

1920s Slang

A

- **Alderman:** A man's pot belly.
- **Ameche:** Telephone
- **Ankle:**
 - (n) Woman
 - (v) To walk

B

- **Babe:** Woman
- **Baby:** A person, can be said to either a man or a woman
- **Bangtails:** Racehorses
- **Barber:** Talk
- **Baumes rush:** Senator Caleb H. Baumes sponsored a New York law (the Baumes Law) which called for automatic life imprisonment of any criminal convicted more than three times. Some criminals would move to a state that didn't have this law in order to avoid its penalty should they be caught again, and this was known as a "Baumes rush," because of the similarity to "bum's rush."
- **Be on the nut, To:** To be broke
- **Bean-shooter:** Gun
- **Beef:** problem
- **Bee's Knees:** An extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate.
- **Beezer:** Nose
- **Behind the eight-ball:** In a difficult position, in a tight spot
- **Bent cars:** Stolen cars
- **Berries**
 - Dollars
 - Something attractive; similar to "bee's knees"
- **Big Cheese, Big Shot** - The boss. Someone of importance and influence
- **Big house:** Jail
- **Big one, The:** Death
- **Big sleep, The:** Death (coined by Chandler)

1920s Slang

- **Bing:** Jailhouse talk for solitary confinement, hence "crazy"
- **Bird:** Man
- **Bit:** Prison sentence
- **Blip off:** To kill
- **Blow:** Leave
- **Blow one down:** Kill someone
- **Blower:** Telephone
- **Bluenose:** A prude.
- **Bo:** Pal, buster, fellow, as in "Hey, bo"
- **Boiler:** Car
- **Bop:** To kill
- **Box:**
 - A safe
 - A bar
- **Box job:** A safecracking
- **Brace** (somebody): Grab, shake up
- **Bracelets:** Handcuffs
- **Break it up:** Stop that, quit the nonsense
- **Breeze:** To leave, go; also **breeze off:** get lost
- **Bruno:** Tough guy, enforcer
- **Bucket:** Car
- **Bulge**, as in "The kid had the bulge there": The advantage
- **Bulls:** Plainclothes railroad cops; uniformed police; prison guards
- **Bum's rush, To get the:** To be kicked out
- **Bump:** Kill
- **Bump gums:** To talk about nothing worthwhile
- **Bump off:** Kill; also, **bump-off:** a killing
- **Buncoing some** (people): Defrauding people

1920s Slang

- **Bunk:**
 - "Take a bunk" - leave, disappear
 - "That's the bunk" - that's false, untrue
 - "to bunk" - to sleep
- **Bunny**, as in "Don't be a bunny": Don't be stupid
- **Burn powder:** Fire a gun
- **Bus:** Big car
- **Button:** Face, nose, end of jaw
- **Button man:** Professional killer
- **Buttons:** Police
- **Butts:** Cigarettes
- **Buy a drink:** To pour a drink
- **Buzzer:** Policeman's badge

C

- **C:** \$100, a pair of Cs = \$200
- **Cabbage:** Money
- **Caboose:** Jail (from "calaboose," which derives from *calabozo*, the Spanish word for "jail")
- **Call copper:** Inform the police
- **Can:**
 - Jail
 - Car
- **Can-opener:** Safecracker who opens cheap safes
- **Canary:** Woman singer
- **Carry a Torch:** Suffering from an unrequited love.
- **Case dough:** "Nest egg ... the theoretically untouchable reserve for emergencies" (*Speaking*)
- **Cat:** Man
- **Cat's Meow:** Something splendid or stylish; similar to bee's knees.

1920s Slang

- **Cat's Pajamas:** "I think yer the cat's pajamas" - term of endearment translated in today's terms as "I think you are really really cool".
- **Century:** \$100
- **Cheaters:** Sunglasses
- **Cheese it:** Put things away, hide
- **Chew:** Eat
- **Chicago lightning:** gunfire
- **Chicago overcoat:** Coffin
- **Chilled off:** Killed
- **Chin:** Conversation; **chinning:** talking
- **Chin music:** Punch on the jaw
- **Chisel:** To swindle or cheat
- **Chiv, chive:** Knife, "a stabbing or cutting weapon" (*Speaking*)
- **Chopper squad:** Men with machine guns
- **Chump:** person marked for a con or a gullible person.
- **Clammed:** Close-mouthed (**clammed up**)
- **Clean sneak:** An escape with no clues left behind
- **Clipped:** Shot
- **Close your head:** Shut up
- **Clout:** Shoplifter
- **Clubhouse:** Police station
- **Coffee-and-doughnut,** as in "These coffee-and-doughnut guns are ...": Could come from "coffee and cakes," which refers to something cheap or of little value.
- **Con:** Confidence game, swindle
- **Conk:** Head
- **Cool:** To knock out
- **Cooler:** Jail
- **Cop**
 - Detective, even a private one

1920s Slang

- To win, as in a bet
- **Copped, To be:** Grabbed by the cops
- **Copper**
 - Policeman
 - Time off for good behavior
- **Crab:** Figure out
- **Crate:** Car
- **Croak:** To kill
- **Croaker:** Doctor
- **Crush:** An infatuation.
- **Crushed out:** Escaped (from jail)
- **Cush:** Money (a cushion, something to fall back on)
- **Cut down:** Killed (esp. shot?)

D

- **Daisy:** None too masculine
- **Dame:** Woman
- **Dangle:** Leave, get lost
- **Darb:** Something remarkable or superior
- **Daylight**, as in "let the daylight in" or "fill him with daylight": Put a hole in, by shooting or stabbing
- **Derrick:** Shoplifter
- **Diapers**, as in "Pin your diapers on": Clothes, get dressed
- **Dib:** Share (of the proceeds)
- **Dick:** Detective (usually qualified with "private" if not a policeman)
- **Dingus:** Thing
- **Dip:** Pickpocket
- **Dip the bill:** Have a drink
- **Dish:** Pretty woman
- **Dive:** A low-down, cheap sort of place

1920s Slang

- **Dizzy with a dame, To be:** To be deeply in love with a woman
- **Dogs:** Feet
- **Doll, dolly:** Woman
- **Dormy:** Dormant, quiet, as in "Why didn't you lie dormy in the place you climbed to?"
- **Dough:** Money
- **Drift:** Go, leave
- **Drill:** Shoot
- **Drink out of the same bottle,** as in "We used to drink out of the same bottle": We were close friends
- **Drop a dime:** Make a phone call, sometimes meaning to the police to inform on someone
- **Droppers:** Hired killers
- **Drum:** Speakeasy
- **Dry-gulch:** Knock out, hit on head after ambushing
- **Ducat**
 - Ticket
 - For hobos, a union card or card asking for alms
- **Duck soup:** Easy, a piece of cake
- **Dump:** Roadhouse, club; or, more generally, any place
- **Dust**
 - Nothing, as in "Tinhorns are dust to me"
 - Leave, depart, as in "Let's dust"
 - A look, as in "Let's give it the dust"
- **Dust out:** Leave, depart

E

- **Egg:** Man
- **Eggs in the coffee:** Easy, a piece of cake, okay, all right
- **Elbow:**
 - Policeman

1920s Slang

- A collar or an arrest. Someone being arrested will "have their elbows checked."

- **Elephant ears:** Police

F

- **Fade:** Go away, get lost
- **Fakeloo artist:** Con man
- **Fella:** a man
- **Fin:** \$5 bill
- **Finder:** Finger man
- **Finger, Put the finger on:** Identify
- **Flaming Youth:** The male counterpart to a flapper.
- **Flapper:** A stylish, brash young woman with short skirts and shorter hair.
- **Flat**
 - Broke
 - As in "That's flat" - that's for sure
- **Flat Tire:** A dull-witted or disappointing date.
- **Flattie:** Flatfoot, cop
- **Flimflam(m):** Swindle
- **Flippers:** Hands
- **Flivver:** A Ford automobile
- **Flogger:** Overcoat
- **Flop:**
 - Go to bed
 - As in "The racket's flopped" - fallen through, not worked out
- **Fog:** To shoot
- **Frail:** Woman
- **Fry:** To be electrocuted
- **From nothing,** as in "I know from nothing": I don't know anything
- **Fuzz:** police

1920s Slang

G

- **Gal:** Woman
- **Gams:** Legs (especially a woman's)
- **Gashouse**, as in "getting gashouse": Rough
- **Gat:** Gun
- **Gate**, as in "Give her the gate": The door, as in leave
- **Gee:** Man
- **Geetus:** Money
- **Get Sore** (at someone): get mad
- **Getaway sticks:** Legs (especially a woman's)
- **Giggle juice:** Liquor
- **Giggle Water:** Liquor
- **Gin mill:** Bar
- **Gink:** Man
- **Girlie:** Woman
- **Give a/the third:** Interrogate (third degree)
- **Glad rags:** Fancy clothes
- **Glom**
 - To steal
 - To see, to take a look
- **Glaum:** Steal
- **Go climb up your thumb:** Go away, get lost
- **Go over the edge with the rams:** To get far too drunk
- **Go to read and write:** Rhyming slang for take flight
- **Goofy:** Crazy
- **Goog:** Black eye
- **Goon:** Thug
- **Goose:** Man

1920s Slang

- **Gooseberry lay:** Stealing clothes from a clothesline
- **Gowed-up:** On dope, high
- **Grab (a little) air:** Put your hands up
- **Graft:**
 - Con jobs
 - Cut of the take
- **Grand:** \$1000
- **Greasers:**
 - Mexicans or Italians.
 - A hoodlum, thief or punk.
- **Grift:**
 - As in "What's the grift?": What are you trying to pull?
 - Confidence game, swindle
- **Grifter:** Con man
- **Grilled:** Questioned
- **Guinea:** derogatory term for an Italian
- **Gum-shoe:** Detective; also gumshoeing = detective work
- **Gun for:** Look for, be after
- **Guns:**
 - Pickpockets
 - Hoodlums
- **Guy:** a man

H

- **Hack:** Taxi
- **Half, A:** 50 cents
- **Hammer and saws:** Police (rhyming slang for laws)
- **Hard:** Tough
- **Hash house:** A cheap restaurant

1920s Slang

- **Hatchetmen:** Killers, gunmen
- **Have the bees:** To be rich
- **Have the curse on someone:** Wanting to see someone killed
- **Head doctors:** Psychiatrists
- **Heap:** Car
- **Heat:** Police
- **Heater:** gun
- **Heebie-Jeebies:** The jitters.
- **Heeled:** Carrying a gun
- **High-Hat:** To snub.
- **High pillow:** Person at the top, in charge
- **Hinky:** Suspicious
- **Hitting on all eight:** In good shape, going well (refers to eight cylinders in an engine)
- **Hock shop:** Pawnshop
- **Hogs:** Engines
- **Hombre:** Man, fellow
- **Hooch:** Liquor
- **Hood:** Criminal
- **Hoofer:** Dancer.
- **Hoosegow:** Jail
- **Horn:** Telephone
- **Hot:** Stolen
- **Hotsy-Totsy:** Pleasing.
- **House dick:** House/hotel detective
- **House peeper:** House/hotel detective
- **Hype:** Shortchange artist

I

- **Ice :** Diamonds

1920s Slang

- **In stir:** In jail
- **Ing-bing,** as in to throw an: A fit
- **Iron:** A car

J

- **Jack:** Money
- **Jake, Jakeloo:** Okay Used like "cool" in modern slang.
- **Jalopy:** An old car.
- **Jam:** Trouble, as in "in a jam"
- **Jane:** A woman
- **Java:** Coffee
- **Jaw:** Talk
- **Jerking a nod:** Nodding
- **Jobbie:** Man
- **Joe:** Coffee, as in "a cup of joe"
- **Johns:** Police
- **Johnson brother:** Criminal
- **Joint:** Place, as in "my joint"
- **Jorum of skee:** Shot of liquor
- **Juice:** Interest on a loanshark's loan
- **Jug:** Jail
- **Jump, The:** A hanging

K

- **Kale:** Money
- **Keen:** Attractive or appealing.
- **Keister, keyster:**
 - Suitcase
 - Safe, strongbox
 - Buttocks

1920s Slang

- **Kick**, as in "I got no kick": I have nothing to complain about
- **Kick off**: Die
- **Kiss**: To punch
- **Kisser**: Mouth
- **Kitten**: Woman
- **Knock off**: Kill
- **Knockover**: Heist, theft

L

- **Lammed off**: Ran away, escaped
- **Large**: \$1,000; **twenty large** would be \$20,000
- **Law, the**: The police
- **Lead**: "fill ya full of lead": the term used for bullets
- **Lead poisoning**: To be shot
- **Lettuce**: Folding money
- **Lid**: Hat
- **Line**: Insincere flattery.
- **Lip**: (Criminal) lawyer
- **Looker**: Pretty woman
- **Look-out**: Outside man
- **Lousy with**: To have lots of
- **Lug**
 - Bullet
 - Ear
 - Man ("You big lug!")
- **Lunger**: Someone with tuberculosis

M

- **Mac**: a man
- **Made**: Recognized

1920s Slang

- **Map:** Face
- **Marbles:** Pearls
- **Mark:** Sucker, victim of swindle or fixed game
- **Maroon:** person marked for a con or a gullible person.
- **Mazuma:** Money
- **Meat**, as in "He's your meat": He's the subject of interest, there's your man
- **Meat wagon:** Ambulance
- **Mill:** Typewriter
- **Mitt:** Hand
- **Mob:** Gang (not necessarily Mafia)
- **Mohaska:** Gun
- **Moll:** Girlfriend
- **Monicker:** Name
- **Mouthpiece:** Lawyer
- **Mug**
 - Face
 - Guy
- **Mugs:** Men (esp. dumb ones)
- **Mush:** Face

N

- **Nailed:** Caught by the police
- **Nance:** An effeminate man
- **Nevada gas:** Cyanide
- **Newshawk:** Reporter
- **Newsie:** Newspaper vendor
- **Nibble one:** To have a drink
- **Nicked:** Stole
- **Nippers:** Handcuffs

1920s Slang

- **Nix on (something):** No to (something)
- **Noodle:** Head
- **Number:** A person, can be either a man or a woman

O

- **Op:** Detective (esp. private), from "operative"
- **Orphan paper:** Bad checks
- **Out on the roof, To be:** To drink a lot, to be drunk
- **Oyster fruit:** Pearls

P

- **Pack:** To carry, esp. a gun
- **Packing Heat:** carrying a gun, armed
- **Pal:** a man
- **Palooka:** Man, probably a little stupid
- **Pan:** Face
- **Paste:** Punch
- **Patsy:** Person who is set up; fool, chump
- **Paw:** Hand
- **Peaching:** Informing
- **Pearl diver:** dish-washer
- **Peeper:** Detective
- **Peepers:** Eyes
- **Pen:** Penitentiary, jail
- **Peterman:** Safecracker who uses nitroglycerin
- **Piece:** Gun
- **Pigeon:** Stool-pigeon
- **Pill**
 - Bullet
 - Cigarette

1920s Slang

- **Pinch:** An arrest, capture
- **Pins:** Legs (especially a woman's)
- **Pipe:** See or notice
- **Pipe that:** Get that, listen to that
- **Pipes:** Throat
- **Pistol pockets:** ?? heels?
- **Pitching woo:** Making love (Turner)
- **Plant**
 - (n) Someone on the scene but in hiding
 - (v) Bury
- **Plug:** Shoot
- **Plugs:** People
- **Poke**
 - Bankroll, stake
 - Punch (as in "take a poke at")
- **Pooped:** Killed
- **Pop:** Kill
- **Puffing:** Mugging
- **Pug:** Pugilist, boxer
- **Pump:** Heart
- **Pump metal:** Shoot bullets
- **Punk:** Hood, thug
- **Pushover:** A person easily convinced of something.
- **Puss:** Face
- **Put down:** Drink
- **Put the screws on:** Question, get tough with

R

- **Rags:** Clothes

1920s Slang

- **Ranked:** Observed, watched, given the once-over
- **Rap**
 - Criminal charge
 - Information, as in "He gave us the rap"
 - Hit
- **Rappers:** Fakes, set-ups
- **Rat:** Inform
- **Rate:** To be good, to count for something
- **Rats and mice:** Dice, i.e. craps
- **Rattler:** Train
- **Red-light:** To eject from a car or train
- **Redhot:** Some sort of criminal
- **Rhino:** Money
- **Right:** Adjective indicating quality
- **Right gee, Right guy:** A good fellow
- **Ringers:** Fakes
- **Ritzzy:** Elegant.
- **Rod:** Gun
- **Roscoe:** Gun
- **Rub-out:** A killing
- **Rube:** Bumpkin, easy mark
- **Rumble, the:** The news
- **Run-out, To take the :** Leave, escape

S

- **Savvy?:** Get me? Understand?
- **Sawbuck:** \$10 bill (a **double sawbuck** is a \$20 bill)
- **Scatter**, as in "And don't bother to call your house peeper and send him up to the scatter"
 - Saloon or speakeasy.

1920s Slang

- A hideout, a room or lodging
- **Schnozzle:** Nose
- **Scram out:** Leave
- **Scratch:** Money
- **Scratcher:** Forger
- **Screw :** Prison guard
- **Send over:** Send to jail
- **Shamus:** (Private) detective
- **Sharper:** A swindler or sneaky person
- **Sheba:** A woman with sex appeal.
- **Sheik:** A man with sex appeal.
- **Shells:** Bullets
- **Shine:** Moonshine, bootleg liquor
- **Shiv:** Knife
- **Shylock:** Loanshark
- **Shyster:** Lawyer
- **Silk,** as in "all silk so far": All okay so far
- **Sing:** Confess, admit secrets
- **Sister:** Woman
- **Skate around,** as in "She skates around plenty": To be of easy virtue
- **Skid rogue:** A bum who can't be trusted
- **Skipout:** Leave a hotel without paying, or a person who does so
- **Skirt:** Woman
- **Slant, Get a:** Take a look
- **Sleuth:** Detective
- **Slug**
 - As a noun, bullet
 - As a verb, to knock unconscious

1920s Slang

- **Smell from the barrel, Have a:** Have a drink
- **Smoked:** Drunk
- **Snap a cap:** Shout
- **Snatch:** Kidnap
- **Sneak**
 - Leave, get lost, as in "If you're not a waiter, sneak"
 - Type of burglary, as in as in "The hotel-sneak used to be my lay"
- **Sneeze:** Take
- **Snitch:** An informer, or, as a verb, to inform
- **Snooper:** Detective
- **Speakeasy:** An illicit bar selling bootleg liquor.
- **Spiffy:** Looking elegant.
- **Soak:** To pawn
- **Sock:** Punch
- **Soup:** Nitroglycerine
- **Soup job:** To crack a safe using nitroglycerine
- **Spill:** Talk, inform; spill it = tell me
- **Spinach:** Money
- **Spitting:** Talking
- **Spondulix:** Money
- **Square:** Honest; **on the square:** telling the truth
- **Squeeze:** a female companion; girlfriend. Frequently used in underworld circles.
- **Squirt metal:** Shoot bullets
- **Stiff:** A corpse
- **Sting:** Culmination of a con game
- **Stool-pigeon:** Informer
- **Stoolie:** Stool-pigeon
- **Stringin':** As in along, feeding someone a story

1920s Slang

- **Stuck On:** Having a crush on.
- **Sucker:** Someone ripe for a grifter's scam
- **Sugar:** Money
- **Swanky:** Ritzy.
- **Swell:** Wonderful.
- **Swift, To have plenty of:** To be fast (on the draw)
- **Swing:** Hang

T

- **Tail:** Shadow, follow
- **Take a powder:** Leave
- **Take it on the heel and toe:** Leave
- **Take on:** Eat
- **Take for a Ride:** To drive off with someone in order to bump them off.
- **Take the air:** Leave
- **Take the bounce:** To get kicked out (here, of a hotel)
- **Take the fall for:** Accept punishment for
- **That's the crop:** That's all of it
- **Three-spot:** Three-year term in jail
- **Throw a joe:** Pass out ?? (Key, 86)
- **Throw lead:** Shoot bullets
- **Ticket:** P.I. license
- **Tiger milk:** Some sort of liquor
- **Tighten the screws:** Put pressure on somebody
- **Tin:** Badge
- **Tip a few:** To have a few drinks
- **Tip your mitt:** Show your hand, reveal something
- **Tomato:** Pretty woman
- **Tooting the wrong ringer:** Asking the wrong person

1920s Slang

- **Torcher:** Torch singer
- **Torpedoes:** Gunmen
- **Trap:** Mouth
- **Trigger man:** Man whose job is to use a gun
- **Trip for biscuits,** as in "You get there fast and you get there alone - or you got a trip for biscuits": Make the trip for no purpose, achieve no results
- **Trouble boys:** Gangsters
- **Turn up:** To turn in (to the police)
- **Twist:** Woman
- **Two bits:** \$25, or 25 cents.

U

- **Under glass:** In jail
- **Up-and-down,** as in "to give something the up-and-down": A look
- **Uppers,** as in "I've been shatting on my uppers for a couple of months now" or "I'm down on my uppers": To be broke

W

- **Weak sister:** A push-over
- **Wear iron:** Carry a gun
- **Wheats,** as in "a stack of wheats": Pancakes
- **Wikiup:** Home
- **Wire,** as in "What's the wire on them?": News, "What information do you have about them?"
- **Wise, To be** To be knowledgeable of; **put us wise:** tell us
- **Wise head:** A smart person
- **Wooden kimono:** A coffin
- **Wop:** derogatory term for an Italian
- **Wrong gee:** Not a good fellow
- **Wrong number:** Not a good fellow

Y

1920s Slang

- **Ya Follow:** do you understand?
- **Yap:** Mouth
- **Yard:** \$100
- **Yegg:** Safecracker who can only open cheap and easy safes

Z

- **Zotzed:** Killed