

American Expatriates in the 1920s: Why Paris?

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Abstract:

In the 1920s, Paris was the place to be! Paris' allure was great in spite of the fact that the world was between two great wars and had seen destruction that was previously beyond all comprehension. So many men died that male populations in some areas of the world were completely decimated. In the United States, we had the "Roaring Twenties." Exuberance, a thriving stock market, enthusiasm in dance, art, and music was evident. Harlem attracted people as never before, and experienced a Renaissance of its own. Skyscrapers in Chicago and New York reached new heights, as did hemlines. Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, and people were doing the Lindy Hop. They also danced the Charleston, played jazz, and could buy a Ford for \$290. Wasn't all of this a metaphor for new hope and vitality here at home? So why Paris? Why did so many American artists leave the U.S. and head to France? What was going on politically here and abroad that made artists long for other shores? This unit will look at the forces at work leading to the creation of a large community of expatriates living in Paris. *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald will serve as primary examples of literature, which exposed the dark underbelly of a society that was intent on "living it up" here at home. How did the time period inform the writing? What were the forces of modernism at work in the art, literature, and music of the era, and were there similarities in tone between these various works?