

## Activity 9

# Document-Based Activity

## The Roaring Twenties

### Using Source Materials

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT** Many Americans were troubled by the social and economic changes of the early 1900s. Waves of immigrants brought unfamiliar values and customs. Large bureaucratic corporations created a complex, impersonal work culture. In response to these changes, people drew inspiration from the dramatic successes of larger-than-life celebrity heroes. The mass media of the 1920s fueled this trend. Movies, radio, and newspapers glorified the stars of the entertainment and sports worlds.

**TASK** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of American history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay.

### Part A

**DIRECTIONS** Examine the following documents and answer the short-answer questions that follow each document.

#### DOCUMENT 1

There is no agency so fraught with possibilities for service of good or evil to the American people as the radio . . . The power of the press will not be comparable to that of broadcasting stations when the industry is fully developed. If the development continues as rapidly in the future as in the past, it will only be a few years before these broadcasting stations . . . will simultaneously reach an audience of over half our citizenship, and bring messages to the fireside of nearly every home in America.

—Representative Luther A. Johnson  
Speech to the U.S. House of Representatives, March 13, 1926

1. According to Representative Luther A. Johnson, how does the power of radio compare to that of newspapers?

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2. How does Johnson seem to feel about the developing radio industry?

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**Activity 9****Document-Based Activity****The Roaring Twenties****DOCUMENT 2**

**Before You Read** The following words in the document below may be new to you: *facilitated, tangential, flacks, quintessence*. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

In a culture preoccupied with personality, “celebrity” became a measure of success. But even more important to the rise of celebrity, and what in fact facilitated this rise, was the centralization of the entertainment industry in New York between 1900 and 1929. For all kinds of entertainment . . . New York emerged as the central market in these decades. Star personality celebrities fueled this energetic commercial culture, and in fact became that culture’s icons . . . promoted by tangential industries that grew up around the entertainment industry. New “brokers,” such as theatrical agents and public relations flacks, by the late 1920s had constructed what one witness called a “staggering machine of desire” that centered on celebrity . . .

One way to measure America’s shift away from a hero-oriented stance to an embrace of celebrity was . . . to survey the biographical articles that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* between 1901 and 1941: in the years from 1901–1914, 74 percent of the subjects came from traditional fields such as politics, business, and the professions. But after 1922 over half came from the world of entertainment: sports figures like Joe Louis and Babe Ruth, and movie stars such as Gloria Swanson and Charlie Chaplin. The machinery providing mass information—the new broker network and the flourishing print, broadcasting, recording, and film industries—created a ravenous market for celebrity culture . . .

In the 1920s and ’30s, Hollywood celebrities came to represent the quintessence of glamour. Packaging star imagery became a major component of the Hollywood dream machine: the enduring images of the stars . . . were the portraits made by each studio for publicity purposes.

—Amy Henderson, historian at the Smithsonian Institution  
“Media and the Rise of Celebrity Culture,” *OAH Magazine of History*

1. According to the article, how did Americans’ interests change in the early 1900s?

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2. What factors contributed to the rise of a celebrity culture in the 1920s?

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**DOCUMENT 3**

**Jack Dempsey–Georges Carpentier heavyweight boxing championship bout, Jersey City, New Jersey, July 2, 1921**



© Bettmann/CORBIS

1. What can you infer from this photograph about sports in America in the 1920s?

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2. How did events like the one pictured above contribute to the rise of celebrities in America?

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**Activity 9****Document-Based Activity****The Roaring Twenties****DOCUMENT 4**

**Before You Read** The following words in the document below may be new to you: *precipice, panorama*. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army football team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds yesterday afternoon as 55,000 spectators peered down on the bewildering panorama spread on the green plain below.

A cyclone can't be snared. It may be surrounded but somewhere it breaks through to keep on going. When the cyclone starts from South Bend, where the candle lights still gleam through the Indiana sycamores, those in the way must take to storm cellars at top speed.

Yesterday the cyclone struck again as Notre Dame beat the Army, 13 to 7, with a set of backfield stars that ripped and crashed through a strong Army defense with more speed and power than the warring cadets could meet . . .

The Army has a better team than it had last year. So has Notre Dame. We doubt that any team in the country could have beaten Rockne's array yesterday afternoon, East or West. It was a great football team brilliantly directed, a team of speed, power and team play. The Army has no cause to gloom over its showing. It played first-class football against more speed than it could match.

Those who have tackled a cyclone can understand.

—Grantland Rice

*New York Herald-Tribune*, October 19, 1924

1. How did Grantland Rice describe the Notre Dame football players? What effect do you think his article had on those who read it?

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2. Why do you think Rice wrote the article the way that he did?

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## Activity 9

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#### DOCUMENT 5

Premiere of *The Jazz Singer* at Warners' Theatre, New York City, 1927



The Granger Collection, New York

1. Look closely at the photograph. What devices do you see that are intended to entice people to see the movie?

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2. The Jazz Singer was the first sound movie ever made. What does the size of the crowd in front of the theatre suggest about interest in this film?

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**Activity 9****Document-Based Activity****The Roaring Twenties****DOCUMENT 6**

Less than four weeks ago, "Slim" Lindbergh, a curiously simple, silent young air mail pilot, left this vicinity at gloomy dawn, alone in his plane, Spirit of St. Louis, bound for Paris, across the ocean. Not more than 2,000 men and women saw him go.

Yesterday, he returned to a tribute of millions. Le Bourget and Croyden, with their hysterical, unwieldy crowds; Paris, with its Boulevard throngs, and Washington with its glitter of formality were all but obliterated by the greetings of New York.

Certainly, this city never has seen the counterpart of yesterday. Police estimate 4,300,000 persons were in the streets, on the roofs or draped from windows, from the Battery to the grandstand in Central Park. It seems an exaggerated figure, but none who passed through the double wall of humans along the route of the parade would quarrel over a difference of a million or so.

Nor was the parade, which passed mile after mile through air thick with confetti and torn paper, the most striking spectacle of the day. That remained when the day was over, the journey up the bay from the Narrows, with the ruffle-haired Lindbergh on the bridge of the reception boat, Macom, and behind, churning the dull green water, an armada such as it is given to few men to see . . .

Lindbergh—"Slim" Lindbergh—was at the head of the procession, standing, nervous and, for the only time during the day, obviously excited on the bridge of the slim Macom, the sun touching his blond hair, his strong fingers twisted about the guardrail. A faint smile parted his lips. It went, then came, then went again, as if he were doing his very best to look as if he was used to extraordinary goings on.

—Oliver H. P. Garrett,  
*New York World*, May 22, 1927

1. Who was the subject of this celebration? Why were the people celebrating?

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2. What can you conclude from this article about how Americans felt about their heroes in the 1920s?

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**Activity 9****Document-Based Activity****The Roaring Twenties****DOCUMENT 7**

**Before You Read** The following words in the document below may be new to you: *hitherto*, *southpaw*, *momentous*, *audible*, *permeated*. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

Babe Ruth scaled the hitherto unattained heights yesterday. Home run 60, a terrific smash off the southpaw pitching of Zachary, nestled in the Babe's favorite spot in the right field bleachers, and before the roar had ceased it was found that this drive not only had made home run record history, but also was the winning margin in a 4 to 2 victory over the Senators. This also was the Yanks' 109th triumph of the season. Their last league game of the year will be played today.

When the Babe stepped to the plate in that momentous eighth inning the score was deadlocked. Koenig was on third base, the result of a triple, one man was out and all was tense . . .

The Babe took a vicious swing at the third pitched ball and the bat connected with a crash that was audible in all parts of the stand. It was not necessary to follow the course of the ball. The boys in the bleachers indicated the route of the record homer. It dropped about half way to the top. Boys, No. 60 was some homer, a fitting wallop to top the Babe's record of 59 in 1921.

While the crowd cheered and the Yankee players roared their greetings the Babe made his triumphant, almost regal tour of the paths. He jogged around slowly, touched each bag firmly and carefully, and when he embedded his spikes in the rubber disk to record officially homer 60, hats were tossed liberally and the spirit of celebration permeated the place.

The Babe's stroll out to his position was the signal for a handkerchief salute in which all the bleacherites, to the last man, participated. Jovial Babe entered into the carnival spirit and punctuated his Ringly strides with a succession of snappy military salutes.

—*New York Times*, October 1, 1927

1. What was Babe Ruth's profession? How is he described in the article?

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2. What was special about Ruth's accomplishment?

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**Activity 9****Document-Based Activity****The Roaring Twenties****Writing a Document-Based Essay**

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT** Many Americans were troubled by the social and economic changes of the early 1900s. Waves of immigrants brought unfamiliar values and customs. Large bureaucratic corporations created a complex, impersonal work culture. In response to these changes, people drew inspiration from the dramatic successes of larger-than-life celebrity heroes. The mass media of the 1920s fueled this trend. Movies, radio, and newspapers, glorified the stars of the entertainment and sports worlds.

**TASK** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of American history, write an essay in which you:

- Explain why celebrities and heroes became increasingly important to Americans in the 1920s.
- Discuss how celebrities and heroes inspired Americans during that decade.

**Part B**

**DIRECTIONS** Using the information from the documents provided and your knowledge of American history, write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, a body of several paragraphs, and a conclusion. In the body of the essay, use examples from at least *four* documents. Support your response with relevant facts, examples, and details. Include additional outside information.

**GUIDELINES**

**In your essay, be sure to:**

- Address all aspects of the **Task** by accurately analyzing and interpreting at least *four* documents.
- Incorporate information from the documents in the body of the essay.
- Incorporate relevant outside information.
- Support the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details.
- Use a logical and clear plan of organization.
- Introduce the theme by establishing a framework that is beyond a simple statement of the **Task** or **Historical Context**.
- Conclude the essay with a summation of the theme.