



The Jazz Age



- Formally, the term can be defined as the **period between the years 1919 until October, 1929**, years which acted as a buffer between two great events-- **the World War I and the great depression** (Boardman 7).

Realistically,

- The term “the Jazz Age” is described or recaptured as being an era that was characterized by an **“ambivalent sense of exhilaration”** (Shaw 3). The word exhilaration is not a term that is applicable to many modern day inventions or used to describe any other time in history. The word **indicates a sense of excitement** which are not meant to be long-lived but a short and unforgettable time period which sets unbeatable standards for all other eras in history.

Glamour & Luxury

- In order to understand the extent to which the age valued glamour, one can take a clue from the **grand and luxurious hotels that were constructed during this era**. They basically act as a permanent homage to the values of luxury and excess that the Jazz Age mercilessly promoted. Despite the many years that have passed, these hotels still remain unraveled in their detail, suggesting that no matter how many years have passed, there has not been another time when **America fell so deep into the depths of materialism**.

the Term “Jazz” was first coined

- As it was meant to indicate **sexual liberation and freedom of a generation that previously was forced to keep all things taboo behind locked doors. The Jazz Age was inevitable because nothing taboo can be kept behind doors** for an extended period of time before becoming mainstream. This kind of living, rebellion to traditional beliefs that were the mark and the criterion of determining success led the destruction of a lot of people, as revealed in the life of Fitzgerald’s characters. About this subject O’Donnell comments:

- **It is characterized as the age of excess.** The Jazz Age is one of disenchantment and skepticism, of a failed and vulnerable romanticism that takes place of lost belief in old gods or order and progress, and of exuberant, inflationary excess in which the **philosophy of carpe diem** vies with the restrictions of the Prohibition as the gap between the rich and the poor expands to the point of collapse with the stock market crash of 1929 (1998: 8).

- The Jazz Age can be used to describe **the materialistic ideal** of individualism that the American Dream of the early twentieth century held so dear. **It represents the early version of the dream so perfectly because it was an age that knew no limitations.** When the American Dream was first developed, it did not believe that anything could stand in the way of desire if determination was present. **The participants of the Jazz Age believed that they were entitled to the excess and luxury that the era had to offer because it was simply an extension of the unstoppable attitude of the American Dream.**
- It was a time for experimentation and increased **affection for fun, play and the pursuit and quest for pleasure.** It was a time in history when America had fully established itself as a world power and the need to construct a new American cultural face arose.

- Doctorow maintains: “**We were the most powerful nation. Who could tell us any longer what was fashionable and what was fun?**” (17). **It is obvious that the end of the First World War gave the Americans the strength to get out from under the shadow of Europe** and gave them the confidence to invent their own culture. It is clear that for centuries, American youth only had the confidence of receiving **second-hand culture rather than inventing their own.**

- This time period was also particularly interesting because despite the party, lifestyle of American youth, **the government started to exercise more control over society, mainly in the form of what is referred to as National Prohibition or the control of alcoholic beverages.** The government's decision to place a ban on alcoholic beverages gave birth to what is known as **Prohibition Culture** so as mentioned by (Minter 95). Not surprisingly, the government's attempt to put a **stop on the use of alcohol and put morality back into American Culture** was an ill attempt at control that was met with a surprising response. As a result of Prohibition laws, American culture was forever changed and transformed into a culture that **valued PLEASURE, fun, and defiance.**

The **start** of the Jazz Age indicated, the **failure** of the American Dream

- By the time the Jazz Age had come into full swing, **the original American Dream had already declined and taken with it the concept of hardworking.** Many of the previous generation, still perceived America as a land where freedom was important, yet a certain degree of morality was always needed to make sure that society remained in order. **The ethics of honest hard work and sacrifice were needed especially during the First World War, in a sense, their American Dream of hardworking, morality and ethics slowly disappeared during the Jazz Age.** The new American Dream still revolved around progress but with progress came the need for luxury that the previous generation had not allowed themselves to indulge in.

- Although there are many famous writers who incorporated certain elements of the Jazz Age into their writings, **none other than Fitzgerald was able to define the very essence of the Jazz Age and its generation. In view of that Fitzgerald says: The restlessness approached Hysteria. The parties were bigger. The pace was faster, the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser, and the liquor was cheaper; but all these benefits did not really minister to much delight. Young people wore out early-- they were hard and languid at twenty- one. Most of my friends drank too much – the more they were in tune to the times the more they drank (Alexandria 194).**

- Even decades later, **he is still the father of the Jazz Age** and was able to capture it in all of its glory and excess like no other writer of his generation or current generation. Although Fitzgerald prided himself for his novel writing skills rather than short stories, the very genre he silently shunned became the greatest form for observing the Jazz Age generation. **Fitzgerald's life was the embodiment of the Jazz Age itself, "Scott having become a celebrity, the Fitzgeralds went on a roller coaster ride of glamorous Long Island partying, trips to Paris, unbuttoned high jinks, lavish entertaining, and notorious debaucheries that kept Scott emotionally and financially strapped" (Shaw 4).** It is clear that **Fitzgerald became the voice of the Jazz Age** because he was not a fraud; he was responsible for making the era mainstream and making it a part of history rather than just another phase.

- **The literature that Fitzgerald produced during the Jazz Age both reflected the defiant nature of the American Dream and the pursuit of money and wealth** at all costs. One of the most famous examples of Fitzgerald's work that clearly demonstrates these two qualities is The Great Gatsby, the title character often hosts extravagant parties in which there is an excessive amount of liquor. Also, he builds a fortune by engaging in bootlegging operations. Fitzgerald points out that despite the laws of the time, his characters embraced the spirit of the Jazz Age and embraced the spirit of personal freedom rather than collective obedience.

- **Fitzgerald and his wife were the living, breathing, and embodiment of the American Dream and the Jazz Age. They were rich, young, glamorous couples who had the luxury.** It can be argued that if Fitzgerald himself did not engage in the types of activities he did during the 1920s, he would never have become the voice that he did since he was considered **the voice and the sound of the Jazz Age** (Bryer et al. 2003: 149). The Jazz Age, according to Fitzgerald, **had no interest in politics at all. It was an age of miracles; it was an age of art, an age of excess, an age of satire, and more importantly an age of pleasure.**