

Why the 1920s in
america was
considered the
"modern era" and
"modernism" essay
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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Why the 1920s in America was considered the “ Modern Era” and “ Modernism” Essay Sample

Many historians cite the 1920s as the decade in which America entered the “ modern era.” Given the myriad labels attached to this decade, this essay focuses on the broader context of all those movements under the umbrella term “ modernism.”

First, what is modernism and why did it apply to the 1920s (as opposed to earlier decades)? What ideologies or beliefs had changed by the 1920s that qualified this decade as “ modern” for America?

Second, to expand on those changes, what new issues/events/movements did Americans face in the 1920s? Discuss at least three examples and explain how each reflected modernism.

Last, in what ways did Americans respond to modernism? Why did some embrace modernism and others reject it? Discuss at least three examples and explain its significance for 20th century American life.

MY RESPONSE:

Intro/First.

World War I made the United States a world power. While European nations tried to recover from the war, the United States had overseas territories, access to markets, and plenty raw materials. Formerly in debt to European investors, the United States began to lend money abroad. At home, the economy expanded. Characteristics that qualified the 1920s as New Age and

modern were assembly-line production, mass consumption, easy credit, and advertising. In addition, profits soared, and American passion for reform decrease, while business and government resumed their long-term attraction. But not all Americans enjoyed the rewards of prosperity. A mix of economic change, political conservatism, and cultural conflict made the 1920s a decade of contradictions.

Second.

By 1922 the nation began a spectacular spurt of growth. The first new issue and event that Americans encountered in the 1920s was auto production, which symbolized the new potential of industry. Annual car sales tripled from 1916 to 1929; and 27 million cars were quickly sold by the end of the 1920s. Furthermore, new ways of production changed car manufacture. A moving assembly line brought interchangeable parts to workers who performed specific tasks again and again. Assembly-line techniques cut production costs, which made cars less expensive and more available to average citizens, which was another example of how America was more modernized. The effect of auto production spread beyond car factories. Auto building prompted industries that made steel, glass, rubber, and petroleum. Exploration for oil led to new corporations, such as Gulf Oil and Texaco.

Because of all the new cars on roads, state-funded programs to build new roads and highways changed the nation's landscape. Previously isolated rural areas filled with tourist cabins and gas stations. New suburbs with single-family homes on small plots of land appeared at the outskirts of cities;

and the construction industry soared. This event was a third way America was considered modern era.

Finally, the car industries lead the way to new ways to distribute and sell products. Auto companies sold cars through networks of dealers to customers who often used a new type of credit, the installment plan. The installment plan (like credit cards) was a fourth issue that made America more modern. With this plan, the purchaser made an initial payment, or down payment, and then agreed to pay the balance of the purchase price in a series of payments.

America was truly transforming into more modern like environments. Energy use tripled, and electricity reached 60 percent of American homes. Industry produced new home appliances such as refrigerators, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. As incomes rose, families spent larger portions of their incomes to buy these durable goods; items previously considered luxuries now became necessities. Chain stores, put local retailers out of business; canned goods and commercial breads replaced homemade products. The young advertising industry, which had appeared in the late 19th century, fed a desire for consumer goods. Extensive credit supported this desire, known as consumerism. These were all more things that caused America to seem more modern were.

During the decade, American corporations became larger. Some grew by securing markets abroad; others grew through consolidation. Large companies came to dominate many industries. By the end of the 1920s, 100 corporations controlled nearly half the nation's business.

Modernism also promoted a period of experimentation in the arts from the 1920s. In an era characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, advances in science and the social sciences, Modernists felt a growing separation incompatible with Victorian morality, optimism, and convention. The Modernist impulse is increased in various literatures by industrialization and urbanization, by the search for an authentic response to a much-changed world. In the visual arts the roots of Modernism are often traced back to painter Edouard Manet, who broke away from notions of perspective, modeling, and subject matter. The avant-garde movements that followed (including Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Constructivism, and Abstract Expressionism), are also generally defined as Modernist. Over the span of these movements, artists increasingly focused on the intrinsic qualities of their media, for example line, form, and color.

Last.

Americans responded to modernism with enthusiasm and embraced it, but others rejected it. The vast growth of business in the 1920s transformed many areas of life, but failed to distribute benefits equally. Industrial workers did not get any of the profit from increased productivity. Wages rose but not as fast as prices. Unions competed with company unions (employer-established organizations) and battled the National Association of Manufacturers, which sought to break union power.

Farmer rejected modernism because agriculture suffered severely. Markets for farm products declined after army purchases ended and European

farming revived. Farmers produced more, and prices continued to fall. The annual income of farmers declined, and they fell further into debt.

Many American families may have loved the many aspects of the new modern American life, such as having a car, new home appliances, more convenient ways of purchasing and preparing food, and new sources of entertainment. However, since there was so much to buy (and the new idea of buy it now, and pay for it later), many Americans became caught up in a web of credit and consumption. Therefore, after racking up bills, they probably started to reject and dislike modernism.

During the 1920s, African American embraced modernism because their communities were home to cultural revivals, such as the Harlem Renaissance, where art, music, and literature thrived. The “ New Negro,” a term used by critic and historians, celebrated African American heritage and racial identity. As black creativity flourished, African Americans began to raise their voices for equality. Interest also arose in black nationalism.