



The USA, a nation of contrasts, 1910 - 1929



Changes in American culture and society

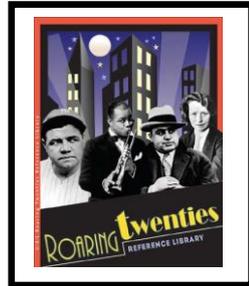
In this topic we will focus upon three key questions:

- i) How did popular entertainment develop during this period?
- ii) How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?
- iii) Why did sport and other leisure activities witness so much growth during this period?



A brief comment on the topic

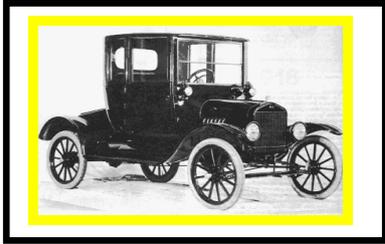
In this section we examine some of the key changes in American culture and society. A great amount of change took place during the decade that affected the people of America in many ways. With the horror of World War One put behind them, Americans fell in love with the movies and movie stars. Furthermore, a new form of music - Jazz - took control of America and the world. Also the growing prosperity allowed people to spend more money on hobbies and past times and meant the watching and participating in sports grew immensely. It was a decade when women became more independent and gained greater equality and a period that saw Americans like Lindbergh achieve amazing records, like flying across the Atlantic.



The era of the silent movie

When World War One ended the **cinema** quickly became the most popular form of entertainment. Every small town had a cinema and a visit to the movies became part of American life, but why?

'Shhh! Silent Movie'



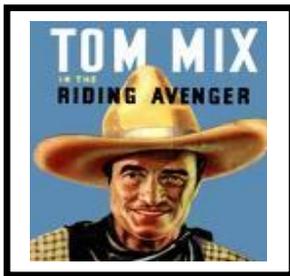
Improvements in transport meant people could go to the cinema.



Films were a form of escapism - cowboys, romance & swashbuckling adventures.

Popularity of the Movies

Cheap prices - tickets were only 5 cents.



Movie star appeal - Celebrities, Sex-appeal, fashion.



Up until 1927 movies were silent, the only sound came from a piano accompaniment and occasionally sound effects. Some cinemas even had a cinema employee provide a commentary. Fast music would be played in car chases and romantic music for love scenes.

More and more people became regular cinema goers, and the film industry responded by developing a wider variety of films for Americans to watch. Films ranged from Westerns and Biblical stories to romances and comedies. Many Americans enjoyed the escapism that going to the cinema offered, as it gave them the opportunity to escape the boredom of their everyday lives.

Movie Stars

Perhaps however, the real winners of the success of the cinemas were the **movie stars**. Stars like **Charlie Chaplin**, **Clara Bow**, **Greta Garbo**, **Buster Keaton** and **Rudolph Valentino** became a huge success. As moviegoers wanted to see their favourite film stars, film





Interesting Fact: Cinemas were originally called nickelodeons.

companies paid the stars large sums of money to make films. Charlie Chaplin was paid \$1 million dollars for an 8 film contract, while Great Garbo was earning \$5000 dollars a week.

Furthermore, newspapers and fan magazines began to publish stories about the lives of the stars, much like *OK* and *Hello* do today. The fashions of the films became the fashion of the streets. Film makers realised quickly that 'sex sells' and films became more risqué. Stars like Clara Bow and Rudolph Valentino were sold on their sex appeal. When Valentino died suddenly in 1926 some of his fans were so upset that they committed suicide.

The Talkies

Prior to World War One the film industries moved from New York to Hollywood, California. Here in Hollywood the industry really began to develop and by 1927 the first 'talkie' had been produced. *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson made the cinemas even more popular as cinema-goers could now here the film stars speak and by 1930 more than 100 million cinema tickets were being sold each week.



Nevertheless, Hollywood did not have it all its own way. Some Americans thought that movies were lowering the morals of society as was promoting sex symbols like Bow and Valentino. Pressure from some groups forced Hollywood to respond and produce the **Hays Code**.

Source A: *Mary Hulst remembers the cinema in the 1920s.*

It was really an experience. You would be treated like a king or queen. You were led into an enormous lobby of marble with huge stairs leading up to the balconies. All the carpets were an inch or two thick. Everything was done in there to make you feel comfortable, to make you feel important.

Hays Code:

No Screen Nudity.



Screen kisses must not last.

Murder, arson & robbery must be shown as EVIL!

PROFILE: Louis Armstrong

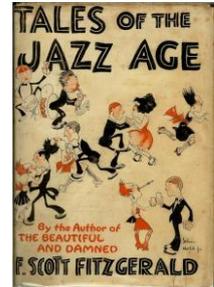


Born in New Orleans in 1901, he became a famous trumpeter. In 1922 he moved to Chicago, the capital of Jazz in the USA. By 1925 he had his own band and was known nationwide. Some of his most famous songs were *Ain't Misbehaving* and *Tiger Rag*.

And all that Jazz!



The 1920s is known as the '**Jazz Age**' because the popular music of the time and it was Jazz. F. Scott Fitzgerald who coined the phrase 'Jazz Age' in one of his books



Jazz music was not new; it had come from the slave plantations and as the slaves worked they would sing, using pick axes and washboards to add music to their songs. As most black musicians could not read music they would improvise and make it the tunes up as they went along, this music then developed into blues and ragtime and boogie-woogie. As all these words were taken from black sexual slang, white people disapproved and renamed it jazz.

Although the music was of African American origins, by the 1920s the music had become extremely popular with young middle-class whites. However, not all of white-America was so accepting of Jazz music and many criticised Jazz for lowering moral standards.

Some cities like New York and Cleveland even banned the public performance of Jazz. However, this only served to make it even more exciting and popular to the young. Jazz became the main music played in night clubs and speakeasies and the radio broadcast the songs into people's homes.



Source B: Taken from an interview with a Jazz musician in the early 1920s.

Jazz players make their instruments do entirely new things, things trained musicians are trained to avoid. Jazz has come to stay – it is an expression of the times – the breathless, energetic, super active times in which we are living.

Source C: From *The Ladies Home Journal*, 1922, a magazine written for American women

Jazz was originally for the voodoo dancer, chanting and simulating vile things. It was used to simulate brutality and sensuality. That this has a demoralising effect on the brain has been demonstrated by many scientists. Jazz is harmful and is dangerous.

PROFILE: Duke Ellington



Born in Washington DC in 1899, Louis Armstrong became a composer and pianist. In the 1920s he moved to New York and assembled a ten-piece band. He became very popular and some of his most notable songs were *Choo Choo* and *Chocolate Kiddies*.

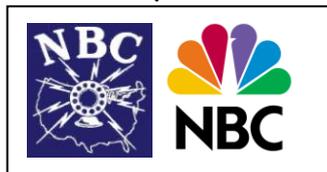
The Impact of the Radio



By the end of 1920s the **radio** had developed into one of the most popular forms of entertainment, reaching over 50 million people. The first radio station, Station KDKA began in 1920 and by 1930 there were some 600 radio stations broadcasting. 40 percent of US homes had a radio as they were mass produced and could be bought by paying them off in weekly instalments.

Radio enabled Americans to listen to sporting events like Baseball and Boxing and made stars of **Babe Ruth** and **Jack Dempsey**. People also listened to Jazz music, local and regional news programmes and also advertisements. The first radio network set up was the **National Broadcasting Company (NBC)**, in 1926.

With so many things being broadcast on the radio there was a dramatic increase in social and political awareness; you no longer needed to be literate to read the news, no longer had to have money to go and watch sports or buy records, instead, you just listened to the radio.



Speakeasies

When prohibition was introduced in 1920, illegal drinking clubs called **speakeasies** sprang up all over America's major cities. Usually run by gangsters, speakeasies became places where black musicians played Jazz to audiences made up of both black and white people.



Gang bosses opened up fancy clubs, like Small's Paradise in Harlem. Here famous performers like Duke Ellington and Fred Astaire played music, sang songs and danced to entertain the crowds.

New **dances** emerged as the new found excitement of the 20s expressed itself on the dance floor. During WWI dances had been slow and formal, but they were replaced during the 20s with new faster dances like the **Charleston** and **Black Bottom**.

However, for the younger generation it was all great fun and some even organised dance marathons.



The Charleston

Source D: F. Scott Fitzgerald describes the 1920s in his book *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922)

The parties were bigger – the pace faster – the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser and the liquor was cheaper.

Changes in American Culture and Society

Questions:

Section 1, How did popular entertainment develop during this period?



1) What does this photograph show you about the cinema in the late 1920s? [2]

- 2) Describe the growth of the film industry between 1910 and 1930? [5]
- 3) Explain why movie stars were important in the film industry? [4]
- 4) Explain why movies were so popular in the 1920s? [4]
- 5) Start a Mind Map detailing the main points and developments from this topic. Remember to use words and pictures and use different colours for each category.



'King' Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Chicago, 1922. Louis Armstrong is the musician kneeling in the foreground.

- 6) What does the photograph show you about Jazz music in the 1920s? [2]
- 7) Describe the new speakeasy club culture of the 1920s? [5]
- 8) Explain why the radio was so popular during the 1920s? [4]
- 9) Explain the effect Jazz music had upon American culture and society? [4]
- 10) Was the radio the most important change in popular entertainment in the USA in the 1920s?
- 11) Continue to complete your mind map.

How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

Source F:

Jane's a flapper. Let us take a look at the young person as she strolls across the lawn of her parents' suburban home, having just put the car away after driving sixty miles in two hours. She is, for one thing, a pretty girl. Beauty is the fashion in 1925. She is frankly, heavily made up with poisonously scarlet lips and richly ringed eyes. As for her clothes, Jane isn't wearing much this summer. Her dress is brief. It is cut low. The skirt comes just below the knees. The bra has been abandoned since 1924.

An article called 'Flapper Jane' from a fashionable US magazine, 1925

The position of women before 1917

Political Position

Women played no part in politics. They did not have the right to vote.

Social Position

It was thought to be unladylike to smoke or drink. A woman would be accompanied by a chaperone if she went out in the day or evening. Divorce and sex before marriage was uncommon.



Employment Opportunities

Most middle and upper classes stayed in the home to look after the children. Working women usually worked in low paid jobs and in areas like domestic work or dress making.

Appearance

Women were expected to wear tight-waist, ankle length dresses. Have long hair, which was tied back and not wear any make-up.

Propaganda poster
encouraging women to
help with the war effort



Changes after 1917

American entry into the war, in 1917, gave US women greater opportunities than ever before:

- ↔ With some 2.8 million men being drafted to fight in WWI, more than a million US women helped out in the war effort.
- ↔ Approximately 90,000 women served in the US armed forces in Europe. Working as clerks, radio electricians, accountants and nurses among other things.
- ↔ At home women also worked in jobs traditionally done by men, such as working in heavy industry, engineering and transport.

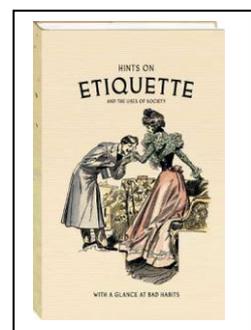
When the war ended in 1918, women emerged with a new sense of freedom; they had proved that they could do the jobs men had done and they enjoyed the increased social freedom that regular employment and wages gave them. They began smoking and drinking and going out un-chaperoned.

Also, as a direct result of their efforts during the war, in 1919 American women were rewarded with the **19th Amendment** to the American Constitution (America's laws). It now stated that women had the **right to vote** - now women could have a greater say in the world in which they lived.

Changing Attitudes to Women

Social Etiquette (Manners & Behaviour)

The consumer boom of the 1920s provided exciting opportunities for women. Vacuum cleaners and washing machines becoming affordable house-hold items and drastically reduced the number of hours women spent on domestic chores. With more free time women were able to work or enjoy more leisure time.





Interesting Fact: Ford decided to offer other colours apart from black because he wanted to appeal to women buyers.

Furthermore, the 'Jazz Age' brought many changes in entertainment and leisure. Cinema, radio and dance halls were extremely popular with women and many tried to follow in the footsteps of famous and successful women of the day, like Clara Bow.

Employment

Women made smaller gains in the world of work. In 1930 there were 2 million more women in employment than there had been in 1920. However, the majority of women still worked in low paid, low skilled jobs. Men were still paid a lot more than women and the **Supreme Court** even banned any attempts to set a minimum wage for women. Women were confined to jobs like librarians and nurses.

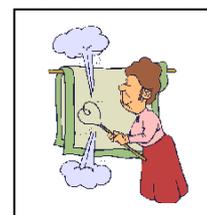
Nevertheless, more women working meant more women had more money and made more decisions about how they were going to spend that hard earned cash. Advertising was even aimed specifically at women for this reason.

Marriage and Life Expectancy

While magazines still portrayed women as married with children, many women were beginning to make important decisions about their lifestyle and family. During the 1920s women lived longer and had fewer children. Between 1900 and 1925, women's life expectancy rose from 51 to 63 years and the no. of children had decreased from 3.6 to 2.6. Divorce rates also increased during this period.

Had 'Change come to America' for everyone?

While many improvements had been made in America's towns and cities, in rural farming areas, however, very little changed for many women's lives. Many women in these areas could not afford items like vacuum cleaners and washing machines and life carried on in the same way as before.



What was the Flapper lifestyle?



Hair cut short and wore make-up.

Wore short skirts and wore bright clothes.

Smoked and drank in public.

Went out to speakeasies and went to the cinema without a chaperone.



Openly danced with men in public, danced the Charleston and Black Bottom and listened to Jazz music.

Drove in cars and rode on motorbikes.

Even wore revealing swimming costumes on public beaches.

Flappers

Perhaps the most significant change in the position of females was the experienced by women known as **flappers**.

These women challenged the traditional attitudes towards women and became known as flappers. They wanted more independence in their social life, behaviour and appearance. Clara Bow became a flapper icon for her role in IT.

Source G

The word 'flapper' to us means not a female that smokes, swears and kisses her gentleman friends goodnight, although there is no harm in any of that. We think of the flapper as the independent young woman who feels like punching someone when called the weaker sex, who resents being put on a pedestal and who is responsible for the advancement of women's condition in the world.

From a letter written to the Daily Illini newspaper in 1922



Was the flapper life was for everyone?

Flappers did very little to further the cause of women's rights during the 1920s. Some were even arrested for their outrageous behaviour. For this, many women seen flappers as too extreme to follow, a 1920s 'Goth' you could argue.

Religious societies, traditional groups and women from rural areas strongly disapproved of the flapper lifestyle. The **Anti-Flirt League** was set up and condemned the flapper way of life.

Furthermore, not every woman could afford to live the flapper life. For the majority of American women going out drinking, smoking and wearing the most fashionable clothes was something they could aspire to, but never achieve.

Changes in American Culture and Society

Questions:

Section 2, How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

- 1) What does this photograph show you about the changing lifestyle of American women? [2]
- 2) Describe the flapper movement? [5]
- 3) Explain why the First World War changed the position of women? [4]
- 4) Explain why some people opposed flappers? [4]
- 5) Develop your mind map?



An American magazine advertisement for an electric washing machine. (1926)



Why did sport and other leisure activities witness so much growth during this period?

The 'Roaring Twenties' was a time of great prosperity and left many US citizens with more disposable income than ever before. As we have already seen many used this extra income to attend the cinema, although this was not the only area that saw an explosion of interest. Sport and sporting heroes became a key feature of the twenties and some people became household names because of the extreme nature of their accomplishments. Moreover, the USA became known for odd fads and crazes and Henry Ford's factories mass produced cheap automobiles that put millions of Americans on the road.

How did interest in sport grow in the 1920s?



As is the case today, sport played a huge part in people's lives during the twenties. People earned more money and spent some of it on going to watch their favourite sports and listen to them on their newly purchased radios.

The 1920s was called the '**Golden Age**' of sport: Baseball, American football, golf, horse racing and tennis captured the imagination of many people. Sports journalists and radio shows made heroes out of sport stars and many people took to playing more sports.

With so many people participating in sporting activities, city councils constructed swimming pools, baseball pitches, playgrounds and recreational centres. Furthermore huge stadiums were built across the USA to cope with what was to become professional sports.

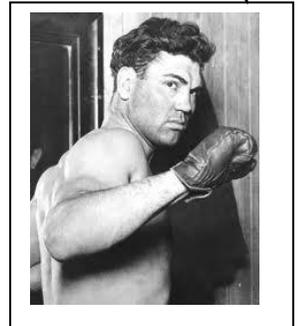
Baseball

Baseball became the most popular sport in the 1920s and **Babe Ruth** as the most famous sportsman of the decade and is regarded as the greatest baseball player ever. Black people were not allowed to play in the major leagues.



Boxing

Just like today Americans loved to see big sporting events and there are none bigger than Boxing matches. In 1921 75,000 people paid \$1.5 million to watch **Jack Dempsey** fight for the Heavyweight Championship.

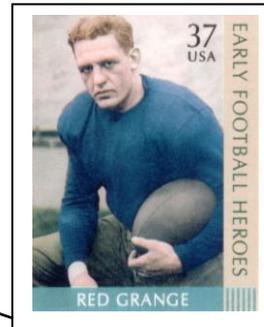


Sporting Icons

There were so many developments in sport during the period that Americans became fascinated with sports stars and teams. This in turn led to millions of Americans participating in sporting events.

American Football

Red Grange was the main man in American Football during the era. At the time he was earning \$100 per game.



Tennis & Golf

Bill Tilden was a tennis star who helped raise the profile of the game.

Golf had always been a rich man's game but by 1927 2 million players played regularly.

Fads, crazes and the downright unusual!



Dance Marathons

As jazz music and jazz dances swept the country **dance marathons** became increasingly popular. The contests tested self-endurance as the dances would continue non-stop until one couple remained standing to claim the prize money, although many people danced for the fame that winning the competitions brought.

The craze began in 1923 when **Alma Cummings** danced non-stop for 27 hours using six different partners. She received national attention for her effort and used her fame to set up her own dance marathons to try and make some money. Many people who took part in the dance marathons hoped they would either win money or fame though in reality very few did.

Newspapers, magazines, crosswords and Goldfish eating

In 1919 the first tabloid newspaper was published. Called the *New York Daily News* it focused on crime, cartoons, fashion and sport, much like our tabloids of today, *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror*.

Advertisers paid lots of money to promote their goods in these newspapers and in turn newspapers sponsored Beauty pageants and the short lived craze of **live goldfish eating competitions**. Sports and cinema heroes were written about frequently as everyday people loved to know what was happening to their favourite star.



Flagpole Sitting

Perhaps the oddest faze of all was flagpole sitting. '**Shipwreck**' Kelly was the most well known after spending 49 continuous days sitting on a flagpole.



Shipwreck Kelly

All American Heroes



The 1920s was also a time of heroes as many Americans took on daring challenges. In May 1927 **Charles Lindbergh** became the first male to fly across the Atlantic Ocean non-stop; he was soon followed by **Amelia Earhart** who became the first woman to make the flight in 1929. Further accomplishments came from people like Gertrude Ederle, a New Yorker, who became the first woman to swim across the English Channel in 1927, taking 14 hours 30 minutes.

Any colour, so long as it's black.

The twenties was also the period that saw the mass production of the automobile. **Henry Ford's** assembly lines were producing a **Model T** in just over 90 minutes. Millions of Americans took up the opportunity to buy these affordable cars and took to the roads.

The car made it easier for Americans to travel to see friends or relatives and allowed them to explore the countryside and take vacations. It was the beginning of America's love affair with the car.

Source H

The impact of the car on life in the USA cannot be exaggerated. It gave people great freedom to travel, visit friends and US cities. Many people moved out to live in the suburbs during the 20s because they could drive to work. Cars meant young people could escape their parents and go to cinemas or clubs. Though some people thought the car was leading to a moral decline in young people and it was also blamed for making crime easier.

An account by a modern historian of how the car helped to changed American society during the 1920s.



Henry Ford with his Model T.

Changes in American Culture and Society

Questions:

Section 3, Why did sport and other leisure activities witness so much growth during this period?



A couple participating in a Dance Marathon, 1925.

- 1) What does this photograph tell you about the crazes that swept through the USA during the 1920s? [2]
- 2) Describe some of the fads and crazes Americans participated in during the 1920s? [5]
- 3) Explain why so many Americans began to take more interest in sporting activities? [5]
- 4) Explain the impact the automobile (car) had upon leisure activities during the 1920s? [5]
- 5) Was the radio the most important development in American culture during the 1920s? [10]

You should give a two sided answer to this question.

You should discuss the importance of radio

You should discuss the importance of other developments in US culture and society

You should give a judgement on the question set

- 6) Finish Mind Map - make sure you have used pictures, drawings, words and colour.