The 1920s saw radical changes in the morals and values of the Gilded Age. These changes were viewed by some as a sign of America’s moral breakdown and critics pointed to the toleration of organized crime, widespread political corruption and growing sexual liberation of women as evidence of this breakdown. The growth of speakeasies, repeated scandals and ever-shorter skirts symbolized an age that was radically different than its Victorian predecessors.

Additionally, close examination of the heroes of this period reveal much about Americans’ shifting morals. No longer did Americans admire only political and business figures, instead, they turned to the movies, sports, religion and the news for their idols.

Technology also played a role in changing the nation. Americans experienced more recreational time and greater access to entertainment than in any decade prior. For the first time in history, sports events drew million-dollar gates and the movies provided an escape from reality and offered Americans the ability to lose themselves in a world of fantasy.

### Overarching themes

<table>
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<th>1920s</th>
<th>1930s</th>
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<td>● Quest for wealth and the commercialization of the American Dream</td>
<td>● Changing economic values/priorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Emphasis on innovation and new technology</td>
<td>● Despair/hopelessness at changing economic realities</td>
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<td>● Value in risk taking, pushing previously established limits and boundaries (physical and psychological)</td>
<td>● Resilience in the face of great adversity</td>
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<td>● Tensions between new and old, rural and urban, religion and science</td>
<td>● Championing of the little guy and those who flew in the face of the established order</td>
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### Directions: Using the links and readings provided on the pages that follow and the additional sources posted on the class website, answer the following questions about important people, places, and events of the 1920s.

1. **Youth culture:****

   Define the following slang terms: [http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm](http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm)

   - “fly boy”
   - “goofy”
   - “hoofer”
   - “juice joint”
   - “cat’s meow”
   - “a clam”
   - “dry up”
   - “flivver”
Looking at the following cartoon, answer the following questions:

A. Describe what is happening in the cartoon & connect it to the historical events/issues of the time.

B. What do you think the artist’s message is?
“It seems to be an accepted axiom nowadays that our young people are going to the devil. Press, pulpit, and publicist are agreed that youth is wild and getting wilder. The college boy and his flapper friend, it is charged, drink, pet, and are disrespectful to their elders, while the neighborhood gangster, aided by his youthful sweetie and stimulated by the false courage of heroin or cocaine, robs and murders with casual calmness long before he is out of his teens. Most of this lamentation, of course, is based on theory and not on fact. Those who indulge in it have read in the papers of a few sensational cases like the Leopold-Loeb affair, or have witnessed some of the post-Prohibition drinking parties in which youth, imitating the practice of its elders, indulges. The reasoning is almost always from the particular to the general, a type of argument which is as dangerous in this case as usual.

Recognizing that this is true, the Children’s Bureau of the United States Bureau of Labor recently undertook to throw a little light, of a really scientific character, on this question. If youth is as wild as is represented, and the wildness extends through all classes, the results certainly ought to be reflected in the records of the juvenile courts and the institutions in which delinquents are detained. Accordingly, a careful study was made of the statistics dealing with the subject. The figures investigated included delinquency rates in fourteen of the leading cities of the United States . . .

In nearly all these fourteen cities, the delinquency rates per 1,000 children of “delinquency age” were decidedly lower in 1924 or 1925 than in 1915 . . .

These statistics, the reliability of which is beyond question, do not of course show that all the [fears] of the alarmed editorial writers and preachers are unjustified. Youth may really be wild, in a fashion which does not get itself reflected in the delinquency and prison statistics. In so far, however, as the complaint has been made of youthful criminals as a new phenomenon, it is clearly without foundation. And certainly whatever wildness of youth exists, if it be not serious enough to draw the attention of the law, cannot be worth as much excitement, as many millions of words of frenzied exhortation, as it has been receiving.”

What can be said about fears that youth are “going to the devil”? 
2. **Flappers & the New Woman**

Read the handout titled “What did it mean to be a flapper”, which is posted on the website.

How would you describe a flapper? (Support with at least 3 details FROM THE READING.)

Read the following:

*Citation:* Rev. Hugh L. McMenamin [Roman Catholic priest], “Evils of Woman’s Revolt against the Old Standards,” *Current History*, October 1927

“Look about you. The theatre, the magazine, the current fiction, the ballroom, the night clubs and the joyrides—all give evidence of an ever-increasing disregard for even the rudiments of decency in dress, deportment, conventions [standards], and conduct. Little by little the bars have been lowered, leaving out the few influences that held society in restraint. One need be neither prude nor puritan to feel that something is passing in the hearts and in the minds of the women of today that is leaving them cold and unwomanly. . . .

We may try to deceive ourselves and close our eyes to the prevailing flapper conduct. We may call boldness greater self-reliance, brazenness greater self-assertion, license greater freedom, and try to pardon immodesty in dress by calling it style and fashion, but the fact remains that deep down in our hearts we feel a sense of shame and pity. . . .

Modern economic conditions, with the mania for speedy profits, have been a powerful factor in producing the “New Woman,” inasmuch as they have dragged her into the commercial world and made her economically independent. It is quite impossible for a woman to engage successfully in business and politics and at the same time create a happy home. A woman cannot be a mother and a typist at the same time, and unfortunately she elects to be merely a wife, and out of that condition have arisen those temples of race suicide—our modern apartment houses—and the consequent grinding of the divorce mills.”

What did some worry about with regards to the flappers?
What can you say about changing lifestyles in the 1920s?
4. **Sports in the 1920s:**

   Watch the video clip of Babe Ruth on the website.

   Then, check out the following:

   Name a leading athlete for each of the following sports. Why was this individual celebrated as a hero in their time? (Support with specific detail. You are looking not only for what people liked about him but also what they VALUED at the time.)

   **Baseball:**

   **Boxing:**

   Then, read the handout on “The Chicago Black Sox Scandal” on the website.
   - In what ways did the scandal and the way that the public/team/govt responded reflect some of the changes happening in America in the 1920s?
5. **1920s Crime and Justice:**

Watch the videos posted on the website (“Prohibition and Crime” and “The Untouchables”). Then check out the slideshow at: [http://www.slideshare.net/guesswhatgracie/crime-in-the-1920s30s](http://www.slideshare.net/guesswhatgracie/crime-in-the-1920s30s)

Name three major gangsters from this period and briefly explain what they were famous for:

What does the slide show tell you about crime in the 1920s and early 1930s?
Looking at the following cartoon, answer the following questions:

A. Describe what is happening in the cartoon & connect it to the historical events/issues of the time.

B. What do you think the artist’s message is?
YOU SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. “Men bowed down and worshiped at the altar of the goddess Success, while seeking quick something-for-nothing riches.”
   - Thomas A. Bailey

   To what extent do heroes of the 1920s and early 1930s reflect the philosophy in the Bailey statement?

2. In looking more closely at some of America’s heroes & pasttimes in the 1920s, what can we learn about what Americans in this time valued?

3. Why were Americans so fascinated by the big, fast lifestyle achieved through fame and/or crime?