. "Pageant wagons", also known as "stages on wheels," consisted of a group of actors who would move around the city and perform one scene from a play. They would then leave, and a wagon of new actors performing the next scene would roll into town.



15. What do you imagine these societies did for entertainment before the musicals were invented?

From the 14th to 17th Century, Europeans experienced what's known as the "Renaissance" -- a period of great cultural change beginning in Italy and spreading across Europe. During this time, England's musicals developed into a form called "commedia dell-arte", which originated in Italy. It involved noisy clowns and improvising on older plots. Plays that were serious or tragic tended to be broken up by short musicals. In the 18th century, Britain had two forms of musical theatre that were flourishing in the country: ballad operas and comic operas. Ballad operas featured popular songs, whereas comic operas had original music and usually a romantic storyline.

16. What does having music add to a play? Would you rather see a play or a musical and why?

17. What are some things the actors/actresses must do to "bring the story to life"?

In 1728, *The Beggar's Opera* became the longest running play of all time with sixty-two performances. Until now, America had not been part of the musical scene. William Hallam from London decided to send twelve actors to America in 1742. They first established a theatre in Williamsburg, Virginia but later moved to New York in 1753. Around this time, transportation was advancing, and it became easier for people to travel to the theatres in London and New York. Poverty

started to dwindle, and there was street lighting that made night travel safer, all leading to an influx in the number of theatre goers. *A Trip to Coontown*, produced in 1898, was a musical comedy notable for being the first one produced and performed by African Americans on Broadway. The 1890s were an era of musical comedies, and hundreds were staged in New York during this time.

18. Would you rather be performing on stage or watching in the audience? Explain why.

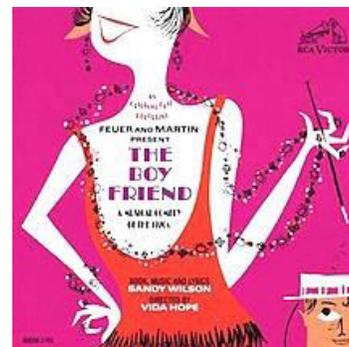
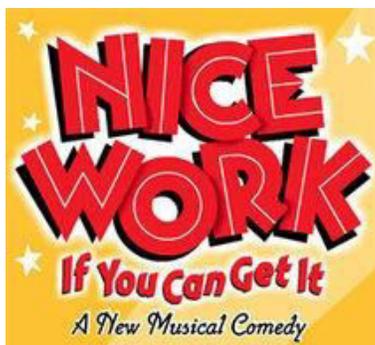
During World War I, the theatre increased in popularity even further. The citizens that weren't sent off to fight were trying to distract themselves from the absence of their men and the horrors of war. Musical theatre became an "escapist entertainment" for Americans, and the theatres had never been more popular.

After the end of World War I, the Roaring Twenties brought even more people to the theatre. The musicals were focused on having famous actors and actresses, using over-the-top dance routines, and incorporating popular songs of the day. People went to musicals for a grandiose theatrical performance, and weren't always as concerned with the plot of the musical itself. Times Square, in New York City, grew to be packed with people bustling to restaurants, cinemas, clubs, and theatres, always basking themselves in different forms of entertainment to occupy their new care-free ways. A popular Broadway star of the time, Marilyn Miller, stated:

There comes a time once in every two or three years when the vast stage of that playhouse begins to show signs of a deep and familiar agitation. Down in the orchestra pit the violins chitter with excitement and the brasses blare. The spotlight turns white with expectation. Fifty beautiful girls in simple peasant costumes of satin and chiffon rush pell-mell onto the stage, all squealing simple peasant outcries of 'Here she comes!'

19. What do you think the "agitation" that Marilyn talks about is?

20. Draw an ad for a musical during the Roaring Twenties (no fair saying you can't draw -- just try!). Below are examples of a few.



When the Great Depression hit in 1929, there was a sharp decline in theatre attendance in both America and Europe. Many people were barely making enough to feed themselves and pay the bills, let alone go on an extravagant theatre outing. Broadway could no longer be an outlet for energy and imagination as it once had been. Because of the lack of attendance, many Broadway performers and workers were also left without jobs. And because the Great Depression portrayed America in a negative light, the number of immigrants coming into America vastly decreased, and Broadway lost most of its foreign actors and actresses. Scriptwriters reacted to the times by shifting their musicals to contain political events and other concerns of the time. Stanley Green said, "The musical theatre -- the most opulent, escapist, extravagant, and unabashedly commercial form of the theatre -- could not hide from what was going on."

21. What do you imagine the musicals focused on during this time?

In 1941, history changed again as the United States declared war on Germany and Japan, and World War II began. Though Broadway still focused on playing out the political and economic events in America, it also now circled around keeping up the spirit and loyalty of the nation.

The American Theater Wing, which had originally been part of the British War Relief founded in 1917, separated so it could focus solely on the needs of the American people. All kinds of people in the theater industry came together to help provide for servicemen and raise money for a country deep in debt. The American Theater Wing relied mostly on volunteers who would do simple tasks, such as addressing envelopes and writing small comedies or plays. There were also actors and actresses who were sent out to perform all over the country to provide comic relief and entertainment. A monumental moment for the American Theater Wing was when the Stage Door Canteen opened in 1942. At the Canteen, men who served in the war would receive free food and free entertainment when they were on their leave.

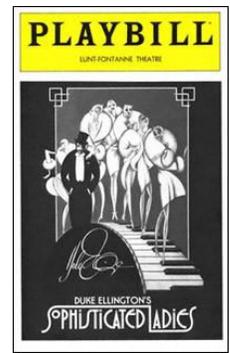
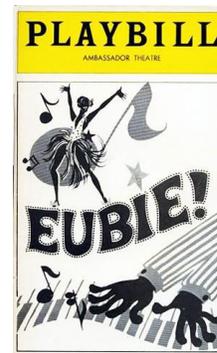


22. What are some other services/products we could provide for soldiers on break?

After World War II, America entered into the "Golden Age" of theatre. There was artistic creation in the air, and scriptwriters were breaking with traditional methods. Choruses done by a group of girls and dances with half-dressed girls scampering across the stage were left behind for fresh ideas, such as an opening with a solo singer. During the 1950s, "corporate musicals", private shows put on for employees or customers, became a part of company life.

In the 1940s and 1950s, one of the most productive and popular composer/lyricist teams were Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Some of their musicals were: *Carousel*, *Flower Drum Song*, *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *The Desert Song*, and *The Sound of Music*. *The Sound of Music* ran for 1,443 performances, the most yet, and got a Tony Award for the best musical, which is like the equivalent of a movie winning an Oscar. In the 1960s, nearing the end of the Golden Age, more risqué pieces came out, like *Cabaret*.

Mirroring changing attitudes about race and segregation following the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 60's, African American songwriters made inroads into the previously white dominated musical theater. The 1970's and 1980's saw highly successful musicals based on the works of "Fats" Waller (*Ain't Misbehavin'*), Eubie Blake (*Eubie!*), and Duke Ellington (*Sophisticated Ladies*).



23. What do you think contributes most to winning the Tony Award for best musical?

At a time where Broadway attendance was high, well-known scriptwriters were high in demand. One such man was Stephen Joshua Sondheim. Sondheim, born in 1930, has won an Academy Award, eight Tony Awards, eight Grammy Awards, a Pulitzer Prize, and the Laurence Oliver Award. He was described by Frank Rich as, "now the greatest and

perhaps best-known artist in the American musical theater." In an interview in 1957, Sondheim responded to a question of how his work takes shape, with the following answer:

Except for Sweeney Todd, I've generally gone to writers and asked them if they had any ideas. Or I'll sit with a writer and invent ideas. Occasionally, as with Pacific Overtures, the idea has been brought to me. Then I have to find out, first, why it should be sung, as opposed to spoken. How can music not only enhance but fulfill the work? ... I try to use song in unexpected ways. I like surprise, because I think that's the essence of theatre. Over a period of years, I've tried to learn how not to write the expected. Often I will take a scene from a librettist and not write the song that seems to be called for simply because I don't want the audience ahead of me.

24. Think of three ways artists might get inspiration.

One of Stephen's most famous musicals, opening in 1957 with music written by Leonard Bernstein, is *West Side Story*, which draws inspiration from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Two rival gangs in New York are the Jets, who are all white, and the Sharks, who are Hispanic. Tony, one of the former Jets, meets Maria, the sister of the Shark's leader, at a school dance, and they fall in love. They believe their love can overcome any obstacle, but gang violence and prejudice results in the death of the leader of the Sharks and the Jets, and Tony as well. Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, the heroine Maria does not die after Tony dies in her arms.

There have been many successful musicals since *West Side Story*, a recent one being *Something Rotten*, which was released in 2015. David Cote from *Time Out New York*, calls it "Broadway's FUNNIEST, SPLASHIEST musical comedy in at least 40 years!" Below is a description from Broadway.com:

Set in the 1590s, brothers Nick and Nigel Bottom are desperate to write a hit play but are stuck in the shadow of that Renaissance rock star known as "The Bard" [Shakespeare]. When a local soothsayer foretells that the future of theater involves singing, dancing and acting at the same time, Nick and Nigel set out to write the world's very first musical. But amidst the scandalous excitement of opening night, the Bottom Brothers realize that reaching the top means being true to thine self...and all that jazz.



West Side Story



Something Rotten

25. Would you rather see a musical that is set in a past time or modern day? Why?

26. Come up with an original musical idea. Describe the plot, main characters, and setting.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendix

Histories: Unit 4 of 5

Citations

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