The Issue

The issue: In the early 20th century, a new breed of young woman emerged; the so-called flapper was opinionated, smoked and drank heavily, and flaunted her sexuality in ways considered shocking at the time. Are flappers selfish, time-wasting young women who are eroding the moral fabric of the country? Or are they intelligent, free-spirited women who boldly assert their independence from outdated moral standards and gender roles?

- **Arguments against the flapper culture**: Flappers are a disgrace to society because they are lazy pleasure-seekers who are only interested in drinking, partying, and flirting. They often neglect their education and refuse to make important commitments such as marriage and child-rearing. Flappers also spend far too much money on clothes to achieve a trendy look, and, despite claiming to be independent, are in fact conformists who adhere to common fashion styles and behavior modes dictated by others. Ultimately, flappers give feminists a bad name by overindulging in their newfound social freedoms and imitating the worst and most excessive habits of men.

- **Arguments in favor of the flapper culture**: Flappers are intelligent, self-willed young women who have earned the right to pursue a passionate lifestyle. In some respects, they are a new kind of feminist, since they aggressively assert their social, professional, and sexual independence from men. Their behavior, far from being destructive, will help to establish full equality between the sexes. Furthermore, critics are wrong to assert that flappers are fundamentally immoral when compared with their elders; many flappers behave responsibly in their...
pursuit of self-fulfillment, and their free-spirited behavior is really not unlike the youthful exuberance of previous generations.

Background

The "flapper" was an exotic new breed of young woman who dominated the cosmopolitan scene of the late 1910s and, especially, the 1920s. The stereotypical flapper was a slender, fashionable, opinionated woman who partied hard, smoked and drank heavily, and flaunted her sexuality in ways considered shocking at the time. The bold and often wild behavior of flappers made them a lightning rod for controversy.

Flappers initially flourished in the United States after World War I (1914-18), which triggered various political and cultural changes. For example, the conflict’s brutality left many young people disillusioned and led them to question traditional morality and values. The war also indirectly accelerated the development of women’s rights; for the duration of the fighting, many women took jobs that had been left vacant by men who went off to fight in the war, and they became more confident in their ability to work and function independently of men.

Women’s rights enjoyed a further boost from the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, which granted women the power to vote. The feminist movement was running strong at the time, and it encouraged women to aggressively pursue their goals and become more active in politics and society. The flapper emerged amid that climate of social change, and came to symbolize a new form of liberated woman. [See Woman Suffrage]

The development of the flapper was also linked to radical new trends in fashion, music, and male-female courtship rituals. Flappers typically abandoned traditional garments such as long dresses and corsets, instead wearing skimpier clothes that were, by Victorian-era standards, scandalously provocative. They also became notorious for dancing wildly—often to jazz music—and allowing themselves to be kissed or "petted" (fondled) by a series of disposable male suitors. They often avoided long-term commitments such as marriage and child-rearing, preferring to live and work as they pleased.

Although the controversy over flappers and their behavior might seem quaint by modern standards, at the time it was considered a serious topic for debate. In April 1922, the New York Times ran an article by Margaret O’Leary, "More Ado about the Flapper," which effectively summed up the contemporary dispute on the matter. "Concern—and consternation—about the flapper are general," O’Leary declared. "Roughly, the world is divided into those who delight in her, those who fear her and those who try pathetically to take her as a matter of course. Optimists have called her the hope of the new era, pessimists point to her as ultimate evidence of the decadence of the old."

As O’Leary indicated, flapper culture polarized observers. Many people maintained that flappers were irresponsible and self-destructive, while others insisted that they were an exciting new breed of independent woman. The debate grew steadily until it involved the press, famous writers and artists, and even politicians who could not resist commenting on the flapper phenomenon.

Critics of flappers argued that they were lazy, self-absorbed young women who contributed little or nothing to the general welfare of society. Flappers tended to neglect their education in the pursuit of pleasure, their detractors charged, and consequently were often uninformed and uninvolved. Flappers also avoided important responsibilities such as marriage and child-rearing, critics complained, and thereby undermined the traditional family’s central position in society.

Other detractors of flappers maintained that they were essentially conformists, not free spirits, because they adhered to popular trends in fashion and behavior. In their
view, then, flappers were not really bold individuals but just thoughtless consumers of trendy clothes and cosmetics. Some accused flappers of harming the feminist cause by overindulging in alcohol, smoking, and sex—these excessive habits that undermined the progress of women by making them appear irresponsible and out of control.

Defenders of flappers, on the other hand, characterized them as strong-willed and independent women who were worthy of admiration. In their view, flappers had every right to drink, party, and flirt with various partners. After all, they argued, males had enjoyed such social privileges for generations, and it seemed only fair that the liberated "new woman" should now enjoy them too.

Supporters of the flapper culture also disputed critics' claims that flappers were empty-headed and neglectful of their education. They maintained that the genuine flapper was intelligent and well-read, and felt free to express her views on traditionally male-dominated topics such as politics and art. Advocates also challenged claims that all flappers lived wild lifestyles and were antifamily, arguing that many flappers behaved responsibly and would make perfectly good wives and mothers if they decided to settle down.

**Genesis of the Flapper**

No single event created the flapper, but historians have pinpointed a number of factors that led to her initial appearance. World War I was one of the most important catalysts. The conflict left 116,000 Americans dead and more than 200,000 wounded, and it caused many young people to question traditional morality and the judgment of those among their elders who had supported the fighting.

In 1922, self-confessed flapper Ellen Welles Page succinctly described the effects of World War I on her generation. "The war tore away our spiritual foundations and challenged our faith," she wrote. "We are struggling to regain our equilibrium." To put it another way, the war shocked many young people into losing their faith in established institutions such as religion and the family, and some of them embraced the flapper's wild lifestyle as an expression of their newfound cynicism. [See "A Flapper's Appeal to Parents" (primary document)]

The war also had the effect of pushing women further into the workforce, as they took a variety of jobs that had been left vacant by male soldiers. (Women also regularly found new jobs as operators in the then-booming telephone industry.) By 1929, more than 50 percent of single women in the United States were employed, and many of them lived alone and supported themselves in large cities such as Chicago and New York City.

Historians note that 1920s working women typically struggled to make ends meet, and earned less than men. Nevertheless, having a job enabled some of them to maintain the flapper's often-extravagant lifestyle. Also, whereas women had frequently been isolated from one another in past generations, during the 1920s they often worked together in large groups; this increased interaction helped to speed the development of all-female subcultures like the flappers.

Various other social changes accelerated the birth of the flapper, including changes in thinking about dating, sex, and marriage. Prior to World War I, American women had typically been required to behave in a passive manner while dating, and avoid any sexually aggressive behavior. In his book *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (1931), historian Frederick Lewis Allen asserted that prewar women were "guardians of morality" who were expected to "look forward in innocence...to a romantic love match which would lead them to the altar and to living happily-ever-after; and until the 'right man' came along they must allow no male to kiss them."

Around the time of the war, conservative attitudes toward dating, sex, and gender roles began to erode. For instance, according to sociological surveys, only 14 percent of American women had premarital sex prior to 1900, but that percentage rose to 39
percent during the 1910s and 1920s. Furthermore, the institution of marriage started to lose its status as a sacred and unbreakable bond around that time; the reported number of divorces doubled from about 100,000 in 1914 to 205,000 in 1929.

These changes in the sexual and social climate suited flappers, who tended to avoid long-term commitments such as marriage and enjoyed flirting with multiple male partners. Most flappers claimed that there was nothing particularly outrageous about their behavior, since sexual aggressiveness in young men had been widely tolerated for some time. In their view, they were simply working to eliminate the social "double standard" that had hitherto enabled men, but not women, to engage in premarital flirtations and sexual activity.

In addition to changing social attitudes, technological developments also played a part in the sexual revolution of the flappers. For example, the proliferation of the automobile during the 1910s and 1920s allowed young men and women to go on drives away from their homes and enjoy dates in more private, romantic settings. Furthermore, the increased use of electric lighting fostered the development of an urban "night life," which enabled young people to stay out and party together for longer periods of time. Without the advent of the automobile and the electric light, flappers might never have achieved the freedom necessary to develop their unique lifestyle.

Another important factor in the flapper's emergence was Prohibition (1920-33), a relatively short-lived attempt by the U.S. government to ban the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Prohibition was unpopular in certain social circles, and its opponents soon found illegal ways to obtain alcohol. Rebellious flappers particularly enjoyed flouting Prohibition by partying in underground drinking establishments called speakeasies and carrying hidden flasks of alcohol. (Their stereotypical drink of choice was gin.) Although Prohibition did suppress drinking somewhat, it also gave the activity a glamorous and dangerous aura that appealed to flappers, and created an underground drinking culture where they could thrive. [See Prohibition]

Furthermore, the growth of flapper culture was encouraged by jazz, a dynamic musical art form pioneered by African Americans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jazz was commonly associated with dancing, and its widespread popularity contributed to an explosion of nightlife and dance clubs. Many flappers were attracted to jazz, both because they appreciated the music on its own terms and because it was closely linked with exciting social activities. Some conservative critics actually blamed jazz for inspiring immoral behavior in flappers and other young people. Commentator Anne Shaw Faulkner, writing for the Ladies' Home Journal in 1921, branded the musical form an "evil influence" that stimulated base impulses such as "brutality and sensuality." [See "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" (primary document)]

In short, flappers were not created by any single event, but by a series of political and social changes. The rise of women's rights, the decline of conservative morality, and the explosion of urban culture and nightlife combined to produce the colorful and unprecedented figure of the flapper.

**Defining the Flapper**

Although flappers arguably achieved their greatest notoriety in the United States, the actual word "flapper" is believed to have originated in England before World War I, and entered American usage around 1915. Some historians say that the term initially referred to skinny young women who wore long, straight dresses (known as "flapper-dresses") to conceal their lack of feminine curves; others maintain that the word was used in a more pejorative sense, to refer to English prostitutes.

In any event, commentators in the United States soon picked up the term, and began applying it to a controversial new type of young woman. Writer H. L. Mencken crafted a very early definition of the model flapper in 1915, describing her as someone "impossible to shock" and who was "opposed to the double standard of morality" that
gave men more social freedom than women. He also enumerated the model flapper's physical characteristics, noting that her skirts were short enough to reveal her ankles, and her hair was short enough to expose "the ravishing whiteness of her neck." The short haircut Mencken referred to was known as "bobbed" hair, and quickly became one of the most recognizable physical characteristics of flappers. [See Flapper Fashions (sidebar)]

Other observers wrote their own elaborate definitions in later years. In 1922, admitted ex-flapper Ruth Hooper painted a strong, unapologetic portrait of flappers for the New York Times, writing: [See "Flapping Not Repented of" (Excerpt) (primary document)]

A flapper is proud of her nerve—she is not even afraid of calling it by its right name. She is shameless, selfish and honest, but at the same time she considers these three attributes virtues. Why not? She takes a man's point of view as her mother never could, and when she loses she is not afraid to admit defeat, whether it be a prime lover or $20 at auction. She can take a man—the man of the hour—at his face value...with no foolish promises that will need a disturbing and disagreeable breaking.

Hooper's definition included many of the classic elements of the flapper, including her assertiveness in taking a "man's point of view" (presumably on important issues of the day) and her willingness to experiment with various male suitors without making commitments. Hooper suggested that those traits were strengths, but more conservative observers characterized them as unladylike excesses.

In 1925, New Republic editor Bruce Bliven offered yet another definition in his profile of "Jane," an archetypal flapper who may or may not have existed. Adopting a clearly tongue-in-cheek style, Bliven described Jane as follows:

She is, for one thing, a very pretty girl. Beauty is the fashion in 1925. She is frankly, heavily made up, not to imitate nature, but for an altogether artificial effect—pallor mortis, poignantly scarlet lips, richly ringed eyes—the latter looking not so much debauched (which is the intention) as diabolic. Her walk duplicates the swagger supposed by innocent America to go with the female half of a Paris Apache dance. And there are, finally, her clothes. These were estimated the other day by some statistician to weigh two pounds. Probably a libel; I doubt they come within half a pound of such bulk. Jane isn't wearing much, this summer.

Taken together, these definitions create a fairly complete portrait of the flapper, as she existed in the popular consciousness—if not always in reality. According to the press, the flapper had a series of easily recognizable characteristics: she was flirtatious, opinionated, short-haired, scantily clad (by 1920s standards), and generally outrageous. These characteristics were often enumerated in articles, works of fiction, poems, and even songs on the subject of the flapper. [See 'The Playful Flapper' (primary document)]

While some writers concentrated simply on defining flappers, others actively popularized their lifestyle and culture. Foremost among them was F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose timely short stories and novels often featured free-spirited, witty, amorous female characters who fit the public perception of flappers. Shortly after Fitzgerald gained notoriety with the 1920 publication of his first novel, This Side of Paradise, journalists started billing him as the spokesman for his generation and its controversial culture; he was variously described in the press as the originator of the flapper, the country's foremost "expert on flappers," and even "Flapperdom's Fiction Ace." [See Bernice Bobs Her Hair (primary document)]

Some of Fitzgerald's notable female characters were apparently inspired by his wife, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. In the eyes of many observers, she was the quintessential flapper due to her reputation for speaking her mind, drinking heavily, and partying relentlessly, often in the company of her husband. She also contributed to the evolving definition of the model flapper, remarking in 1922 that she was a woman who
"flirted because it was fun to flirt" and "refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn’t boring."

Other prominent contributors to the flapper culture included Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel, a French clothing designer who in large part defined 1920s fashion, and New Yorker columnist Lois Long, a popular chronicler of big-city life. The flapper image was also shaped by a bevy of silent film actresses, including Clara Bow, Louise Brooks, Colleen Moore, and Constance Talmadge. Though movies of the 1920s were perhaps too tame to duplicate flapper culture exactly, they did give many Americans a rough idea of what the culture was like. [See Flappers in Film (sidebar)]

Reinforced by the press, fashion trends, and the movies, the image of the flapper became increasingly prevalent during the early-to-mid 1920s. And, as the popularity of flappers grew, the debate over their impact on society grew as well. Over time, a slew of observers ranging from concerned parents to religious figures to government officials expressed opinions on the flapper phenomenon. Some saw the flapper as a harmless manifestation of youthful exuberance, while others championed her as a liberated and exciting "new woman." There were also those who saw the flapper as an outright threat to conventional morality, and hoped to see her exotic culture die out before it could become a permanent fixture of mainstream consciousness.

The Case for Flappers

Flappers were smart, liberated young women who had a legitimate right to embrace their unique and passionate lifestyle, advocates of the flapper culture maintained. Journalist Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, writing for Harper's magazine in 1927, reinforced this positive view of the flapper as an admirable and independent figure; she described the typical young woman of the 1920s as someone who "knows that it is her American, her twentieth-century birthright to emerge from a creature of instinct to a fully fledged individual who is capable of molding her own life. And in this respect she holds that she is becoming man's equal."

Several other commentators made similar arguments that flappers were, in essence, feminists—albeit unusual ones. According to advocates of the flapper culture, American women of previous generations had been both sexually and intellectually repressed, but flappers were freer to express their sexuality and their educated views on topics such as art, society, and politics. That new freedom of expression was, in their view, a good thing.

New Republic editor Bruce Bliven made an explicit connection between flappers and feminism in a 1925 article, "Flapper Jane." "Women to-day are shaking off the shreds and patches of their age-old servitude," he wrote in his profile of "Jane," the archetypal flapper. Bliven further suggested that certain controversial traits of flappers, such as their sexual aggressiveness and aversion to traditional gender roles, could be seen as forms of feminist expression:

Women have highly resolved that they are just as good as men, and intend to be treated so. They don't mean to have any more unwanted children. They don't intend to be debarred from any profession or occupation which they choose to enter. They clearly mean (even though not all of them yet realize it) that in the great game of sexual selection they shall no longer be forced to play the role, simulated or real, of helpless quarry. If they want to wear their heads shaved, as a symbol of defiance against the former fate which for three millennia forced them to dress their heavy locks according to male decrees, they will have their way.

Bliven’s comments touched on a core argument in favor of flapper culture—that women were entitled to full equality with men in all spheres of society, ranging from the workplace to the home to the dance floor. Advocates of flapper culture were particularly aggressive in attacking what they perceived as society’s double standards; they argued that flappers had a perfect right to be sexually assertive.
before marriage, since such behavior was already widely tolerated among men.

Advocates also praised flappers for possessing, and asserting, unusual intelligence. In her July 1922 article for the New York Times, admitted "ex-flapper" Ruth Hooper described the typical flapper as eloquent and well-read: "She may even quote poetry to you, not Indian love lyrics, but something about the peace conference [at Versailles, France, after World War I] or theology. After all, she checks up pretty squarely, doesn't she?" In the view of Hooper and like-minded commentators, flappers deserved credit for asserting the right of women to be conspicuously intelligent and for insisting on taking part in discussions of issues pertaining to formerly male-dominated spheres such as academia, politics, and the arts.

Hooper also contradicted critics' claims that flappers were antifamily. She predicted that the average flapper, thanks to her intelligence, honesty, and independence, would become an excellent mother once she matured and lost her youthful edge. "Watch her five years from now and then be thankful that she will be the mother of the next generation, with the hypocrisy, fluff and other 'hokum' worn entirely off," Hooper wrote. "Her sharp points wear down remarkably well and leave a smooth polished surface. You'll be surprised at what a comfort that surface will be in the days to come!"

Ellen Welles Page, another self-proclaimed flapper, also defended the morality of her culture. In "A Flapper's Appeal to Parents," published in Outlook in December 1922, she argued that not all flappers lived a wild and irresponsible lifestyle. "I don't use rouge, or lipstick, or pluck my eyebrows," she wrote. "I don't smoke (I've tried it, and don't like it), or drink, or tell 'peppy stories.' I don't pet." But Page also asserted that she attended co-educational dances and sporting events, which she maintained were harmless and fun activities enjoyed by flappers, and did not necessarily lead to immoral behavior.

Page further suggested that members of the older generation were being hypocritical in their criticism of flappers. In a direct address to her adult readers, she wrote, "Think back to the time when you were struggling through the teens. Remember how spontaneous and deep were the joys, how serious and penetrating the sorrows." She was, in effect, encouraging her older readers to see a link between their own carefree youths and the flapper culture. In the view of Page and other flapper apologists, youthful exuberance was a common phenomenon that recurred in each generation; so why, they asked, should flappers be singled out for criticism by elders who had also behaved passionately when they were young?

Not only young people and radicals defended flappers. Many older people and "establishment" figures in the political and religious communities also spoke in favor of the flapper culture. For instance, in May 1922, Reverend Almer Pennewell of Evanston, Illinois, gave a sermon defending flappers. "Flapperism is not a disease," he asserted. "Bobbed hair, short skirts and knickerbockers are not signs of sin, but a declaration of independence."

Pennewell, like other advocates of flapper culture, explicitly linked the flapper to the rise of feminism. "We are passing from the man age, a rough age, into the age of culture, the women's age. That is why the flapper exists today," he said. "The new age will not be one ruled by women, but one in which their influence will be felt." He also positively contrasted flappers to more oppressed women of the past, whom he described as "pretty little birds in cages."

In short, advocates argued that flapper culture was a social and intellectual triumph for liberated women. It was, they asserted, not fundamentally immoral or detrimental to society in any way.

The Case Against Flappers

Critics of the flapper culture argued that it encouraged immorality, irresponsibility, and downright laziness. In September 1922, U.S. Secretary of Labor James Davis expressed this view during a speech in Atlantic City, New Jersey, criticizing the
“flippancy of the cigarette-smoking, cocktail-drinking flapper.” He further complained about the state of contemporary youth in general, saying, "We hear much of evil tendencies among our girls and boys, of erotic conversations and literature in our schools and homes, of devotions to amusements that are unhealthful for soul and body."

Davis declared that these "evils" in the youth culture were "disturbing" and called on parents to give more positive guidance to their children. His speech reflected common concerns that the flapper culture was far too centered on substance abuse and sex and acted as a malign influence on young people. [See "Blue Laws for Flappers" (primary document)]

This negative view of flappers was often echoed by critics from the realm of academia. In December 1923, Harvard University psychologist Abraham Roback released a study claiming that flappers were among the poorest students and thereby posed "a hopeless problem for educators." Roback did not suggest that flappers were inherently stupid, but said that they "dislike to work, are very impatient and fail to apply knowledge which they acquire in school." He also cast them as selfish, maintaining that "they can appreciate only that phase of the question which directly affects them." [See "Flappers Lowest in Radcliffe Tests" (primary document)]

Roback's study, which he claimed was based on "hundreds of intelligence tests" administered to students, bolstered critics' arguments that flappers were too self-absorbed and impatient to deal with serious issues. In the view of these critics, flappers recklessly pursued personal gratification without proper consideration for any of the long-term consequences of their actions.

Though flapper culture was largely criticized by men in "establishment" positions such as Davis and Roback, a number of prominent feminists also attacked it. For instance, Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, suggested that flappers were conformists—and not free spirits—because they all dressed alike. "Women do not wear short skirts or bobbed hair by their own election," she wrote in August 1926, "but in obedience to the dictum of fashion." Catt's argument reflected the critical view that flappers were not fiercely individualistic, as they often claimed, but were instead simply consumers who fell in line with prevailing styles of dress and behavior.

Furthermore, critics stressed that maintaining the standard flapper look was an overly expensive, and ultimately frivolous, pursuit for young women. That argument was backed up by hard economic data; in 1927, sociologist Hattie Anderson published a survey of the spending habits of 1,318 women in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and found that the average respondent spent 46.3 percent of her earnings on clothes. Detractors of the flapper culture argued that this kind of heavy spending in the name of fashion was simply not justified, and constituted an unreasonable burden on working women.

Other critics, less concerned with economics, attacked flappers for eroding the moral fabric of society. British writer Sheila Kaye-Smith, in a piece for Living Age in 1929, criticized the new generation of young women for abandoning traditional values in order to pursue their independent lifestyles. "Marriage is going out of fashion as a vocation, and a great deal of nonsense is talked about men and women working together side by side," she protested. "I have even heard it said in praise of the modern woman that she does not look upon marriage as her aim in life, but looks forward to entering a profession and earning her living independently of male support. To me this schoolgirlish contempt of natural emotions is just as bad as early Victorian prudery."

In the view of Kaye-Smith and other like-minded critics, women's traditional roles as wives and mothers were ultimately more fulfilling and important than the autonomous, "masculine" lifestyles of flappers and working women. Further criticizing the modern woman, Kaye-Smith wrote, "To prove herself man's equal, as she always has been, she has paid him an unnecessary compliment of imitation, and she will never establish
herself fully in popular opinion as his equal until she realizes that her equality lies in her difference."

Other critics also questioned the morality of the flapper culture, but on somewhat different grounds. They claimed they were bothered not only by the smoking, drinking, and promiscuity of the flappers, but also by their apparently cynical worldview. Feminist Lillian Symes, writing for Harper's magazine in 1929, complained that the older generation of feminists to which she belonged had little in common with "the post-war, spike-heeled, over-rouged flapper of to-day. We grew up before the post-war disillusionment engulfed the youth of the land and created utilitarian literature, gin parties, and jazz babies."

Symes further argued that flappers took women's newfound social freedoms too far. "We believed didactically in our right to smoke and drink," she wrote of her own generation, "[b]ut we considered over-indulgence in either 'rather sloppy' if not anti-social." She also criticized the sexual aggressiveness of flappers, writing that her generation "should have been thoroughly revolted by the promiscuous pawing and petting permitted by so many technically virtuous younger women today." In other words, her view was that women could be independent-minded feminists without resorting to the social and sexual excesses of the flapper.

Overall, critics of the flapper culture argued that it was a destructive manifestation of women's liberation that might, in fact, hurt young women rather than help them to achieve full equality. In 1921, William Guth, president of Maryland's Goucher College, summarized the negative view that flappers had no real, productive place in 1920s society. "The test today for the educated woman is her usefulness in the community as well as in the home and in business," he maintained. "Certainly there will be no room for the frivolous flapper."

**The End of the Flapper?**

As of 1923, the flapper was "going stronger than ever," according to novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. "She gets wilder all the time," he proclaimed. "She still is looking for new conventions to break—for new thrills, for sensations to add zest to life, and she is growing more and more terrible." In the final analysis, however, flappers did not prove as durable as Fitzgerald predicted they would; by the close of the 1920s, these colorful figures had practically vanished after only a brief reign as queens of cosmo-polytism.

What exactly led to the demise of the flapper? Historians have cited a number of factors, including the devastating stock market crash of October 1929 that ushered in the Great Depression, which stifled many creative enterprises and had an overall sobering effect on American society. In many people's eyes, the carefree and extravagant flapper had no place in an era of economic hardship.

Flappers also suffered as a result of a partial resurgence of traditional morality in the United States. One notable manifestation of that conservative trend was the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, which attempted to sanitize potentially offensive content in films. Among other things, the code barred explicit depictions of sexuality on film, and thereby banished the most flirtatious and flapperlike female characters from the silver screen. [See Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Excerpts) (primary document)]

Another commonly cited cause of the flapper's demise was the loss of her mystique due to extensive press coverage that made her part of the mainstream culture. Even before the stock market crash and the advent of the motion picture code, flappers had lost much of their edge simply by becoming too popular for their own good. As more and more young women started to imitate the flapper lifestyle depicted by the media, flappers evolved from an exotic class of rebels into something more common—and therefore less exciting.

Evolving social and economic conditions, which had created the flapper in the first
place, ultimately led to her undoing. Nevertheless, her legacy remains relevant. Historians often credit flappers with pioneering a sexual revolution and helping to create an entirely new, youth-oriented subculture in American society. Furthermore, the willingness of the flapper to defy conventional morality, male authority, and societal expectations has been widely credited with inspiring rebellious sentiments in later generations. [See Feminist Movement]

Almost a century later, the flapper has become dated, but flapper-related issues have not. As long as controversies over youth culture, sex, and gender roles persist, the debate over everything flappers represented will continue in one form or another.

**Bibliography**


