

NEW POPULAR CULTURE OF THE 1920's

Radio Drives Popular Culture

- During the 1920s, the radio went from being a little-known novelty to being standard equipment in every American home.

Rise of the Radio

- Guglielmo Marconi invented the radio in the late 1800s, and by the early 1900s the military and ships at sea used them.
- In 1920, most Americans still didn't own radios, and there was not any programming.
- In 1920, a radio hobbyist near Pittsburgh started playing records over his radio, and people started listening.

Radio Station Boom

- The growing popularity of those simple broadcasts caught the attention of Westinghouse, a radio manufacturer.
- **In October 1920, Westinghouse started KDKA, the first radio station.**
- By 1922 the U.S. had 570 stations.
- Technical improvements in sound and size helped popularity.
- **Americans now had a shared experience.**

Movies

New Film Techniques

- In early years movies were short, simple pieces.
- During World War I, filmmaker **D. W. Griffith** produced *The Birth of a Nation*, a controversial film that some consider racist.
- The film nonetheless introduced innovative movie techniques and helped establish film as an art form and widened its audience.
- Woodrow Wilson, after seeing the movie, said, "it's like writing history with lightning."

Talkies and Cartoons

- Another important innovation was the introduction of films with sound, or "talkies."
- **In 1927 filmgoers were amazed by *The Jazz Singer*, first movie to incorporate dialogue**
- In 1928, the animated film *Steamboat Willie* introduced Mickey Mouse and cartoons.
- By the end of the 1920s, Americans bought 100 million movie tickets a week, though the entire U.S. population was about 123 million people.

Film Star Heroes

- The great popularity of movies in the 1920s gave rise to a new kind of celebrity—the movie star.
- One of the brightest stars of the 1920s was Charlie Chaplin, a comedian whose signature character was a tramp in a derby hat and ragged clothes.
- Rudolph Valentino, a dashing leading man of romantic films, was such a big star that his unexpected death in 1926 drew tens of thousands of women to the funeral home where his body lay.

Charles Lindbergh

- Charles Lindbergh was a daredevil pilot who practiced his skills as an airline pilot, a dangerous, life-threatening job at the time.
- Lindbergh heard about a \$25,000 prize for the first aviator to fly a nonstop transatlantic flight, or a flight across the Atlantic Ocean, and wanted to win.
- He rejected the idea that he needed a large plane with many engines, and developed a very light single-engine craft with room for only one pilot.
- On May 21, 1927, Lindbergh succeeded by touching down in Paris, France after a thirty-three-and-a-half-hour flight from New York.
- Lindbergh earned the name “Lucky Lindy” and became the most beloved American hero of the time.

Emelia Earhart

- A little over a year after Lindbergh’s flight, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, returning to the U.S. as a hero.
- She went on to set numerous speed and distance records as a pilot.
- In 1937 she was most of the way through a record-breaking flight around the world when she disappeared over the Pacific Ocean.

Sports Heroes

Radio helped inflame the public passion for sports, and millions of Americans tuned in to broadcasts of ballgames and prize fights featuring their favorite athletes.

Helen Wills:

Played powerful tennis, winning 31 major tournaments and two Olympic gold medals. Her nerves of steel earned her the nickname “Little Miss Poker Face.”

Red Grange:

College football player who earned the nickname the “Gallopig Ghost” for his speed. He turned professional after college, which was shocking at the time.

Babe Ruth:

Known as the “Sultan of Swat,” Ruth was legendary on the baseball field for his home runs. His legend lives on today in baseball circles and popular culture.

Bobby Jones:

Jones won golf’s first Grand Slam, meaning he won the game’s four major tournaments, and remains the only golfer to get a Grand Slam for matches in one calendar year.

Harlem Renaissance

Life in Harlem

- New York City was one of the northern cities many African Americans moved to during the Great Migration, and by the early 1920s, about 200,000 African Americans lived in the city.
- Most of these people lived in a neighborhood known as Harlem, which became the unofficial capital of African American culture and activism in the United States.
- A key figure in Harlem's rise was W.E.B. Du Bois, a well-educated, Massachusetts-born African American leader.
- In 1909 Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in New York City.
- Du Bois also served as editor of a magazine called *The Crisis*, a major outlet for African American writing and poetry, which helped promote the African American arts movement.

A Renaissance in Harlem

- Harlem in the 1920s was home to tens of thousands of African Americans, many from the South, who felt a strong sense of racial pride and identity in this new place.
- This spirit attracted a historic influx of talented African American writers, thinkers, musicians, and artists, resulting in the **Harlem Renaissance**.

Writers

- Little African American literature was published before that era.
- Writers like Zora Neale Hurston and **James Weldon Johnson** wrote of facing white prejudice.

Poets

- Poets like Claude McKay and **Langston Hughes** wrote of black defiance and hope.
- These poets recorded the distinctive culture of Harlem in the 1920s.

Artists

- Black artists won fame during this era, often focusing on the experiences of African Americans.
- William H. Johnson, Aaron Douglas and Jacob Lawrence were well known.