

# The Jazz Age

## If YOU were there...

The year is 1924, and the New York Giants are playing the Washington Senators in the World Series. You just bought your first radio, and you are listening to an announcer describe the tense action as the seventh and deciding game goes into extra innings. You used to have to wait to read about the games in the newspaper. Now you can follow your favorite team pitch by pitch!

**What other forms of entertainment could the radio bring to you?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** You read earlier about the rise of mass culture in the United States in the late 1800s. Newspapers, department stores, and world's fairs allowed millions of Americans to share the same cultural activities. In the 1920s technologies such as radio broadcasts and movies helped the rise of mass culture continue.

## A National Culture

On November 2, 1920, KDKA, the first commercial radio station, announced that Warren Harding had won the presidential election held that day. Just one year later, stations broadcast the action from the 1921 World Series. One newspaper writer predicted, "It might not be too long before farmers at the four corners of the Union may sit in their own houses and hear the president of the United States." Such an event seemed amazing to Americans in the early 1900s. But it quickly became a reality, as hundreds of radio stations began broadcasting all over the United States.

National radio networks, such as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), allowed people all over the country to listen to the same programs. People suddenly had access to music, news, weather reports, children's bedtime stories, sports broadcasts, and political speeches without leaving their homes. Business owners loved this technology because it allowed their advertisements to reach millions of listeners. Radio helped build a new national culture by allowing Americans everywhere to share common experiences.

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Radio and movies linked the country in a national culture.
2. Jazz and blues music became popular nationwide.
3. Writers and artists introduced new styles and artistic ideas.

### The Big Idea

Musicians, artists, actors, and writers contributed to American popular culture in the 1920s.

## Key Terms and People

talkie, p. 766

Jazz Age, p. 767

Harlem Renaissance, p. 768

Langston Hughes, p. 768

Lost Generation, p. 768

expatriates, p. 768

Georgia O'Keeffe, p. 769

### TAKING NOTES

As you read, look for examples of popular culture in the 1920s. Record your notes in a diagram like this.

### 1920s Popular Culture

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## THE IMPACT TODAY

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has held the Oscar ceremony every year since 1929. It was first broadcast over the radio in 1930, and in 1953 the Academy Awards were first televised.

Movies also became a major national passion in the 1920s. Though early motion pictures had no sound, they opened a new world of exciting adventures for audiences. People packed theaters to see Westerns, romances, and stories about bootlegging gangsters. Movie fans were even more thrilled by the 1927 movie *The Jazz Singer*, in which actor Al Jolson shouted the line “You ain’t heard nothin’ yet!” This was the first **talkie, or motion picture with sound**.

The movies quickly became big business. By the end of the decade, Americans were buying 95 million movie tickets each week, an amazing figure considering that the U.S. population was only 123 million. Young movie fans copied hair and clothing styles of movie stars. Fans felt a personal connection to stars like Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and Mary Pickford, who was known as “America’s Sweetheart.” Few fans at the time realized that Pickford was also a smart businesswoman. She was one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood and a founder of United Artists, one of the nation’s most successful film companies.

Movie stars were not the only national heroes. Fans packed baseball stadiums to watch the great players of the 1920s, especially George

Herman “Babe” Ruth. Ruth shattered home-run records, drawing thousands of new fans to the sport. Because baseball was segregated, African American players and business leaders started their own league. Negro League stars such as Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson are considered to be among the best baseball players in history.

Fans always loved to see athletes break records. In 1926 American swimmer Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel between England and France, beating the men’s world record by almost two hours.

Pilots also became national heroes in the 1920s. Charles Lindbergh dominated the national news in 1927 when he completed the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, traveling from New York to Paris. A few years later, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

New ideas like psychoanalysis became more popular. Developed by psychologist Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis is a method for examining human behavior to find out why people behave the way they do.

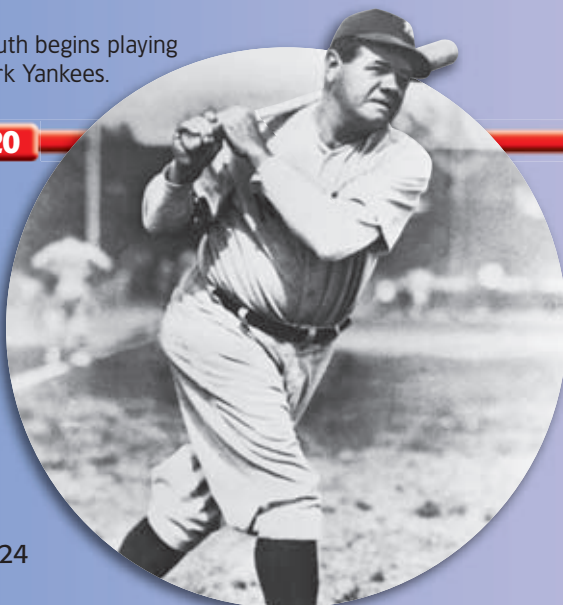
**READING CHECK** Summarizing How did American culture change during the 1920s?

## Time Line

### Popular Culture of the 1920s

**1920** Babe Ruth begins playing for the New York Yankees.

1920



**1924** First Negro-League World Series is played.



## Popular Music

With a booming economy and exciting forms of entertainment, the 1920s became known as the Roaring Twenties. **An explosion in the popularity of jazz music gave the decade another nickname—the Jazz Age.**

Jazz developed in New Orleans, where African American musicians blended spirituals with European harmonies and West African rhythms. When blacks moved north during the Great Migration, they brought their music with them.

As with many new forms of popular culture, jazz sparked arguments between older and younger generations. “When my grandmother found out that I was playing jazz music . . . she told me that I had disgraced the family,” remembered “Jelly Roll” Morton, an early jazz composer. But young Americans loved the music and the wild, fast-paced dances that went along with it. Dance crazes sweeping the nation included the Charleston, the Toddle, and the Shimmy. New magazines arose that taught dance steps to subscribers.

Jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong experimented with various sounds and rhythms to create a new kind of music. Armstrong, who played the trumpet, was known for his solo numbers. His method

of stepping out from the band to perform a solo was an **innovation** that is still copied by musicians today. Another major figure of the Jazz Age was conductor and composer Edward “Duke” Ellington. His “big band” sound blended many instruments together in songs such as “Take the A Train.” Ellington described the exciting life of Jazz Age musicians in New York City:

“A lot of guys liked to play so much that in spite of being on a regular job, they’d still hire out to work matinees, or breakfast dances . . . Nobody went to bed at nights and round three or four in the mornings you’d find everyone making the rounds bringing their horns with them.”

— Duke Ellington, quoted in *Reminiscing in Tempo*, by Stuart Nicholson

Blues music, which came from the rural South of the Mississippi Delta, also gained national popularity in the 1920s. Blues began as an expression of the suffering of African Americans during slavery. One of the leading blues singers of the 1920s was Bessie Smith, nicknamed the Empress of the Blues. “She had music in her soul,” said Louis Armstrong.

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

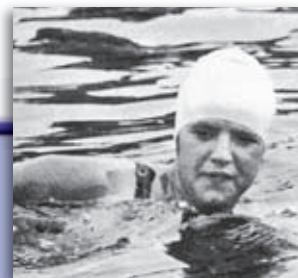
**innovation**  
a new idea or way of doing something

**READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas** Where did jazz originate, and what musical styles influenced it?



**1925** F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is published.

**1926** Gertrude Ederle becomes the first woman to swim across the English Channel.



**1927** Charles Lindbergh completes the first non-stop solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean.



**1925** Louis Armstrong begins recording with his band, the Hot Five.

**1926** NBC, the first national radio network, begins broadcasting.

**1927** *The Jazz Singer*, the first full-length talkie, is released.

**1928**

**ANALYSIS SKILL**

**READING TIME LINES**

Which events reflected people's interest in breaking records?

## Writers and Artists

While musicians were creating new forms of music, writers and artists were also reshaping American culture. Many creative works of the 1920s are still admired today.

### The Harlem Renaissance

Many of the African Americans who came north in the Great Migration built a thriving community in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. This community became the center of the **Harlem Renaissance**, a period of African American artistic accomplishment.

Harlem Renaissance writers included **Langston Hughes** and Claude McKay. Hughes produced poems, plays, and novels about African American life. His works often incorporated African American slang and jazz rhythms. McKay was a poet and activist who spoke out against racial discrimination and called on African Americans to stand up against lynchings and other violence.

Another important writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Zora Neale Hurston. Her novels, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, reflected the experiences of African American women.

### Primary Source

#### POEM

#### “I, Too”

In one of his most celebrated poems, Langston Hughes expressed both pride in being African American and faith in the American dream.

“I, Too

I, too, sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
'Eat in the kitchen;'  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—  
I, too, am America.”



#### ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

**Analyzing** Who do you think Hughes is referring to when he speaks of “they”?

### The Lost Generation

Other Americans also wrote of their experiences living in the United States and in places around the world. Soon after he graduated from high school in Illinois, Ernest Hemingway volunteered as an ambulance driver in World War I. Hemingway called the war “the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that had ever taken place on earth.” He began writing short stories and novels, and soon he gained fame for his powerful and direct writing style. Hemingway was among a group of young American writers who expressed feelings of disillusionment in the American society that they felt denied them a voice in their own futures. Author Gertrude Stein called these writers “a lost generation.” **Writers who criticized American society in the 1920s thus became known as the Lost Generation.**

Many members of the Lost Generation moved to Paris in the 1920s and formed a community of **expatriates**—people who leave their home country to live elsewhere. Hemingway wrote about the expatriate community in his best-selling novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Another Lost Generation writer was F. Scott Fitzgerald. His novel *The Great Gatsby* focused on what he saw as the loss of morality behind the seemingly fun and free-spirited times of the Jazz Age. Criticizing a glamorous couple, Fitzgerald wrote:



“They were careless people...they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Another writer of the time, Sinclair Lewis, became the first American to receive the Nobel Prize in literature.

### New Directions in Art

Painters were also experimenting with new artistic styles in the 1920s. Edward Hopper painted images of the loneliness of modern urban life. **Georgia O’Keeffe** was well known for her detailed paintings of flowers and of the Southwest.

Architects of the 1920s embraced a style they called art deco. Buildings constructed in this style had clean, sharp lines that resembled machines. Today art-deco skyscrapers still stand out in American city skylines.

#### READING CHECK Comparing and Contrasting

How were the artists of the Harlem Renaissance and the Lost Generation similar and different?

## Section 3 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Recall** What new forms of entertainment dominated American society during the 1920s?

**b. Identify** What was the first **talkie**?
- a. Explain** Why were the 1920s called the **Jazz Age**?

**b. Make Inferences** Why do you think jazz music became so popular?
- a. Recall** How did writers and artists express new ideas during the 1920s?

**b. Describe** What did the **Lost Generation** writers express in their works?

**c. Predict** How might the artists of the **Harlem Renaissance** influence African American artists of later generations?



### BIOGRAPHY

## Georgia O’Keeffe

1887–1986

Georgia O’Keeffe grew up in Wisconsin and studied art in Chicago and New York. While teaching art at a college in Canyon, Texas, she would sometimes hike in Palo Duro Canyon, where she sketched scenes of amazing colors and rock formations. This was the start of a lifelong fascination with the beauty of the desert landscape. O’Keeffe lived much of her life in rural New Mexico, where many of her paintings were created. Animal bones, rocks, and desert flowers fill her works. She would often paint these objects in close-up view, showing tiny details. O’Keeffe said, “Most people in the city rush around so, they have no time to look at a flower. I want them to see it whether they want to or not.”

**Finding Main Ideas** How did Georgia O’Keeffe’s life influence her painting?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** Americans became interested in new forms of entertainment and art in the 1920s. In the next chapter you will learn about how life changed in the 1930s.