

The Roaring Life of the 1920s

Americans confront changes in society as women enter new roles and the mass media gains a growing audience. The Harlem Renaissance signals the flourishing of African-American culture.

The Roaring Life of the 1920s

SECTION 1 Changing Ways of Life

SECTION 2 The Twenties Woman

SECTION 3 Education and Popular Culture

SECTION 4 The Harlem Renaissance



Section 1

Changing Ways of Life

Americans experience cultural conflicts as customs and values change in the 1920s.

SECTION

1 Changing Ways of Life

Rural and Urban Differences

The New Urban Scene

- 1920 census: 51.2% of Americans in communities of 2,500 or more
- 1922–1929, nearly 2 million people leave farms, towns each year
- Largest cities are New York, Chicago, Philadelphia
 - 65 other cities with 100,000 people or more
- In 1920s, people caught between rural, urban cultures
 - close ties, hard work, strict morals of small towns
 - anonymous crowds, moneymaking, pleasure seeking of cities

Continued . . .



SECTION

1

continued Rural and Urban Differences**The Prohibition Experiment**

- 18th Amendment launches Prohibition era
 - supported by religious groups, rural South, West
- **Prohibition**—production, sale, transportation of alcohol illegal
- Government does not budget enough money to enforce the law

Speakeasies and Bootleggers

- **Speakeasies** (hidden saloons, nightclubs) become fashionable
- People distill liquor, buy prescription alcohol, sacramental wine
- **Bootleggers** smuggle alcohol from surrounding countries

Continued . . .

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SECTION

1

continued **Rural and Urban Differences****Organized Crime**

- Prohibition contributes to organized crime in major cities
- Al Capone controls Chicago liquor business by killing competitors
- By mid-1920s, only 19% support Prohibition
- 18th Amendment in force until 1933; repealed by 21st Amendment

SECTION

1

Science and Religion Clash

American Fundamentalism

- **Fundamentalism**—movement based on literal interpretation of Bible
- Fundamentalists skeptical of some scientific discoveries, theories
 - reject theory of evolution
- Believe all important knowledge can be found in Bible
- Fundamentalist preachers lead religious revivals in South, West
 - Billy Sunday holds emotional meetings
 - Aimee Semple McPherson uses showmanship while preaching on radio

Continued . . .



NEXT

SECTION

1

continued **Science and Religion Clash****The Scopes Trial**

- 1925, Tennessee passes law making it a crime to teach evolution
- American Civil Liberties Union backs John T. Scopes challenge of law
- **Clarence Darrow**, most famous trial lawyer of day, defends Scopes
- Fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan is special prosecutor
- **Scopes trial**—debates evolution, role of science, religion in school
 - national sensation; thousands attend
- Bryan admits Bible open to interpretation; Scopes found guilty

Section 2

The Twenties Woman

American women pursue new lifestyles and assume new jobs and different roles in society during the 1920s.

SECTION

2 The Twenties Woman

Young Women Change the Rules

The Flapper

- **Flapper**—emancipated young woman, adopts new fashions, attitudes
- Many young women want equal status with men, become assertive
- Middle-class men, women begin to see marriage as equal partnership
 - housework, child-rearing still woman's job

The Double Standard

- Elders disapprove new behavior and its promotion by periodicals, ads
- Casual dating begins to replace formal courtship
- Women subject to **double standard** (less sexual freedom than men)
 - must observe stricter standards of behavior



SECTION

2

Women Shed Old Roles at Home and at Work

New Work Opportunities

- After war, employers replace female workers with men
- Female college graduates become teachers, nurses, librarians
- Many women become clerical workers as demand rises
- Some become sales clerks, factory workers
- Few become managers; always paid less than men

Continued . . .



SECTION

2

continued **Women Shed Old Roles at Home and at Work****The Changing Family**

- Birthrate drops partly due to more birth-control information
- Manufactured products, public services give homemakers freedom
- Housewives can focus more on families, pastimes, not housework
- Marriages increasingly based on romantic love, companionship
- Children spend most of day at school, organized activities
 - adolescents resist parental control
- Working-class, college-educated women juggle family, work



Section 3

Education and Popular Culture

The mass media, movies, and spectator sports play important roles in creating the popular culture of the 1920s—a culture that many artists and writers criticize.

SECTION

3 Education and Popular Culture

Schools and the Mass Media Shape Culture

School Enrollments

- High school population increases dramatically in 1920s due to:
 - prosperity
 - higher standards for industry jobs
- Pre-1920s, high school for college-bound students
- In 1920s, high schools also offer vocational training
- Public schools prepare immigrant children who speak no English
- School taxes increase as school costs rise sharply

Continued . . .



SECTION

3

continued **Schools and the Mass Media Shape Culture****Expanding News Coverage**

- Mass media shapes mass culture; takes advantage of greater literacy
- By 1914, hundreds of local newspapers replaced by national chains
- 1920s, mass-market magazines thrive; *Reader's Digest*, *Time* founded

Radio Comes of Age

- Radio is most powerful communications medium of 1920s
- Networks provide shared national experience
 - can hear news as it happens



SECTION

3

America Chases New Heroes and Old Dreams

New-Found Leisure Time

- In 1920s, many people have extra money, leisure time to enjoy it
- Crowds attend sports events; athletes glorified by mass media

Lindbergh's Flight

- **Charles A. Lindbergh** makes first solo nonstop flight across Atlantic
- Small-town Minnesotan symbolizes honesty, bravery in age of excess
- Lindbergh paves the way for other pilots

Continued . . .



NEXT

SECTION

3

continued **America Chases New Heroes and Old Dreams****Entertainment and the Arts**

- Silent movies already a national pastime
- Introduction of sound leads millions to attend every week
- Playwrights, composers break away from European traditions
- **George Gershwin** uses jazz to create American music
- Painters portray American realities, dreams
- **Georgia O' Keeffe** paints intensely colored canvases of New York

Continued . . .

SECTION

3

continued **America Chases New Heroes and Old Dreams****Writers of the 1920s**

- **Sinclair Lewis** is first American to win Nobel Prize for literature
 - criticizes conformity, materialism
- **F. Scott Fitzgerald** reveals negative side of era's gaiety, freedom
- **Edna St. Vincent Millay** celebrates youth, independence in her poems
- Writers soured by American culture, war settle in Europe
 - called Lost Generation
- Expatriate **Ernest Hemingway** introduces simple, tough, American style



Section 4

The Harlem Renaissance

African-American ideas, politics, art, literature, and music flourish in Harlem and elsewhere in the United States.

SECTION

4 The Harlem Renaissance

African-American Voices in the 1920s

The Move North

- 1910–1920, Great Migration of thousands of African Americans
 - move from South to Northern cities
- By 1920, over 40% of African Americans live in cities
- Racial tensions escalate in North; about 25 urban race riots in 1919
- African-Americans continue to migrate in large numbers in 1920s

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SECTION

4

continued African-American Voices in the 1920s**African-American Goals**

- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
 - protests racial violence
- NAACP leader **James Weldon Johnson** fights for civil rights legislation
- NAACP antilynching campaign leads to drop in number of lynchings

Marcus Garvey and the UNIA

- **Marcus Garvey** founds Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)
 - believes African Americans should build separate society
- Garvey promotes black pride, black businesses, return to Africa

SECTION

4

The Harlem Renaissance Flowers in New York

African-American Writers

- Harlem world's largest black urban area; people from U.S., Caribbean
- **Harlem Renaissance**—African-American literary, artistic movement
 - express pride in African-American experience
- **Claude McKay**'s poems urge blacks to resist prejudice, discrimination
- **Langston Hughes**'s poems describe difficult lives of working class
 - many written in jazz, blues tempo
- **Zora Neale Hurston** shows folkways, values of poor, Southern blacks

Continued . . .



NEXT

SECTION

4

continued The Harlem Renaissance Flowers in New York**African-American Performers**

- Influence, popularity of Harlem Renaissance go beyond black audience
- Musical comedy *Shuffle Along* launches movement - is popular with white audiences
- African-American performers win large followings
- **Paul Robeson**—major dramatic actor in London, New York

Continued . . .

NEXT

SECTION

4

continued The Harlem Renaissance Flowers in New York**African Americans and Jazz**

- Jazz born in early 20th century New Orleans, spreads across U.S.
- Trumpeter **Louis Armstrong** makes personal expression key part of jazz
 - most influential musician in jazz history
- **Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington**—jazz pianist, orchestra leader
 - one of America’s greatest composers
- Cab Calloway, Armstrong popularize scat (improvised jazz singing)
- **Bessie Smith**—blues singer, perhaps best vocalist of decade

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