In this article, Mike Kubic, a former correspondent of Newsweek, discusses the circumstances under which America’s “Lost Generation” came to be. The phrase refers to the citizens who reached maturity after World War I, and whose adolescences were thus defined by a consciousness of mass carnage and destruction. Particularly prominent artists and writers who belonged to the generation included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Sherwood Anderson. As you read, take notes on the way in which members of the “Lost Generation” are characterized.

Of all the American generations, none bears a label as depressing and unhopeful as the “Lost Generation.” The term, which was first used by one of its best-known members, Ernest Hemingway, applies to men and women who were born in the last years of the 19th Century and reached maturity after World War I, during a period known as “The Roaring Twenties.”

There was a reason for the doomsday moniker. WWI was an exceptionally tragic episode in the abysmal history of warfare. It was triggered by the assassination in July, 1914 of an Austrian archduke and rapidly and almost mindlessly escalated into a four year-long carnage that cost the lives of more than ten million young Europeans. It proved nothing beyond the human capacity for committing a boundless blunder, but it deeply affected a group of American writers and poets, a few of whom — Hemingway included — witnessed the horrifying spectacle first-hand.

1. Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was an American novelist, short story writer, and journalist. His economical, understated style of writing had a powerful influence on 20th century fiction. Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.
2. The term “The Roaring Twenties” refers to a period of sustained economic prosperity and increased wealth throughout the United States. The era was defined by a sense of cultural modernity and disregard for traditions. Jazz and dancing rose in popularity at this time.
3. name or nickname
4. World War I was a global war that originated in Europe and lasted from July 1914 until November 1918. More than 70 million military personnel were mobilized for the war effort. It was one of the deadliest conflicts in history.
5. Blunder (noun): a bad or stupid mistake
6. Hemingway responded to a Red Cross recruitment effort and signed on to become an ambulance driver in Italy in 1918, when he was just 18 years old. He received the Italian Silver Medal of Bravery for his efforts. Hemingway’s exposure to the brutality of war at such a young age had a great influence on him as a person and as a writer.
The senseless slaughter of their European contemporaries distressed and angered these extraordinarily talented artists so profoundly that, in some ways, they lost their way. Though mostly born and raised in America’s heartland,\(^7\) almost all left the U.S. in their youth to seek fame or at least recognition abroad, usually in Paris or London. Some drifted away completely from their roots, and some even turned against their own country and its democratic system.

And yet, these bitterly critical and frequently pessimistic\(^8\) creative individuals left behind a brilliant heritage that has firmly established America as a literary superpower. Their novels and poems have been translated into dozens of languages, and many have become part of every intellectual’s “must-read” list. Four of the “Lost Generation” authors — Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner — have been honored by the Nobel Prize for Literature, the highest acknowledgment of a literary genius.

Considering these accomplishments, the adjective “lost” is a misnomer.\(^9\) Hemingway used it as a fitting epithet\(^10\) for a group of hedonistic American and British expatriates\(^11\) who travel from Paris to Pamplona in Spain in his book \textit{The Sun Also Rises} to watch the running of the bulls and the bullfights. But in a way, the book counters Hemingway’s gloomy descriptive and is regarded as one of his best and most enduring works.

In fact, one of the reasons for the success of the “Lost Generation” literati\(^12\) was that they were far from “lost” in their message and the artful prose or poetry in which they delivered it. Their harshest judgment was aimed at the undeserved hardships of the poor — Steinbeck’s \textit{Grapes of Wrath} is one example — and the excesses and empty lives of the rich — such as the opulent\(^13\) parties in Fitzgerald’s \textit{The Great Gatsby} or his \textit{Tales of the Jazz Age}, and the footloose life and heavy drinking of expatriates in \textit{A Moveable Feast}.

Another striking theme of some of these disenchanted Americans was a rejection of the traditional beliefs and values of their childhood. Henry Miller verbally spat and trampled upon any and all civilized conventions and customs; Hemingway, a converted Roman Catholic, wrote in \textit{The Movable Feast} that “All thinking men are atheists” and regarded organized religion as “a menace to human happiness...”; Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound glorified brutal dictatorships.

\textbf{The Faulty Compass of the Expatriates}

Stein and Pound were extreme examples of the tendency of many of Americans writers abroad to embrace and sometimes support one or both of the two radical ideologies which, after WWI, captivated millions of followers: Communism, which became the official doctrine of the newly created Union of Soviet Socialist Republic,\(^14\) and, at the opposite end of the spectrum, Italian fascism\(^15\) and Nazism\(^16\) in Germany. It was in this, the turbulent political arena of post-WWI Europe, where several paragons\(^17\) of the “Lost Generation” were truly without a compass.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{The Sun Also Rises}
  \item \textit{Grapes of Wrath}
  \item \textit{The Movable Feast}
  \item \textit{The Great Gatsby}
  \item \textit{Tales of the Jazz Age}
  \item \textit{A Moveable Feast}
  \item Communism
  \item Italian fascism
  \item Nazism
  \item Henry Miller
  \item Hemingway
  \item Faulkner
  \item Steinbeck
  \item Stein
  \item Pound
\end{itemize}
The oddest example of this moral blindness was Stein, who was famous as one of the most avant-garde\textsuperscript{18} writers in the English language. A Jew and a friend of Picasso, a Communist sympathizer, Stein endorsed a proposal for a Nobel Peace prize for Adolf Hitler in 1934, and after his Wehrmacht\textsuperscript{19} conquered France, she became a translator and propagandist for Marshal Pétain, the head of the pro-Nazi Vichy\textsuperscript{20} government. She publicly praised Pétain for his accomplishments when, after the war, he was sentenced to death for treason.

Another fervent\textsuperscript{21} admirer of the far right was Pound, whose Cantos\textsuperscript{22} are regarded as immortal poetry. A brilliant wordsmith who was widely admired for the clarity, precision, and economy of his language, Pound was a virulent\textsuperscript{23} anti-Semite who blamed the First World War on the Jews and international capitalism.

After the war, he admired both Adolf Hitler and the fascist doctrines of Italy's Benito Mussolini. In 1924, Idaho-born Pound moved to Italy and, after WWII broke out, became the most prominent American traitor by working for the fascist government and delivering hundreds of broadcasts denouncing the U.S. democracy, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and, of course, the Jews.

Not as lucky as Stein, who escaped all retribution,\textsuperscript{24} Pound was arrested by the U.S. Army in 1945, charged with treason, and eventually spent more than 12 years in an American psychiatric hospital. Upon his release in 1958, he returned to Italy, where he lived until his death.

T.S. Eliot,\textsuperscript{25} another major “Lost Generation” poet of rare talent (and a friend of Pound, who was his mentor) had his own reason for pursuing a career far from Missouri, where he was born. Oxford- and Harvard-educated, Eliot found his intellectual and artistic home in London, where he won a glittering reputation as a poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, and critic.

\begin{itemize}
\item [14.] Communism is a political theory derived from the works of Karl Marx, who advocated class war and presented as an ideal a society in which property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to his/her abilities and needs.
\item [15.] Fascism is an authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization. Italian Fascism is the original fascist ideology, which originated in Italy, and rose to prominence with the National Fascist Party under the rule of Benito Mussolini. Mussolini ruled Italy constitutionally until 1925, at which point he dropped all pretense of democracy and set up a legal dictatorship. He was ousted from power in 1943.
\item [16.] Nazism, also known as National Socialism, is the ideology and practice associated with the 20th-century German Nazi party and the Nazi state. It is usually characterized as a form of fascism that incorporates pseudoscientific racism and anti-Semitism.
\item [17.] Paragon (noun): a person or thing regarded as a perfect example of a particular quality
\item [18.] favoring or introducing experimental or unusual ideas
\item [19.] The Wehrmacht, literally translated to “Defense Force,” was the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1946.
\item [20.] Vichy is a city in central France. Between 1940 and 1944, it was the seat of France's Nazi-compliant government.
\item [21.] Fervent (adjective): having or displaying a passionate intensity
\item [22.] The Cantos is a long, incomplete poem in 116 sections, each of which is a canto, or a section into which certain long poems are divided. It is the masterpiece of celebrated American poet and literary critic Ezra Pound (1885-1972), who was a major figure in the early Modernist literary movement.
\item [23.] Virulent (adjective): bitterly hostile
\item [24.] Retribution (noun): punishment
\item [25.] T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) was an American-born British poet, writer, and literary critic. He produced some of the best-known poems in the English language, including The Waste Land and “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock,” which were viewed as masterpieces of the Modernist literary movement. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.
\end{itemize}
Praised as “one of the twentieth century’s major poets” for his book-length poem The Waste Land, Eliot did not long remain an American expatriate. After 14 highly successful years in London, he formally renounced his U.S. citizenship and, at the age of 39, became a British subject.

What set most “Lost Generation” expatriate writers apart from their contemporaries in the U.S. was their fascination with the revolutionary creed of Karl Marx — the “dictatorship of the proletariat” — that after 1917 was formally (though not in fact) established in the Soviet Union. Angered by the real or perceived unfairness of the capitalist system and the exploitation of the working classes, a significant number of highly talented American expatriates became enamored of the Communist Party propaganda pouring out of Moscow.

Hemingway was one of them. Although he never joined the Communist Party, he — according to recently released Soviet archives — “repeatedly expressed his desire and willingness to help” the KGB, the virulently anti-American and anti-Western Soviet spy agency. But there is no record that he actually became a KGB spy and, like other expatriates, he eventually responded to the sobering facts about the real nature of the Soviet regime. In the 1930s, Hemingway prominently supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s socially progressive (but democratic) “New Deal.”

Another early admirer of communism was John Dos Passos, who was so impressed by Marxism that in 1928 he traveled to the Soviet Union to study socialism. Two years later, he wrote the first novel — The 42nd Parallel — of his most famous but deeply pessimistic trilogy about his country, The U.S.A. He later became a leading member of the Communist League of American Writers.

He only changed his politics after he arrived in Spain in 1937 to support the government forces fighting the rightist insurgents led by General Francisco Franco. A reportedly Moscow-ordered murder of José Robles, Dos Passos’ close friend and translator, angered him so deeply that he broke up with leftist friends and wrote a series of scathing articles denouncing communist doctrines.

From then on, Dos Passos gravitated to the political right. In the 1960s, he campaigned for Republican presidential candidates Barry Goldwater and Richard M. Nixon.

Another famous expatriate who made a political about-face was John Steinbeck. The author of twenty-seven books, including his famous novels Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, and East of Eden, Steinbeck made no secret of his membership in the Communist Party. In 1939, he signed a letter supporting the Soviet invasion of Finland and the establishment of a Soviet-controlled puppet government.

26. The term “proletariat,” often used in the context of Marxist philosophy, refers to workers or working-class people, regarded collectively.
27. Enamor (adjective): to have a liking or admiration for
28. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” was a series of social liberal programs enacted in the United States between 1933 and 1938. They served as a response to the Great Depression and focused on relief for the unemployed and poor, recovery of the economy to normal levels, and reform of the financial system to prevent another economic depression.
29. John Dos Passos (1896-1970) was an American novelist and artist who was active in the first half of the 20th century.
30. Insurgent (noun): a rebel or revolutionary
31. Denounce (verb): to point out as wrong or evil
32. A “puppet government” refers to a government that is officially autonomous, but which, in practice, is controlled by another nation. Puppet governments are usually kept in power by military force provided by the occupying country.
Documents released in 2012, however, show that in 1952 Steinbeck secretly offered his services to the CIA; its director, Walter Bedell Smith, was eager to take him up on the offer. In later years, Steinbeck became a personal friend of President Lyndon Johnson, a progressive Democrat and, in 1967, he confirmed his political conversion by writing a report praising the U.S. troops in Vietnam.

What was perhaps the most complete personal reversal was made by Henry Miller.33 A native New Yorker, Miller played no politics while living abroad. “I regard politics as a thoroughly foul, rotten world,” he told an interviewer. But as an author, he was a ruthless iconoclast,34 an intellectual rebel in an all-out war on societal restraints and traditional values.

His novels so overflowed with obscenities, explicit sexual descriptions, derision, and personal insults that a critic characterized one of them as a “libel,35 slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty... what you will.”

Miller’s most highly prized works — Tropic of Cancer, Black Spring, Tropic of Capricorn, and The Rosy Crucifixion trilogy — had the distinction of being banned in the United States until 1961 for obscenity. And yet in 1972, nearing the end of his career, Miller wrote three essays, one of which testifies to the strength of the conventional emotions and yearnings against which he had railed and raged for decades.

“[If at eighty you’re not a cripple or an invalid,]36 he wrote, “if you have your health, if you still enjoy a good walk, a good meal (with all the trimmings), if you can sleep without first taking a pill, if birds and flowers, mountains and sea still inspire you, you are a most fortunate individual and you should get down on your knees morning and night and thank the good Lord for his savin’ and keepin’ power.”

No longer “lost,” Miller ended his crusade against conventions the same way some of his fellow expatriates shed their revolutionary politics: by embracing the values of their home in America.

33. Henry Miller (1891-1980) was an American writer best known for breaking with existing literary forms and using the form of a semi-autobiographical novel to blend character study, social criticism, philosophical reflection, explicit language, and surrealist free association.
34. Iconoclast (noun): a person who attacks cherished beliefs or institutions
35. Libel (noun): the publication of a false statement that hurts a person's reputation
36. Invalid (noun): a person made weak or disabled by illness or injury
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central ideas of this article?  
   A. Members of this particular generation were sometimes so disillusioned with the United States that they lent their support to violent and ideologically reprehensible regimes.  
   B. Great aid was offered to the United States government by expatriates-turned-patriotic citizens of the country, who provided intelligence about various European regimes.  
   C. Henry Miller’s works most effectively encapsulated the spirit of the “Lost Generation,” which revolved around rejecting tradition through the use of obscenities.  
   D. The United States government was especially harsh in its treatment of treasonous authors who abandoned America in favor of living in Europe.  
   E. Many of the artists and creative geniuses who turned against their home country later abandoned radical ideals in favor of supporting the United States.  
   F. American writers who came of age during World War I were influenced by the carnage such that their work was universally gloomy and depressing.

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A?  
   A. “It proved nothing beyond the human capacity for committing a boundless blunder, but it deeply affected a group of American writers” (Paragraph 2)  
   B. “It was in this, the turbulent political arena of post-WWI Europe, where several paragons of the ‘Lost Generation’ were truly without a compass.” (Paragraph 8)  
   C. “Not as lucky as Stein, who escaped all retribution, Pound was arrested by the U.S. Army in 1945, charged with treason” (Paragraph 12)  
   D. “Steinbeck secretly offered his services to the CIA; its director, Walter Bedell Smith, was eager to take him up on the offer” (Paragraph 21)  
   E. “But as an author, he was a ruthless iconoclast, an intellectual rebel in an all-out war on societal restraints and traditional values.” (Paragraph 22)  
   F. “the same way some of his fellow expatriates shed their revolutionary politics: by embracing the values of their home in America.” (Paragraph 26)

3. PART A: What does the word “hedonistic” most closely mean as it is used in Paragraph 5?  
   A. engaged in the selfish pursuit of pleasure; self-indulgent  
   B. empty; unconcerned with meaning  
   C. directionless  
   D. compelling; captivating

4. PART B: Which of the following phrases from paragraph 5 of the text best supports the answer to Part A?  
   A. “a fitting epithet”  
   B. “watch the running of the bulls and the bullfights”  
   C. “Hemingway’s gloomy descriptive”  
   D. “one of his best and most enduring works”
5. How are the details presented about the various European political ideologies and regimes the American-born writers supported important in supporting the main idea of the passage?
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Based on your knowledge of cultural history, does the information presented in the text represent a logical extension of the Roaring Twenties? Beyond the literal financial downturn, was a nationwide post-prosperity period of disenchantment and insufficiency inevitable?

2. Generally speaking, the artists and writers of the Lost Generation were highly praised for their insightfulness and astute social commentary. How can we reconcile this with the support such individuals as Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein lent to so ruthless and inhumane a dictator as Adolf Hitler?

3. The text explores many different aspects of the identities of members of the “Lost Generation:” political, social, ideological, professional, and more. In the context of this article, what makes you who you are? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. The text narrates the transition of Hemingway and Dos Passos, both American-born writers, from rebellious supporters of the Soviet Union to disenchanted (and perhaps reluctant) backers of the United States government. In the context of this article, how has America changed over time? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
5. The author states that the first World War “proved nothing beyond the human capacity for committing a boundless blunder...“ and was especially dismaying and traumatic for Ernest Hemingway, who “witnessed the horrifying spectacle first-hand” (Paragraph 2). In the context of this article, how are we changed by war? Based on your knowledge of Hemingway's shifting political allegiances and the content of his writings, do you see evidence of the effect the war had on him? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.