

1920s America

Fiction

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)

Jay Gatsby is the man who has everything. But one thing will always be out of his reach. Everybody who is anybody is seen at his glittering parties. Day and night his Long Island mansion buzzes with bright young things drinking, dancing, and debating his mysterious character. For Gatsby---young, handsome, and fabulously rich---always seems alone in the crowd, watching and waiting, though no one knows what for. Beneath the shimmering surface of his life he is hiding a secret: a silent longing that can never be fulfilled. And soon this destructive obsession will force his world to unravel.

Babbitt, Sinclair Lewis (1922)

In this masterful satire of early 20th century American life, Sinclair Lewis introduces George F. Babbitt, a prosperous partner at a real-estate firm in the fictitious town of Zenith. In the novel, Babbitt becomes unhappy with the ritualized and highly conformist life that he is leading and attempts to make it more gratifying. Unfortunately, accomplishing that task would take more character than our hero possesses, and he relapses back into the vacuous rituals he intended to leave behind. *Babbitt* was first published in 1922, but many readers find that the satire still applies to modern American life.

Elmer Gantry, by Sinclair Lewis (1927)

Universally recognized as a landmark in American literature, *Elmer Gantry* scandalized readers when it was first published, causing Sinclair Lewis to be "invited" to a jail cell in New Hampshire and to his own lynching in Virginia. His portrait of a golden-tongued evangelist who rises to power within his church--a savior of souls who lives a life of duplicity, sensuality, and ruthless self-indulgence--is also the record of a period, a reign of grotesque vulgarity, which but for Lewis would have left no trace of itself. *Elmer Gantry* has been called the greatest, most vital, and most penetrating study of hypocrisy that has been written since the works of Voltaire

Bright Young Things, Anna Godbersen (2010)

Letty Larkspur and Cordelia Grey escaped their small Midwestern town for New York's glittering metropolis. All Letty wants is to see her name in lights, but she quickly discovers Manhattan is filled with pretty girls who will do *anything* to be a star....

Cordelia is searching for the father she's never known, a man as infamous for his wild parties as he is for his shadowy schemes. Overnight, she enters a world more thrilling and glamorous than she ever could have imagined — and more dangerous. It's a life anyone would kill for...and someone will.

The only person Cordelia can trust is Astrid Donal, a flapper who seems to have it all: money, looks, and the love of Cordelia's brother, Charlie. But Astrid's perfect veneer hides a score of family secrets.

Across the vast lawns of Long Island, in the illicit speakeasies of Manhattan, and on the blindingly lit stages of Broadway, the three girls' fortunes will rise and fall — together and apart. From the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE LUXE comes an epic new series set in the dizzying last summer of the Jazz Age

The Paris Wife, Paula McLain (2011)

A deeply evocative story of ambition and betrayal, *The Paris Wife* captures a remarkable period of time and a love affair between two unforgettable people: Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Betty Smith (1943)

The beloved American classic about a young girl's coming-of-age at the turn of the century, Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is a poignant and moving tale filled with compassion and cruelty, laughter and heartache, crowded with life and people and incident. The story of young, sensitive, and idealistic Francie Nolan and her bittersweet formative years in the slums of Williamsburg has enchanted and inspired millions of readers for more than sixty years. By turns overwhelming, sublime, heartbreaking, and uplifting, the daily experiences of the unforgettable Nolans are raw with honesty and tenderly threaded with family connectedness -- in a work of literary art that brilliantly captures a unique time and place as well as incredibly rich moments of universal experience.

The Diviners, Libba Bray (2013)

Evangeline O'Neill has been exiled from her boring old hometown and shipped off to the bustling streets of New York City--and she is ecstatic. It's 1926, and New York is filled with speakeasies, Ziegfeld girls, and rakish pickpockets. The only catch is that she has to live with her uncle Will and his unhealthy obsession with the occult. Evie worries he'll discover her darkest secret: a supernatural power that has only brought her trouble so far.

When the police find a murdered girl branded with a cryptic symbol and Will is called to the scene, Evie realizes her gift could help catch a serial killer. As Evie jumps headlong into a dance with a murderer, other stories unfurl in the city that never sleeps. And unknown to all, something dark and evil has awakened....

The Chaperone, Laura Moriarty (2012)

On a summer's day in 1922 Cora Carlisle boards a train from Wichita, Kansas, to New York City, leaving behind a marriage that's not as perfect as it seems and a past that she buried long ago. She is charged with the care of a stunning young girl with a jet-black fringe and eyes wild and wise beyond her fifteen years. This girl is hungry for stardom and Cora for something she doesn't yet know. Cora will be many things in her lifetime - an orphan, a mother, a wife, a mistress - but in New York she is a chaperone and her life is about to change.

Newport: A Novel, Jill Morrow (2015)

Following in the steps of Beatriz Williams and Amor Towles, this richly atmospheric, spellbinding novel transports readers to the dazzling, glamorous world of Newport during the Roaring Twenties and to a mansion filled with secrets as a debonair lawyer must separate truth from deception.

Spring 1921. The Great War is over, Prohibition is in full swing, the Depression still years away, and Newport, Rhode Island's glittering "summer cottages" are inhabited by the gloriously rich families who built them.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Anita Loos (1925)

If any American fictional character of the twentieth century seems likely to be immortal, it is Lorelei Lee of Little Rock, Arkansas, the not-so-dumb blonde who knew that diamonds are a girl's best friend. Outrageous, charming, and unforgettable, she's been portrayed on stage and screen by Carol Channing and Marilyn Monroe and has become the archetype of the footloose, good-hearted gold digger, with an insatiable appetite for orchids, champagne, and precious stones. Here are her "diaries," created by Anita Loos in the Roaring Twenties, as Lorelei and her friend Dorothy barrel across Europe meeting everyone from the Prince of Wales to "Doctor Froyd" – and then back home again to marry a Main Line millionaire and become a movie star. In this delightfully droll and witty book, Lorelei Lee's wild antics, unique outlook, and imaginative way with language shine

Main Street, Sinclair Lewis (1920)

Main Street, the story of an idealistic young woman's attempts to reform her small town, brought Lewis immediate acclaim when it was published in 1920. It remains one of the essential texts of the American scene.

Manhattan Transfer: A Novel, John Dos Passos (1925)

Considered by many to be John Dos Passos's greatest work, *Manhattan Transfer* is an "expressionistic picture of New York" (New York Times) in the 1920s that reveals the lives of wealthy power brokers and struggling immigrants alike. From Fourteenth Street to the Bowery, Delmonico's to the underbelly of the city waterfront, Dos Passos chronicles the lives of characters struggling to become a part of modernity before they are destroyed by it.

So Big, Edna Ferber (1924)

Winner of the 1924 Pulitzer Prize, *So Big* is widely regarded as Edna Ferber's crowning achievement. A rollicking panorama of Chicago's high and low life, this stunning novel follows the travails of gambler's daughter Selina Peake DeJong as she struggles to maintain her dignity, her family, and her sanity in the face of monumental challenges.

The Home-Maker, Dorothy Canfield (1924)

Although this novel first appeared in 1924, it deals in an amazingly contemporary manner with the problems of a family in which both husband and wife are oppressed and frustrated by the roles they are expected to play. Evangeline Knapp is the perfect, compulsive housekeeper, while her husband, Lester, is a poet and a dreamer. Suddenly, through a nearly fatal accident, their roles are reversed: Lester is confined to home in a wheelchair and his wife must work to support the family. The changes that take place between husband and wife and particularly between parents and children are both fascinating and poignant.

The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke (1925)

From the man known as the father of the Harlem Renaissance comes a powerful, provocative, and affecting anthology of writers who shaped the Harlem Renaissance movement and who help us to consider the evolution of the African American in society.

With stunning works by seminal black voices such as Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, and W.E.B. DuBois, Locke has constructed a vivid look at the new negro, the changing African American finding his place in the ever shifting sociocultural landscape that was 1920s America. With poetry, prose, and nonfiction essays, this collection is widely praised for its literary strength as well as its historical coverage of a monumental and fascinating time in the history of America.

The Weary Blues, Langston Hughes (1926)

A beautiful new edition of this beloved poet's first collection, originally published in 1926 when he was just twenty-four. From the opening "Proem" (prologue poem) he offers in this first book- "I am a Negro: / Black as night is black, / Black the depths of my Africa"-Hughes spoke directly, intimately, and powerfully of the experiences of African Americans, at a time when their voices were newly being heard in our literature. As his Knopf editor Carl Van Vechten wrote in a brief introduction to the original 1926 volume, illuminating the potential of this promising young voice, "His cabaret songs throb with the true jazz rhythm; his sea-pieces ache with a calm, melancholy lyricism; he cries bitterly from the heart of his race...Always, however, his stanzas are subjective, personal" and, he concludes, they are "the expression [of] an essentially sensitive and subtly illusive nature." That illusive nature darts among these early lines and begins to reveal itself, sometimes with shocking confidence and clarity: "Bring me all of your / Heart melodies / That I may wrap them / In a blue cloud-cloth / Away from the too-rough fingers/ Of the world."

Twilight Blues, Edith Wharton (1927)

Out of print for several decades, here is Edith Wharton's superb satirical novel of the Jazz Age, a critically praised best-seller when it was first published in 1927. Sex, drugs, work, money, infatuation with the occult and spiritual healing -- these are the remarkably modern themes that animate *Twilight Sleep*. The extended family of Mrs. Manford is determined to escape the pain, boredom and emptiness of life through whatever form of "twilight sleep" they can devise or procure. And though the characters and their actions may seem more in keeping with today's society, this is still a classic Wharton tale of the upper crust and its undoing -- wittily, masterfully told.

Dave at Night, Gail Carson Levine (1999)

When orphaned Dave is sent to the Hebrew Home for Boys and treated cruelly, he sneaks out at night and welcomed into the music- and culture-filled world of the Harlem Renaissance, where he discovers the power of friendship.

Harlem Summer, Walter Dean Myer (2007)

Myers is at his clever best in this witty and action-packed, coming-of-age story of a teenager's summer during the Harlem Renaissance and his run-ins with famous gangsters, writers, and musicians.

It's 1925 and Mark Purvis is a 16-yr-old with a summer to kill. He'd rather jam with his jazz band (they need the practice), but is urged by his parents to get a job. As an assistant at *The Crisis*, a magazine for the "new Negro," Mark rubs shoulders with Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. He's invited to a party at Alfred Knopf's place. He's making money, but not enough, and when piano player Fats Waller entices him and his buddies to make some fast cash, Mark finds himself crossing the gangster Dutch Schultz.

Witness, Karen Hesse (2001)

Karen Hesse's Newbery Award-winning skills are put to great use in *Witness*, a poetic tale about friendship, fanaticism, and the deadly undercurrents of racial prejudice. The story takes place in a small Vermont town in the year 1924, revealing the devastating impact of the Ku Klux Klan on this pastoral, insular community. At the heart of the tale are two motherless girls who come to the attention of the newly formed Klan: 12-year-old Leanora Sutter, who is black, and 6-year-old Esther Hirsch, who is Jewish.

Henry & The Kite Dragon, Bruce Edward Hall (2004)

Everyone knows that kids from Chinatown don't go to the park when the kids from Little Italy are there. They're rough, they're big, and they don't like Chinese kids. That's okay-Henry doesn't like them, either.

But what Henry does like are kites. He loves them. Even more, he loves to help his friend Grandfather Chin make them, and fly them over Chinatown and the park. But when Tony Guglione and his friends from Little Italy keep throwing rocks and destroying their beautiful creations, Henry and his friends decide enough is enough!

The Sun Also Rises, Ernest Hemingway (1924)

The quintessential novel of the Lost Generation, *The Sun Also Rises* is one of Ernest Hemingway's masterpieces and a classic example of his spare but powerful writing style. A poignant look at the disillusionment and angst of the post-World War I generation, the novel introduces two of Hemingway's most unforgettable characters: Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley. The story follows the flamboyant Brett and the hapless Jake as they journey from the wild nightlife of 1920s Paris to the brutal bullfighting rings of Spain with a motley group of expatriates. It is an age of moral bankruptcy, spiritual dissolution, unrealized love, and vanishing illusions. First published in 1926, *The Sun Also Rises* helped to establish Hemingway as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald, Therese Anne Fowler (2013)

'I wish I could tell everyone who thinks we're ruined...Look closer, and you'll see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed.' When beautiful, reckless Southern belle Zelda Sayre meets F. Scott Fitzgerald at a country club dance in 1918, she is seventeen and he is a young army lieutenant. Before long, Zelda has fallen for him, even though Scott isn't wealthy or prominent or even a Southerner and keeps insisting, absurdly, that his writing will bring him both fortune and fame. When he sells his first novel, she optimistically boards a train to New York, to marry him and take the rest as it comes. What comes, here at the dawn of the Jazz Age, is unimagined success and celebrity that will make Scott and Zelda legends in their own time. Each place they go becomes a playground: New York City, Long Island, Hollywood, Paris, and the French riviera - where they join the endless party of the glamorous, sometimes doomed Lost Generation that includes Ernest Hemingway, Sara and Gerald Murphy, and Gertrude Stein. Everything seems new and possible, but not even Jay Gatsby's parties go on forever. Who is Zelda, other than the wife of a famous - sometimes infamous - husband? With brilliant insight and imagination, Therese Anne Fowler brings us Zelda's irresistible story as she herself might have told it.

Non-Fiction

Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties, Lucy Moore (2015)

Bracketed by the catastrophes of the Great War and the Wall Street Crash, 1920s America was a place of drama, tension and hedonism. It glittered and seduced: jazz, flappers, wild all-night parties, the birth of Hollywood, and a glamorous gangster-led crime scene flourishing under prohibition. But the period was also punctuated by momentous events - the political show trials of Sacco and Vanzetti; the huge Ku Klux Klan march down Washington DC's Pennsylvania Avenue - and it produced a splendid array of writers, musicians and film stars, from F. Scott Fitzgerald to Bessie Smith and Charlie Chaplin.

Paris Without End: The True Story of Hemingway's First Wife, Gioia Diliberto (2011)

Hadley Richardson and Ernest Hemingway were the golden couple of Paris in the twenties, the center of an expatriate community boasting the likes of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, and James and Nora Joyce. In this haunting account of the young Hemingways, Gioia Diliberto explores their passionate courtship, their family life in Paris with baby Bumby, and their thrilling, adventurous relationship—a literary love story scarred by Hadley's loss of the only copy of Hemingway's first novel and ultimately destroyed by a devastating ménage à trois on the French Riviera.

New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America, Nathan Miller (2003)

The images of the 1920s have been indelibly imprinted on the American imagination—from jazz, bootleggers, flappers, talkies, the Model T Ford, Babe Ruth, and Charles Lindbergh to the fight for women's right to vote, racial injustice, and the birth of organized crime. Nathan Miller has penned the ultimate introduction to the era. *Publishers Weekly* calls it "an excellent chronicle of that turbulent, troubled, and tempestuous decade," and Jonathan Yardley's *Washington Post* review proclaimed this *the* new classic history of the 1920s, replacing Frederick Lewis Allen's celebrated account. Using the life of F. Scott Fitzgerald as a backdrop, Miller describes the world of Calvin Coolidge, H. L. Mencken, Woodrow Wilson, and the Red Scare in extraordinarily accessible (and frequently witty) writing, *New World Coming* is destined to become the book we all turn to to recall one of the most beloved eras in American history.

The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers Who Inspired Chicago, Douglas Perry (2010)

Chicago, 1924. For intrepid "girl reporter" Maurine Watkins, a minister's daughter from Indiana, big-city life offered unimaginable excitement. Newspaperwomen were supposed to write about clubs, cooking, and clothes. But within weeks of starting at the Chicago Tribune, Watkins found herself embroiled in the scandalous, sex-fueled murder cases of Belva Gaertner and Beulah Annan, who had gunned down their lovers in mysterious circumstances.

Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition, Daniel Okrent (2010)

From its start, America has been awash in drink. The sailing vessel that brought John Winthrop to the shores of the New World in 1630 carried more beer than water. By the 1820s, liquor flowed so plentifully it was cheaper than tea. That Americans would *ever* agree to relinquish their booze was as improbable as it was astonishing.

America in the Twenties, Ronald Allen Goldberg, John Robert Greene, John Robert Greene (2004)

A study of the decade that swept America into the modern age and changed it forever, this book looks at the 1920s as framed by the aspirations, scandals, and attitudes of the Wilson, Harding, Coolidge and Hoover presidencies, examining how Victorian values transformed into the Jazz Age

Zelda, Nancy Milford (1970)

Zelda Sayre began as a Southern beauty, became an international wonder, and died by fire in a madhouse. With her husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald, she moved in a golden aura of excitement, romance, and promise. The epitome of the Jazz Age, together they rode the crest of the era: to its collapse and their own.

From years of exhaustive research, Nancy Milford brings alive the tormented, elusive personality of Zelda and clarifies as never before her relationship with Scott Fitzgerald. Zelda traces the inner disintegration of a gifted, despairing woman, torn by the clash between her husband's career and her own talent.

Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern, Joshua Zeitz (2007)

Flapper is an inside look at the 1920s. With tales of Coco Chanel, the French orphan who redefined the feminine form; Lois Long, the woman who christened herself "Lipstick" and gave New Yorker readers a thrilling entrée into Manhattan's extravagant Jazz Age nightlife; three of America's first celebrities: Clara Bow, Colleen Moore, and Louise Brooks; Dallas-born fashion artist Gordon Conway; Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, whose swift ascent and spectacular fall embodied the glamour and excess of the era; and more, this is the story of America's first sexual revolution, its first merchants of cool, its first celebrities, and its most sparkling advertisement for the right to pursue happiness.

Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin: Writers Running Wild in the Twenties, Marion Meade (2005)

In her exuberant new work, Marion Meade presents a portrait of four extraordinary writers- Dorothy Parker, Zelda Fitzgerald, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Edna Ferber- whose loves, lives, and literary endeavors embodied the spirit of the 1920s.

These literary heroines did what they wanted and said what they thought, living wholly in the moment. They kicked open the door for twentieth-century women writers and set a new model for every woman trying to juggle the serious issues of economic independence, political power, and sexual freedom. Here are the social and literary triumphs and inevitably the penances paid: crumbled love affairs, abortions, depression, lost beauty, nervous breakdowns, and finally, overdoses and even madness.

A vibrant mixture of literary scholarship, social history, and scandal, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin* is a rich evocation of a period that will forever intrigue and captivate us.

Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s, Frederick L Allen (1931)

Hailed as a classic even when it was first published in 1931. A social history, it depicts the rise of post-World War I prosperity, the catalytic incidents that led to the Crash of 1929, and the devastating economic decline that ensued - all set before a rich backdrop of flappers, Al Capone, the first radio, and the "scandalous" rise of skirt hemlines, Listerine and Lindbergh, as well as Ford, Babe Ruth, the Teapot Dome, and bathtub gin.

Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived Through the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, David E. Kyvig (2004)

The twenties and thirties witnessed dramatic changes in American life: increasing urbanization, technological innovation, cultural upheaval, and economic disaster. In this fascinating book, the prize-winning historian David E. Kyvig describes everyday life in these decades, when automobiles and home electricity became commonplace, when radio and the movies became broadly popular. The details of work life, domestic life, and leisure activities make engrossing reading and bring the era clearly into focus.

1920: The Year that Made the Decade Roar, Eric Burns (2015)

"The Roaring Twenties" is the only decade in American history with a widely applied nickname, and our collective fascination with this era continues. But how did this surge of innovation and cultural milestones emerge out of the ashes of The Great War? No one has yet written a book about the decade's beginning.

Acclaimed author Eric Burns investigates the year of 1920, which was not only a crucial twelve-month period of its own, but one that foretold the future, foreshadowing the rest of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st, whether it was Sacco and Vanzetti or the stock market crash that brought this era to a close.

Burns sets the record straight about this most misunderstood and iconic of periods. Despite being the first full year of armistice, 1920 was not, in fact, a peaceful time—it contained the greatest act of terrorism in American history to date. And while 1920 is thought of as starting a prosperous era, for most people, life had never been more unaffordable. Meanwhile, African Americans were putting their stamp on culture and though people today imagine the frivolous image of the flapper dancing the night away, the truth was that a new kind of power had been bestowed on women, and it had nothing to do with the dance floor. . .

From prohibition to immigration, the birth of jazz, the rise of expatriate literature, and the original Ponzi scheme, 1920 was truly a year like no other.

A Preface to Morals, Walter Lippmann (1929)

After an eloquent and moving analysis of what he sees as the disillusion of the modern age, Lippmann posits as the central dilemma of liberalism its inability to find an appropriate substitute for the older forms of authority-- church, state, class, family, law, custom--that it has denied. Lippmann attempts to find a way out of this chaos through the acceptance of a higher humanism and a way of life inspired by the ideal of "disinterestedness" in all things.

The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's, Paula S. Fass (1977)

Explores the changes that occurred as young people of the 1920s broke with nineteenth-century traditions, and assesses the impact of those changes on American life, then and now.

Harlem Stomp!: A Cultural History Of The Harlem Renaissance, Laban Carrick Hill (2004)

When it was released in 2004, *Harlem Stomp!* was the first trade book to bring the Harlem Renaissance alive for young adults! Meticulously researched and lavishly illustrated, the book is a veritable time capsule packed with poetry, prose, photographs, full-color paintings, and reproductions of historical documents. Now, after more than three years in hardcover, three starred reviews and a National Book Award nomination, *Harlem Stomp!* is being released in paperback.