

# THE ROARING TWENTIES

LIFE & CULTURE  
IN AMERICA IN  
THE 1920S



# Americans on the Move

- Urbanization still accelerating.
  - More Americans lived in cities than in rural areas
  - 1920:
    - New York 5 million
    - Chicago 3 million

# URBAN VS. RURAL

- ❑ **Farms started to struggle post-WWI.**

  - ❑ **6 million moved to urban areas**

- ❑ **Urban life was considered a world of anonymous crowds, strangers, moneymakers, and pleasure seekers.**

Cities were impersonal

- ❑ **Rural life was considered to be safe, with close personal ties, hard work and morals.**

- ❑ **Suburban boom: trolleys, street cars etc.**

Farms were innocent

# Other Migration

- Post-WWI: European refugees to America
- Limited immigration in 1920s from Europe and Asia.
- Employers turned to Mexican and Canadian immigrants to work.
  - As a result: barrios created
    - Spanish speaking neighborhoods.

# THE TWENTIES WOMAN

- After the tumult of World War I, Americans were looking for a little fun in the 1920s.
- Women were independent and achieving greater freedoms.
  - ie. right to vote, more employment, freedom of the auto

Chicago  
1926

# THE FLAPPER

- ❑ **Challenged the traditional ways.**
- ❑ **Revolution of manners and morals.**
- ❑ **A Flapper was an emancipated young woman who embraced the new fashions and urban attitudes.**

# NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN

Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century teachers

- **Many women entered the workplace as nurses, teachers, librarians, & secretaries.**
- **Earned less than men and were prevented from obtaining certain jobs.**

# SUPPORT FOR PROHIBITION

- ❑ Reformers had long believed alcohol led to crime, child & wife abuse, and accidents
- ❑ Supporters were largely from the rural south and west



# ORGANIZED CRIME

- ❑ Prohibition contributed to the growth of organized crime in every major city
- ❑ **Al Capone** –
  - ❑ **Chicago, Illinois**
  - ❑ **famous bootlegger**
- ❑ Capone took control of the Chicago liquor business by killing off his competition
  - ❑ Talent for avoiding jail
  - ❑ 1931 sent to prison for tax-evasion.

# SPEAKEASIES AND BOOTLEGGERS

- ❑ Many Americans did not believe drinking was a sin
- ❑ Most immigrant groups were not willing to give up drinking
- ❑ To obtain liquor, drinkers went underground to hidden saloons known as **speakeasies**
- ❑ People also bought liquor from **bootleggers** who smuggled it in from Canada, Cuba and the West Indies
- All of these activities became closely affiliated with ...



# GOVERNMENT FAILS TO CONTROL LIQUOR

- ❑ Prohibition failed:
  - ❑ Why? Government did not budget enough money to enforce the law
- ❑ The task of enforcing Prohibition fell to 1,500 poorly paid federal agents --- clearly an impossible task!

Federal agents pour wine  
down a sewer

# SUPPORT FADES, PROHIBITION REPEALED

- ❑ By the mid-1920s, only 19% of Americans supported Prohibition
- ❑ Many felt Prohibition caused more problems than it solved
- ❑ The 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment finally **repealed Prohibition in 1933**

# EDUCATION AND POPULAR CULTURE

- ❑ During the 1920s, developments in education had a powerful impact on the nation.
- ❑ **Enrollment in high schools quadrupled** between 1914 and 1926.
- ❑ Public schools met the challenge of educating millions of immigrants

# Mass Media

- Increases in Mass media during the 1920s
  - Print and broadcast methods of communication.
    - Examples:
      - Newspapers
      - Magazines
      - Radio
      - Movies

## Newspapers:

27 million to 39 million  
Increase of 42%

## Motion Pictures:

40 million to 80 million  
Increase of 100%

## Radios:

60,000 to 10.2 million  
Increase of 16,983%

# EXPANDING NEWS COVERAGE

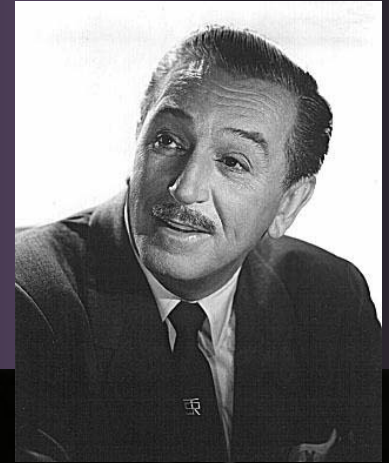
- Literacy increased in the 1920s...
  - as a result
  - Newspaper and magazine circulation rose.
- By the end of the 1920s...
  - 10 American magazines -  
- including *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Time* – boasted circulations of over 2 million a year.
  - Tabloids created

# RADIO COMES OF AGE

- ❑ Although print media was popular, radio was the most powerful communications medium to emerge in the 1920s.
- ❑ News was delivered faster and to a larger audience.
- ❑ Americans could hear the voice of the president or listen to the World Series live.



# Icons of 1920s



BILLIE HOLIDAY  
with WILLIAM F. FOTLER

# LINDBERGH'S FLIGHT

- ❑ **Charles Lindbergh**
  - ❑ **Nickname: "Lucky Lindy"**
- ❑ **May 27, 1927: Lindbergh made the first nonstop solo trans-Atlantic flight.**
  - ❑ **Spirit of St. Louis**
- ❑ **NYC - Paris**
  - ❑ **33 ½ hours later – (no auto pilot)**
  - ❑ **\$25,000 prize**
- ❑ **2yr old Son Charley kidnapped in 1932**
  - ❑ **\$50,000 ransom**
  - ❑ **murdered**

# Amelia Earhart

- 1932: First female to fly solo across the Atlantic
- 1935: First person to fly from California to Hawaii
- 1937: Attempt to fly around the world
  - 2/3 completed and went missing, presumed dead.

# AMERICAN HEROES OF THE 20s

- ❑ In 1929, Americans spent \$4.5 billion on entertainment.  
(includes sports)
- ❑ People crowded into baseball games to see their heroes
- ❑ **Babe Ruth** was a larger than life **American hero** who played for Yankees
- ❑ He hit 60 homers in 1927.

# MUSIC OF THE 1920s

- ❑ Famed composer **George Gershwin** merged traditional elements with American Jazz.
  - ❑ Someone to Watch Over Me
  - ❑ Embraceable You
  - ❑ I Got Rhythm

Gershwin

# EDWARD KENNEDY "DUKE" ELLINGTON

- In the late 1920s, Duke Ellington, a **jazz pianist** and composer, led his ten-piece orchestra at the famous **Cotton Club**.
  - **Band: "The Washingtonians"**
- Ellington won renown as one of **America's greatest composers**.

# LOUIS ARMSTRONG

- ❑ Jazz was born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- ❑ In 1922, a young trumpet player named **Louis Armstrong** joined the Creole Jazz Band.
- ❑ Armstrong is considered the **most important and influential musician** in the history of jazz

# BESSIE SMITH

- Bessie Smith, blues singer, was perhaps the **most outstanding vocalist** of the decade
- She achieved enormous popularity and by 1927 she became the **highest-paid black artist in the world**



# BILLIE HOLIDAY

- **Born Eleanora Fagan Gough**
- One of the most recognizable voices of the 20s and 30s.
  - Embraceable You
  - God Bless the Child
  - Strange Fruit

# 1920s DANCING

- Charleston
- Swing Dancing
- Dance Marathons

# Walt Disney

- Walt Disney only attended one year of high school.
- He was the voice of Mickey Mouse for two decades.
- As a kid he loved drawing and painting.
- He won 32 Academy Awards.

# WRITERS OF THE 1920s

- ❑ **Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald** coined the phrase “Jazz Age” to describe the 1920s
- ❑ Fitzgerald wrote *Paradise Lost* and *The Great Gatsby*
- ❑ *The Great Gatsby* reflected the emptiness of New York elite society

# WRITERS OF THE 1920

- ❑ **Ernest Hemingway**, became one of the best-known authors of the era
  - ❑ Wounded in World War I
- ❑ In his novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, he criticized the glorification of war
  - ❑ Moves to Europe to escape the life in the United States.
    - ❑ “Lost Generation” (Gertrude Stein)
      - ❑ Group of people disconnected from their country and its values.
- ❑ His simple, straightforward style of writing set the literary standard

Hemingway - 1929

# THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

- **Great Migration** saw hundreds of thousands of African Americans move north to **big cities**
- **1920:**
  - 5 million of the nation's 12 million blacks (over 40%) lived in cities

*Migration of the Negro* by  
Jacob Lawrence

# HARLEM, NEW YORK

- Harlem, NY became the **largest black urban community**
- Harlem suffered from overcrowding, unemployment and **poverty**
- Home to literary and artistic **revival** known as the Harlem Renaissance



# THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

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