

Exploration 16

Zeitgeist: Architecture is not Alone

Architecture doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is very much influenced by what is happening around it, spatially as well as culturally. Zeitgeist is the German word for "time-spirit" and refers to the general moral, intellectual, and cultural climate of an era. For example, the Zeitgeist of England in the Victorian period included a belief in industrial progress, and the Zeitgeist of the 1980s in the United States was a belief in the power of money and the many ways in which to spend it.⁶ To understand a building, it's helpful to understand its original cultural context.

For this exercise, we will focus on the Historic State Theater in Uniontown, but you can do similar exercises for any building. The State Theater was constructed in 1922.

Materials:

- Something to write and draw on
- Something to write or draw with
- Music from the same year as the building's construction, see following links for State Theater
- Images of art from the same year as the building's construction, see following for images relating to the State theater
- Books and literature from the same era as the building's construction, see following for those relating to the State Theater
- Images of architecture from the same era as the building's construction, see following for images relating to the State Theater
- Images of inventions from the same era as the building's construction, see following for images relating to the State Theater

Objective:

Using a historic building as a point of departure, students will answer questions describing the location of the building in time and its historical context.

⁶ Zeitgeist. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/zeitgeist> (accessed: November 18, 2007).

Standards:

- Arts: NA-VA 4, 6
- English: NL-ENG 6, 7, 8
- Mathematics: NM-PROB.CONN 3
- Science: NS 6
- Social Studies: NSS-G 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; NSS-USH 7 (8, 9, 10)

Procedures:

- Before you visit, ask you students to think about the Zeitgeist of the 1920s. This decade is sometimes referred to as the "[Jazz Age](#)" or the "[Roaring Twenties](#)." In the United States, it was a period of economic prosperity after the tremendous events of World War I and the Spanish flu epidemic of the 1910s. The Stock Market collapsed in October 1929 (see [Black Tuesday](#)), clearing ending the decade.

Play music from the same era as the building or have students look at the artwork of that era. Relate this same exercise to dance, sculpture, painting, literature, etc., from the era of the building. What was popular at the time? What was it like to live at that time? What were artists "saying" with their work? To what were they reacting in the art they were making? How does the building relate to its artistic environment?

What were some of the modern inventions during the era of this building? Do you see any? What do they do? How did they make life easier for the people who lived/worked here? Who invented them? What problems did the inventions solve? Have any of them changed over time? What do they look like now?

Music from the same era as the State Theater's construction

"There's nothing surer; the rich get rich and the poor get poorer" was considered the credo of the roaring 20s. [Chicago was hot!](#) [Harlem](#) was hot with Jazz and the so-called "devil's music". ([The Cotton Club](#) was open to both whites and blacks and packed nightly.) . [Bessie Smith sang the Blues](#), but most of the best-selling pop hits were sentimental ballads ([I'll Be With You in Apple Blossom Time](#) and [I'm Just Wild About Harry](#)), old-fashioned waltzes ([Three O'clock in the Morning](#) and [Deep in My Heart](#)) , and nonsense songs ([Yes, We Have No Bananas](#) and [I Wish That I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate](#)). [Fanny Brice](#) sang [Rose of Washington Square](#) and [Second Hand Rose](#) in the [Ziegfeld Follies](#) and [Vaudeville](#). The [Grand Ole Opry](#) was transmitted on the radio from Nashville in 1925. [Al Jolson sang his wonderful songs](#).

People were going places and singing about them: [California Here I Come \(love YouTube\)](#), [Alabamy Bound](#), and [Puttin' on the Ritz](#).

Music from the same year as the State Theater's construction:

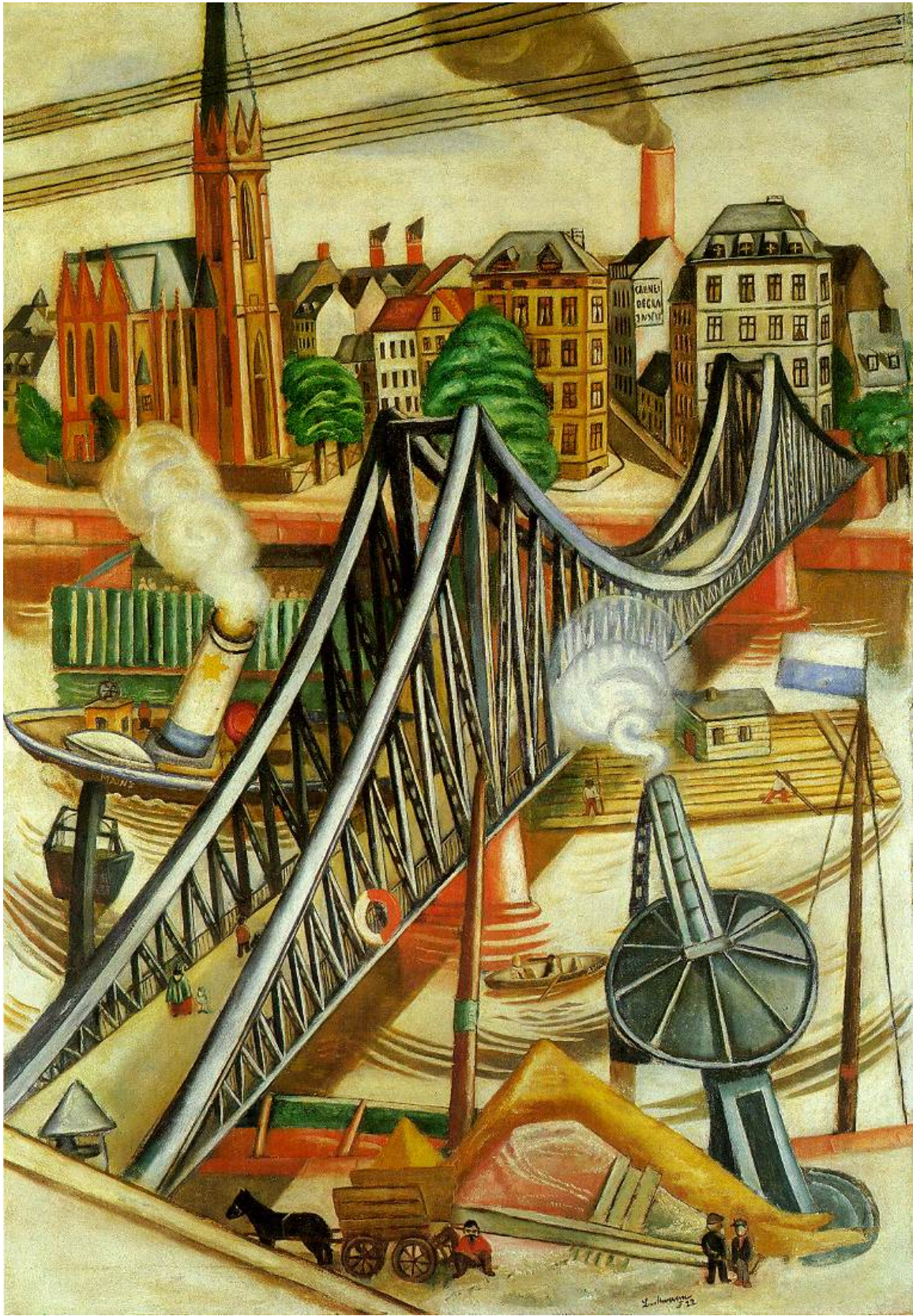
- *Carolina in the Morning*
Click for link to William Frawley & Vivian Vance (as Fred & Ethel Mertz) sing "Carolina in the Morning" at the Anti-Defamation League 40th Anniversary Dinner held at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C. 1953.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MAIttZAIN4>
- *Chicago*
Click for link to hear Frank Sinatra's version
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77L57dKv64w>
- *Downhearted Blues*
Click link to hear Alberta Hunter singing it at age 84 on the Dick Cavett show, over 50 years after she wrote it
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_1xUmRkzYk
- *Lovesick Blues*
Click link to hear Hank Williams 78rpm disc version played on a Wurlitzer <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eJhes23848>
- *Toot Toot Tootsie Goodbye*
Click link to hear Al Jolson's 1922 recording of they year's number one song
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JA1c8zL164Q>
- *Way Down Yonder In New Orleans*

Click link to hear Ethel Merman sing it on The Bell Telephone Hour (Telecast of January 29, 1960)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKWjY2_OaL4

Art from the same era as the State Theater's construction include several important movements--Modernism [[George Luks](#), [Charles W. Hawthorne](#)], [abstract expressionism](#) [[Willem de Kooning](#)], [surrealism, and Dadaism](#) [[Georgia O'Keeffe](#), [Morgan Russell](#), [Man Ray](#)], [realism](#) [[Thomas Hart Benton](#), [Edward Hopper](#), [Grant Wood](#), [Leon Kroll](#)] and landscape [[Aldro Thompson Hibbard](#), [N.C. Wyeth](#)]. The best museums featured shows by these important artists.

Images of art from the same year as the State Theater's construction



Max Beckmann - *The Iron Footbridge*



Lydia Field Emmet - *Harriet Lancashire White and Her Children*



Dugald Sutherland MacColl - *On the Terrace*



André Masson - *Pedestal Table in the Studio*



Joan Miró - *La Masia (The Farm)*

Book and literature from the same era as the State Theater's

Following WWI (the war to end all wars), authors wrote about their feelings of disillusionment and alienation. Writers began to write frankly about sexuality. Three important groups during this period were:

[The Algonquin Round Table](#), an informal group of American literary men and women who met daily for lunch on weekdays at a large round table in the [Algonquin Hotel in New York City](#) during the 1920s and '30s. Many of the best-known writers, journalists, and artists in New York City were in this group. Among them were [Dorothy Parker](#), [Alexander Woollcott](#) (author of the quote "All the things I really like are immoral, illegal, or fattening") [Heywood Broun](#), [Benchley](#), [Robert](#), [George S. Kaufman](#), Franklin P. Adams, [Marc Connelly](#), Harold Ross, [Harpo Marx](#), and Russell Crouse.



[Harlem Renaissance](#) is considered the first important movement of [black artists and writers](#) in the US. Centered in [Harlem, NY](#), and other urban areas during the 1920s, black writers published more than ever before. Influential and lasting black authors, artists, and musicians received their first serious critical appraisal. This group included [Zora Neale Hurston](#), [W.E.B. DuBois](#), [Langston Hughes](#), [Jean Toomer](#), and [Alain Locke](#), who was considered the chief interpreter for the [Harlem movement](#).

The [Lost Generation](#), the self-exiled expatriates who lived and wrote in Paris between the wars. These writers, looking for freedom of thought and action, changed the face of modern writing. Realistic and rebellious, they wrote what they wanted and fought censorship for profanity and sexuality. They incorporated Freudian ideas into their characters and styles. This group included [Ernest Hemingway](#), [Gertrude Stein](#), [John Dos Passos](#), [Henry Miller](#), and [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#).

Others who were important during this decade include [e. e. cummings](#), who experimented with language (and punctuation!). [William Faulkner](#) was an important part of the [Southern Renaissance](#). [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#) expressed the defiance and desires of her generation from

[Greenwich Village](#), and [Eugene O'Neill](#) drew attention to a serious American stage. The 1920s was also the beginning of the [Golden Age of Mysteries](#) - introducing America's own contribution to the mystery novel, the hard-boiled, with writers such as [Raymond Chandler](#) and [Dashielle Hammett](#) and paving the way for the future.

Books That Define the Time

- [The Waste Land](#) by [T.S. Eliot](#)
The ultimate indictment of the modern world's loss of personal, moral, and spiritual values.
- [The New Negro](#) by [Alain Locke](#)
A hopeful look at the Negro in America
- [The Great Gatsby](#) by [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#)
The American dream that anyone can achieve anything
- [Strange Interlude](#) by [Eugene O'Neill](#)
A look at 30 years in the life of a modern woman
- [The Sun Also Rises](#) by [Ernest Hemingway](#)
The lost generation of expatriates
- [Babbitt](#) by [Sinclair Lewis](#)
A satirical look at small town life
- [The Sound and the Fury](#) by [William Faulkner](#)
Details the moral decay of the [Old South](#)
- [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) by [Zora Neale Hurston](#)
Black life in a Black community

Architecture from the same era as the State Theater's

[Early modernism in art, design, and architecture](#), which began at the turn of the century, continued through to 1940 and the war. In Chicago, the [Wrigley building](#) was designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White while the [Chicago Tribune Tower](#) was designed by Howells and Hood. [Art Deco design](#) was exemplified by the [Chrysler](#) and [Empire State Buildings](#) (depression projects - the Empire State Building completed early 1931.) The term [Art Deco](#) (1925-1950) is derived from the [International Art Exposition in Paris](#) in 1925. In the 20s and 30s art of that style was referred to as modern. Designers included [Karl \(Kem\) Weber](#) and [Eliel Saarinen](#).



Wrigley Building



Chicago Tribune Tower



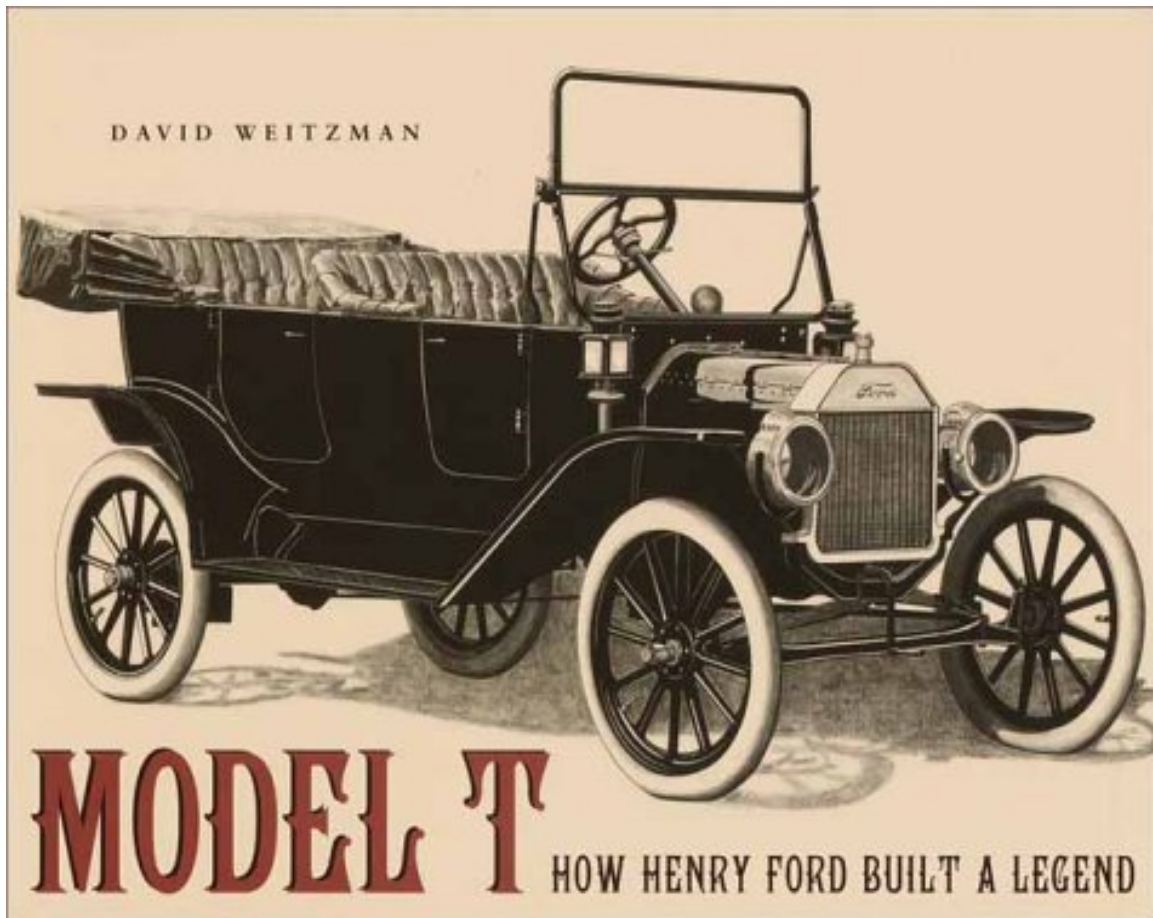
Chrysler Building

Inventions from the same era as the State Theater



Band-Aid (1920)

Earle Dickson, husband of Josephine Dickson, was employed in a company that made gauze and tape called Johnson & Johnson. Ironically, Josephine was extremely accident-prone, she seemed to be cutting herself every day. Finally, Earle came up with the idea of having a piece of tape with a small slice of gauze in the middle to have on hand for when Josephine "struck" again. He later sold these strips and four years later, Johnson & Johnson installed machines for mass-producing this new medical product, which they called the "Band-Aid."



Automobile with Combustion Engine (~1920)

The automobile was probably the most significant invention in the 20s. Although an automobile, which was powered by steam, was invented in 1866, this car was moved by a fuel powered combustion engine. Invented by Henry Ford, these cars were more affordable to the public and were made by the hundreds to sell. The 'Model-T' was the first car to roll off the assembly line. By 1927, the 'Model-T' was found on the streets across America. The coming of the automobile created more jobs, better transportation, and more significantly, cultural changes. Suddenly people were dating more often and going on vacations. Henry Ford later founded the famous Ford Company.

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Kool-Aid (1927)

Edwin Perkins of Omaha, Nebraska, was a chemist who owned a company called "Perkins Product Company" which sold perfume and calling cards. His invention of Kool-Aid was originally called "Fruit Smack", and then later "Kool-Ade" until the well known Kool-Aid was released. The original flavors were: Cherry, Lemon-Lime, Grape, Orange, Root Beer, Strawberry, and Raspberry.



Liquid-Fueled Rocket (1926)

Robert Goddard's invention of the liquid-fueled rocket and methods of propulsion are still used by the North American Space Association today. His method of oxygen and liquid fuel propulsion only lifted the original rocket 184 ft. Now rockets have the ability to go into space thanks to the efforts of Robert Goddard.

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Thomasville (GA) Times-Enterprise
 January 1927

Bread Slicer (1927)

Otto Frederick Rowedder of Iowa worked on his idea of a bread slicer for 15 years. In 1927, he completed a machine that could successfully cut and wrap a loaf of bread. This machine was later improved by baker Gustav Papendick.



Penicillin (1928)

Invented in 1928, Penicillin was one of the first antibiotics ever made. Scientist Sir Alexander Fleming invented it after doing an intensive study on the life of bacteria. Though it wasn't a famous, widely known medicine at first, it drastically helped reduce the number of bacteria orientated deaths in decades to come.