

3 The Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance

TERMS & NAMES

jazz
mass media
popular culture
Harlem
Renaissance
Lost Generation
expatriate

MAIN IDEA

Popular culture was influenced by the mass media, sports, and the contributions of African Americans.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Much of today's popular culture had its origins in this period.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

The decade known as the Roaring Twenties was also called the Jazz Age, because the lively, loose beat of **jazz** captured the carefree spirit of the times. Jazz was developed by African-American musicians in New Orleans. That city was the home of Louis Armstrong, who became one of the world's great jazz musicians.

As a child, Armstrong often listened to jazz played at funeral processions and dance halls. He was raised by a poor, single mother and started working at age seven. His job was collecting junk in a horse-drawn wagon. While in the wagon, Armstrong often played a small tin horn.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I had a little tin horn, the kind the people celebrate with. I would blow this long tin horn without the top on it. Just hold my fingers close together. Blow it as a call for old rags, bones, bottles or anything that people had to sell. . . . The kids loved the sounds of my tin horn!

Louis Armstrong, quoted in *Louis Armstrong* by Sanford Brown



Louis Armstrong brought New Orleans jazz to the North in the 1920s.

Later, Armstrong learned to play the trumpet. With other jazz musicians, he spread this new music to other parts of the country—from Chicago to New York's Harlem—and then to Europe.

In this section, you will read more about the spread of popular culture, the Harlem Renaissance, and the artists of the Lost Generation.

More Leisure Time for Americans

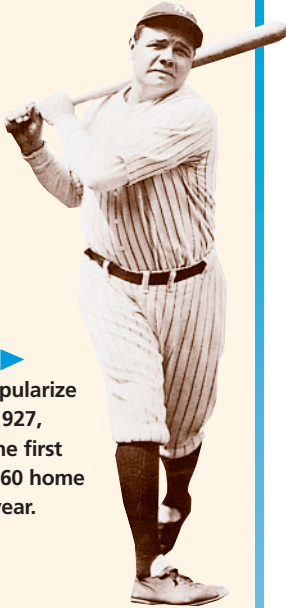
Labor-saving appliances and shorter working hours gave Americans more leisure time. Higher wages also gave them money to spend on leisure activities. People wanted more fun, and they were willing to spend money to have it. Americans paid 25 cents or more to see a movie—an increase of at least 5 times the price in the previous decade. By the end of the 1920s, there were more than 100 million weekly moviegoers.

In addition to attending movies, some Americans went to museums and public libraries. Others bought books and magazines. Sales rose by

Celebrities of the 1920s



▶ **Charlie Chaplin** was the most popular male film star during the 1920s. He was known as the "great comedian."



Babe Ruth ▶ helped to popularize baseball. In 1927, he became the first player to hit 60 home runs in one year.



▶ **Helen Wills** dominated women's tennis in the 1920s.

▼ **Duke Ellington** was a world-famous jazz pianist and composer. His band played at the Cotton Club in Harlem in the 1920s.



50 percent. Americans also spent time listening to the radio, talking on the telephone, playing games, and driving their cars. In 1929, Americans spent about \$4 billion on entertainment—a 100 percent jump in a decade.

But not all Americans were able to take part equally in leisure-time activities or in the consumer culture of the 1920s. Some, like African Americans and Hispanic Americans, had their time and choices limited by factors such as income and race.

Mass Media and Popular Culture

New types of **mass media**—communications that reach a large audience—began to take hold in the 1920s. Radio and movies provided entertainment and spread the latest ideas about fashions and lifestyles.

The first commercial radio broadcast took place in Pittsburgh at station KDKA in 1920. Other radio stations soon emerged. The number of households with radios jumped from about 60,000 in 1922 to 10 million in 1929. Radio stations broadcast news, sports, music, comedy, and commercials. Not only were Americans better informed than before, but listening to the same radio programs united the nation.

Of all the powerful new influences of the 1920s, none shaped the ideas and dreams of Americans more than motion pictures. The moviemaking industry was centered in Hollywood, California.

Movies gave people an escape into worlds of glamour and excitement they could never enter. Audiences flocked to movie theaters to see their favorite actors and actresses. These included Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Clara Bow, and Rudolph Valentino. Movies also spread American popular culture to Europe. **Popular culture** included songs, dances, fashions, and even slang expressions like *scram* (leave in a hurry) and *ritzy* (elegant).

Moviemakers like Samuel Goldwyn, the Warner brothers, and Louis B. Mayer made fortunes overnight. For most of the 1920s, films were silent. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* introduced sound. Another *talkie* caused a sensation in 1928—Walt Disney's cartoon *Steamboat Willie*, featuring Mickey Mouse. Within a few years, all movies were talkies.

ReadingHistory

A. Recognizing Effects What was the main effect that laborsaving devices and reduced working hours had on Americans' lives?

A Search for Heroes

Another leisure activity was watching sporting events and listening to them on the radio. Sporting events of all types—baseball, football, hockey, boxing, golf, and tennis—enjoyed rising attendance. Boxing became very popular. Fans who could not attend the fights listened to matches on the radio or saw them on newsreels shown at movie theaters. The Jack Dempsey–Gene Tunney boxing match of 1926 drew 120,000 fans.

In the 1920s, professional baseball gained many new fans because games were broadcast on radio. As a result, fans flocked to major league ballparks. In New York City, fans went to Yankee Stadium, which opened in 1923, to watch the “Bronx Bombers”—the nickname for the New York Yankees. Even college football and basketball attracted huge crowds.

Sports figures captured the imagination of the American public. They became heroes because they restored Americans’ belief in the power of the individual to improve his or her life. Babe Ruth of the Yankees was baseball’s top home-run hitter. Someone once asked Ruth why his \$80,000 salary was higher than the president’s. Ruth supposedly replied, “Well, I had a better year.”

Baseball players weren’t the only sports heroes. Golfers idolized Bobby Jones. People cheered Helen Wills and Bill Tilden on the tennis courts. In 1926, New York City threw a huge homecoming parade for Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel. Americans also made national heroes of two daring young fliers—Charles A. Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.

ReadingHistory

B. Summarizing

What were some of the changes that came about in popular entertainment in the 1920s?

AMERICA'S HISTORY MAKERS



CHARLES A. LINDBERGH

1902–1974

Charles A. Lindbergh took flying lessons in 1922 and bought his first airplane in 1923. Four years later, in May 1927, he became the first person to fly nonstop alone across the Atlantic Ocean.

Lindbergh had heard about an offer of \$25,000

to anyone who could fly nonstop from New York to Paris. Piloting his single engine monoplane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, without radio or parachute, Lindbergh flew some 3,600 miles in 33½ hours. “Lucky Lindy” became an instant hero.

AMELIA EARHART

1897–1937

Amelia Earhart was often called “Lady Lindy” because of both her physical resemblance to Charles Lindbergh and her similar accomplishments as a pilot.

Earhart took flying lessons in 1921 and bought her first plane in 1922. Noted for her courage and independence, she flew where no women had gone before. She was the first woman to cross the Atlantic in a plane (as a passenger) in 1928 and the first to fly solo across the Atlantic in 1932. She disappeared on a round-the-world flight in 1937. What happened remains a mystery to this day.



Why do you think Lindbergh and Earhart became American heroes?

HISTORY through ART

Artists of the Harlem Renaissance celebrated the cultural traditions and the life experiences of African Americans. This painting by Lois Mailou Jones is entitled *The Ascent of Ethiopia*.

How does the artist show the link between African and American cultures?

The Harlem Renaissance

Wartime military service and work in war industries had given African Americans a new sense of freedom. They migrated to many cities across the country, but it was New York City that turned into the unofficial capital of black America. In the 1920s, Harlem, a neighborhood on New York's West Side, was the world's largest black urban community.

The migrants from the South brought with them new ideas and a new kind of music called jazz. Soon Harlem produced a burst of African-American cultural activity known as the **Harlem Renaissance**, which began in the 1920s and lasted into the 1930s. It was called a renaissance because it symbolized a rebirth of hope for African Americans.

Harlem became home to writers, musicians, singers, painters, sculptors, and scholars. There they were able to exchange ideas and develop their creativity. Among Harlem's residents were poets Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Countee Cullen and novelists Claude McKay and Zora Neale Hurston. Hughes was perhaps Harlem's most famous writer. He wrote about the difficult conditions under which African Americans lived.

Jazz became widely popular in the 1920s. It was a form of music that combined African rhythms, blues, and ragtime to produce a unique sound. Jazz spread from its birthplace in New Orleans to other parts of the country and made its way into the nightclubs

of Harlem. These nightclubs featured popular jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, and singers such as the jazz and blues great, Bessie Smith. Harlem's most famous nightclub was the Cotton Club. It made stars of many African-American performers, but only white customers were allowed in the club.

The Lost Generation

For some artists and writers, the decade after the war was not a time of celebration but a time of deep despair. They had seen the ideas of the Progressives end in a senseless war. They were filled with resentment and they saw little hope for the future. They were called the **Lost Generation**.

Vocabulary
renaissance:
rebirth (French)

ReadingHistory

C. Recognizing Effects What changes to popular culture resulted from the migration of African Americans to the North?



ReadingHistory

D. Analyzing

Causes Why did many American writers become expatriates and live in Paris?

For many of them, only one place offered freedom and tolerance. That was Paris. The French capital became a gathering place for American **expatriates**, people who choose to live in a country other than their own. Among the American expatriates living in Paris was the young novelist Ernest Hemingway. As an ambulance driver in Europe during World War I, he had seen the war's worst. His early novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, reflected the mood of despair that followed the war.

Novelists F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis were two other members of the Lost Generation. Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, lived the whirlwind life of the Jazz Age—fast cars, nightclubs, wild parties, and trips to Paris. His masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, is a tragic story of wealthy New Yorkers whose lives spin out of control. The novel is a portrait of the dark side of the Roaring Twenties.

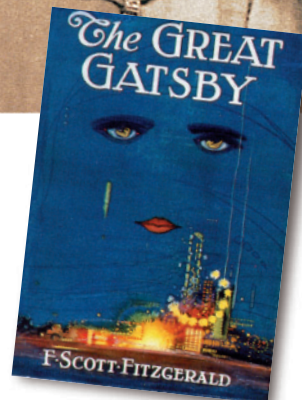
Lewis wrote *Babbitt*, a novel that satirized, or made fun of, the American middle class and its concern for material possessions.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

It's the fellow with four to ten thousand a year . . . and an automobile and a nice little family in a bungalow . . . that makes the wheels of progress go round! . . . That's the type of fellow that's ruling America today; in fact, it's the ideal type to which the entire world must tend, if there's to be a decent, well-balanced . . . future for this little old planet!

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*

The social values and materialistic lifestyles criticized by Lewis soon came to an end. As you will read in the next chapter, the soaring economy that brought prosperity in the 1920s came to a crashing halt. It was followed by a worldwide economic depression in the 1930s.



F. Scott Fitzgerald is pictured here in France with his wife, Zelda. He published his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, while living there.

Section 3 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- jazz
- mass media
- popular culture
- Harlem Renaissance
- Lost Generation
- expatriate

2. Taking Notes

Use the chart to review facts about mass media.

Radio	Movies

How did mass media change the lives of Americans?

3. Main Ideas

- Which two factors gave Americans more leisure time?
- What effect did radio have on sports?
- Why was Harlem called the unofficial capital of black America?

4. Critical Thinking

Evaluating What contributions to popular culture occurred in the 1920s?

THINK ABOUT

- the impact of World War I
- the power of mass media
- new social values

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

ART TECHNOLOGY

Find an image and important facts about a noted person in this section. Draw a trading card or plan that person's home page for the Internet.