

# From Flappers to Rappers

The Origins, Evolution, and Demise of Youth Culture

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## **STUDENT WORKBOOK**

Canadian Scholars

Toronto | Vancouver

**From Flappers to Rappers: The Origins, Evolution, and Demise of Youth Culture**  
Student Workbook

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Canadian Scholars gratefully acknowledges financial support for our publishing activities from the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit Program.

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# Introduction

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## **Purpose**

This workbook is intended for classroom users of the book *From Flappers to Rappers: The Origins, Evolution, and Demise of Youth Culture*. The latter can, of course, be read and used independently of this workbook. I have composed it as an ancillary study tool supplementing and complementing the book and other textual materials that instructors may be using in a course on youth culture. The intent is to allow students to follow the subject matter of the book more intelligibly and interactively. This workbook can be used, therefore, as a source of pedagogical activities, including readings of primary textual materials. Hopefully, it will help make the course more student-centred and interactive.

## **Organization**

The workbook is designed to follow the six chapters of the book in order. The contents of each chapter of this workbook include review material, textual analysis, and a general discussion of the main themes.

*Opening Commentary* – Each chapter starts off with a quotation that is relevant to the overall theme of the chapter. Users are instructed to express their own opinion with regard to the quotation.

*Thematic Summary* – The next section is a summary of the chapter contents, highlighting its main points.

*Review of Main Terms* – This section lists the main terms used in the chapter that relate to its theme. The items may also refer to events, people, or texts. The user is instructed to discuss, describe, or define them.

*Textual Analysis* – This section presents excerpts from the writings of various authors discussed in the chapter, or else examples of art works and other types of texts mentioned in the chapter. Users are instructed to summarize how they relate to the theme, themes, notions, feelings, etc. of the chapter.

*Discussion* – This final section consists of a series of questions or statements based on the chapter's contents to be discussed in class.

# Chapter 1

## Origins: From the Construction of Adolescence to the Roaring Twenties

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### Opening Commentary

Given what this chapter is about, would you agree with the following commentary? Why?

They were smart and sophisticated, with an air of independence about them, and so casual about their looks and clothes and manners as to be almost slapdash. I don't know if I realized as soon as I began seeing them that they represented the wave of the future, but I do know I was drawn to them. I shared their restlessness, understood their determination to free themselves of the Victorian shackles of the pre-World War I era and find out for themselves what life was all about.

—Colleen Moore (1901–1988)

### Thematic Summary

This chapter traces the origins of youth culture to the Roaring Twenties, discussing how concepts of childhood, adolescence, and various others interacted with the biology of adolescents to set the conditions for a veritable youth culture to emerge in America in the 1920s with its own forms of music, dance, and lifestyles. The chapter looks at the origins of adolescence as a construct in the Romantic period, when even childhood was given a new interpretation. It then examines the lifestyles and worldviews of the flappers and flaming youth of the 1920s, who took the lead in transforming American society once and for all. The era was also called the Jazz Era because it was jazz that became the emotional fuel behind the first ever youth culture in history. One of the main themes of the book is, in fact, that without music there would be no youth culture. Each era is characterized and driven by music trends created by, and for, young people.

The roles of technology and the mass media in ensconcing and spreading youth culture, in partnership with the marketplace, are also discussed and analyzed. The partnership between these and youth culture is the one that made it possible for each successive youth culture to

become entrenched into the social groupthink. However, this partnership may have been severed in the current Internet age, which constitutes a true paradox because technology has always been youth culture's booster and the concrete system from which it materializes in the first place.

Finally, the chapter looks at the role of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway alongside art movements such as Dada and Futurism, since these are connected with the flapper movement, either directly or in parallel ways, having come onto the scene at the same time with many of the flappers' radical views of society. So, whether or not the young people of the era read the relevant literary works or appreciated and understood the significance of the art movements is a moot point since all come about at the same time, revealing identical impulses for bringing about radical change.

## **Review of Main Terms**

Discuss, describe, or define the following terms, events, people, or texts, focusing on what they meant to the origins of youth culture in the 1920s. You might want to expand beyond the book in some areas.

1. adolescence
2. Romanticism
3. flapper
4. flaming youth
5. Charleston
6. jazz
7. Roaring Twenties
8. youth culture
9. puberty
10. Prohibition
11. Betty Boop
12. *Casablanca*
13. *Chicago*
14. Jazz Era
15. Tin Pan Alley
16. Louis Armstrong
17. swing

18. The Lost Generation

19. The Great Depression

## Textual Analysis

Below are excerpts from the writings of various authors and paintings discussed in the chapter. Summarize how they relate to the themes, notions, and feelings of the chapter. In the case of the excerpts by Fitzgerald and Hemingway, there is great leeway in interpreting them, since they are metaphors of various kinds.

1. G. Stanley Hall [From: *Adolescence*, 1904]

This long pilgrimage of the soul from its old level to a higher maturity which adolescence recapitulates must have taken place in the race in certain of its important lines long before the historic period, because its very nature seems to involve the destruction of all its products and extinction of all records. Just as the well-matured adult, as is elsewhere shown, has utterly lost all traces and recollection of the perturbations of the storm and stress period, because they are so contradictory and mutually destructive and because feelings themselves can not be well remembered, so the race must have gone through a long heat and ferment, of which consciousness, which best develops in stationary periods, was lost, partly because growth was so rapid. Incidents are never better remembered by the individual, but they are never more transformed and changed, and just so the precious but often grotesque myths and legends of races, sacred to them but often meaningless to others, afford the only traces of ethnic adolescence which races retain.

They are told about campfires, perhaps laboriously and allegorically interpreted or developed into literary form with the same gusto with which the man recounts in ever more mythic form the most vivid incidents his memory has rescued from the turmoil of these years of transformation and reconstruction, when nature's first call is heard to go

out from the home to some promised land or career, to establish a new domicile for body and soul, and to be the progenitor of offspring of both, that to the inflamed youthful heart seem like the stars of heaven in number. Youth loves intense states of mind and is passionately fond of excitement. Tranquil, mild enjoyments are not its forte. The heart and arteries are, as we have seen, rapidly increasing in size, and perhaps heightened blood pressure is necessary to cause the expansion normal at this stage. Nutritive activities are greatly increased; the temperature of the body is probably a trifle higher. After its period of most rapid growth, the heart walls are a little weak, and peripheral circulation is liable to slight stagnation, so that in the interests of proper irrigation.

2. Sigmund Freud [From: *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905]

It is a part of popular belief about the sexual impulse that it is absent in childhood and that it first appears in the period of life known as puberty. This, though a common error, is serious in its consequences and is chiefly due to our present ignorance of the fundamental principles of the sexual life. A comprehensive study of the sexual manifestations of childhood would probably reveal to us the existence of the essential features of the sexual impulse, and would make us acquainted with its development and its composition from various sources.

The Neglect of the Infantile.—It is remarkable that those writers who endeavor to explain the qualities and reactions of the adult individual have given so much more attention to the ancestral period than to the period of the individual's own existence—that is, they have attributed more influence to heredity than to childhood. As a matter of fact, it might well be supposed that the influence of the latter period would be easier to understand, and that it would be entitled to more consideration than heredity. To be

sure, one occasionally finds in medical literature notes on the premature sexual activities of small children... but these are referred to merely as exceptional occurrences, as curiosities, or as deterring examples of premature perversity. No author has to my knowledge recognized the normality of the sexual impulse in childhood, and in the numerous writings on the development of the child is usually passed over.

Infantile Amnesia.—This remarkable negligence is due partly to conventional considerations, which influence the writers on account of their own bringing up, and partly to a psychic phenomenon which has thus far remained unexplained. I refer to the peculiar amnesia which veils from most people (not from all!) the first years of their childhood, usually the first six or eight years. So far it has not occurred to us that this amnesia ought to surprise us, though we have good reasons for surprise. For we are informed that in those years from which we later obtain nothing except a few incomprehensible memory fragments, we have vividly reacted to impressions, that we have manifested pain and pleasure like any human being, that we have evinced love, jealousy, and other passions as they then affected us; indeed we are told that we have uttered remarks which proved to grown-ups that we possessed understanding and a budding power of judgment. Still we know nothing of all this when we become older. Why does our memory lag behind all our other psychic activities? We really have reason to believe that at no time of life are we more capable of impressions and reproductions than during the years of childhood.

3. Margaret Mead [From: *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1928]

And if one girl past puberty is undersized while her cousin is tall and able to do heavier work, there will be a difference between them, due to their different physical endowment, which will be far greater than that which is due to puberty. The tall, husky

girl will be isolated from her companions, forced to do longer, more adult tasks, rendered shy by a change of clothing, while her cousin, slower to attain her growth, will still be treated as a child and will have to solve only the slightly fewer problems of childhood. The precedent of educators here who recommend special tactics in the treatment of adolescent girls translated into Samoan terms would read: Tall girls are different from short girls of the same age, we must adopt a different method of educating them. But when we have answered the question we set out to answer we have not finished with the problem. A further question presents itself. If it is proved that adolescence is not necessarily a specially difficult period in a girl's life—and proved it is if we can find any society in which that is so—then what accounts for the presence of storm and stress in American adolescents? First, we may say quite simply, that there must be some-thing in the two civilisations to account for the difference. If the same process takes a different form, in two different environments, we cannot make any explanations in terms of the process, for that is the same in both cases. But the social environment is very different and it is to it that we must look for an explanation. What is there in Samoa which is absent in America, what is there in America which is absent in Samoa, which will account for this difference?

Such a question has enormous implications and any attempt to answer it will be subject to many possibilities of error. But if we narrow our question to the way in which aspects of Samoan life which irremediably affect the life of the adolescent girl differ from the forces which influence our growing girls, it is possible to try to answer it. The background of these differences is a broad one, with two important components one is due to characteristics which are Samoan, the other to characteristics which are primitive. The Samoan background which makes growing up so easy, so simple a matter, is the general casualness of the whole society. For Samoa is a place where no one plays for very high stakes, no one pays very heavy prices, no one suffers for his

convictions or fights to the death for special ends. Disagreements between parent and child are settled by the child's moving across the street, between a man and his village by the man's removal to the next village, between a husband and his wife's seducer by a few fine mats. Neither poverty nor great disasters threaten the people to make them hold their lives dearly and tremble for continued existence. No implacable gods, swift to anger and strong to punish, disturb the even tenor of their days. Wars and cannibalism are long since passed away and now the greatest cause for tears, short of death itself, is a journey of a relative to another island. No one is hurried along in life or punished harshly for slowness of development.

Instead the gifted, the precocious, are held back, until the slowest among them have caught the pace. And in personal relations, caring is as slight. Love and hate, jealousy and revenge, sorrow and bereavement, are all matters of weeks. From the first months of its life, when the child is handed carelessly from one woman's hands to another's, the lesson is learned of not caring for one person greatly, not setting high hopes on any one relationship. And just as we may feel that the Occident penalises those unfortunates who are born into Western civilisation with a taste for meditation and a complete distaste for activity, so we may say that Samoa is kind to those who have learned the lesson of not caring, and hard upon those few individuals who have failed to learn it.

4. F. Scott Fitzgerald [From: *The Great Gatsby*, 1925]

That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from

growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.

Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old—even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares.

After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home.

.....

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent,

compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

5. Ernest Hemingway [From: *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929]

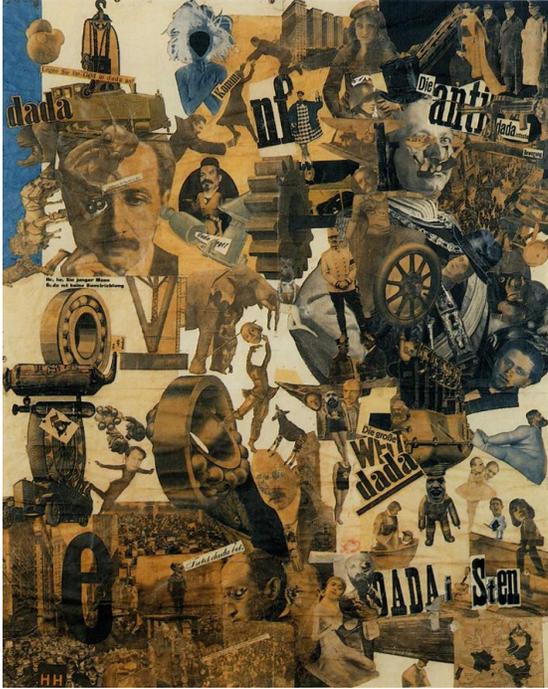
It was dark in the room and the orderly, who had sat by the foot of the bed, got up and went out with him. I liked him very much and I hoped he would get back to the Abruzzi some time. He had a rotten life in the mess and he was fine about it but I thought how he would be in his own country. At Capracotta, he had told me, there were trout in the stream below the town. It was forbidden to play the flute at night. When the young men serenaded only the flute was forbidden. Why, I had asked. Because it was bad for the girls to hear the flute at night. The peasants all called you "Don" and when you met them they took off their hats. His father hunted every day and stopped to eat at the houses of peasants. They were always honored. For a foreigner to hunt he must present a certificate that he had never been arrested. There were bears on the Gran Sasso

D'Italia but it was a long way. Aquila was a fine town. It was cool in the summer at night and the spring in Abruzzi was the most beautiful in Italy. But what was lovely was the fall to go hunting through the chestnut woods. The birds were all good because they fed on grapes and you never took a lunch because the peasants were always honored if you would eat with them at their houses. After a while I went to sleep.

.....

Once in camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first toward the centre where the fire was; then turned back and ran toward the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whiskey in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants.

6. Dada [Below is a Dada painting by Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919. What do you think it means or portrays, and how does it do so? How does it relate to events and ideas of the Roaring Twenties?]



Source: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

7. Futurism [Below is a Futurist painting by Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed + Sound*, 1913–1914. How does it anticipate the Roaring Twenties and other art movements of the era?]



Source: Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed + Sound*, 1913–1914, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

## Discussion

Discuss the following.

1. Identify several works of literature that came to define childhood in the 1800s and early twentieth century, indicating what they tell us about the concept of childhood in the Romantic era.
2. What “problems” did the construction of adolescence bring about? Are these still relevant today?
3. Does high school still play a role in shaping the experience of adolescence and the trends in youth culture generally?
4. Why do you think the book defines the Flapper Era as the first true youth culture era? Do you agree or not? Why?
5. Why do you think legal measures such as Prohibition are not effective at curtailing “unwanted” lifestyles?
6. What roles did radio and records play in promoting youth culture in the 1920s? Why do you think the mass media play such a critical role in the diffusion of trends?
7. Why did youth culture need, at first, to forge a partnership with the mass media and business?
8. Why do you think that wars and economic crises relegate youth movements to the margins, at least in the early eras?