

# Modernism outline



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## The Moderns 1914-1939 The American Dream: Pursuit of a Promise

Modernism called for bold experimentation and wholesale rejection of traditional themes and styles. America is considered a land of new Eden: a land of beauty, bounty, and unlimited promise. The American Dream is based on optimism, opportunity, progress. A Crack in a the World:

Breakdown of Beliefs and Traditions The center of literary life had shifted from New England and spread across America. Two new theories, Marxism and psychoanalysis, combined to influence previous beliefs and values.

### Marxism and the Challenge to Free Enterprise

Marx's socialist beliefs conflicted with the American system of capitalism and free enterprise. Freud and the Unconscious Mind Sigmund Freud called for a new understanding of human sexuality and the role it played in our unconscious thoughts. Stream of Consciousness: abandoned chronology and attempted to imitate the moment-by-moment flow of a character's perceptions and memories. At Home and Abroad: The Jazz Age The Prohibition brought forth the bootlegger, the speak-easy, the cocktail, the short-skirted flapper, the new rhythms of jazz, and the gangster.

Women gained independence and the right of vote, Americans started to move away to countries like France, countering with the idea of the American Dream. Grace Under Pressure: The New American Hero Ernest Hemingway reduced the flamboyance of literary language to the bare bones of the truth it must express. The Hemingway hero is a man of action, a warrior, and a tough competitor; his quality is that at the mysterious center of creation, there lay nothing at all. Hemingway believed that snatching up the rare, rich, good moments of life offers those moments to elude us.

Modern Voices in Poetry: A Dazzling Period of Experimentation Poets entered the period of experimentation: they were inspired by other artists around the world, exploring the artistic life of Europe and observing modernist works.

Imagist and symbolist styles sparked from this poetic movement and prevailed in poetry until the mid-twentieth century. Voices of the American Character Some poets rejected modernism and continued to pursue the American speech. Their individual accents reflect the regional diversity of American life and character.

Robert Frost used New England speech to create a poetic voice that was unique and impossible to imitate. The Harlem Renaissance: Voices of the African-American Experience African-American poets created works based on the rhythms and spirituals of jazz, its lyrics on songs known as the blues, and its diction on the street talk of the ghettos. The Harlem Renaissance brought awareness to African-American communities and became a catalyst for a new appreciation of the role of black talent in American culture. The American Dream Revised Who are we? Where are we going? What values should guide us on the search for our human identity?