THE ROARING TWENTIES

LIFE & CULTURE IN AMERICA IN THE 1920S
During the 1920s, urbanization continued to accelerate. For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas. New York City was home to over 5 million people in 1920. Chicago had nearly 3 million.
Throughout the 1920s, Americans found themselves caught between urban and rural cultures.

- Urban life was considered a world of anonymous crowds, strangers, moneymakers, and pleasure seekers.
- Rural life was considered to be safe, with close personal ties, hard work and morals.

Cities were impersonal.

Farms were innocent.
One example of the clash between city & farm was the passage of the 18th Amendment in 1920.

This Amendment launched the era known as Prohibition.

The new law made it illegal to make, sell or transport liquor.

Prohibition lasted from 1920 to 1933 when it was repealed by the 21st Amendment.
SUPPORT FOR PROHIBITION

- Reformers had long believed alcohol led to crime, child & wife abuse, and accidents
- Supporters were largely from the rural south and west
- The church affiliated Anti-Saloon League and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union helped push the 18th Amendment through
Many Americans did not believe drinking was a sin.
Most immigrant groups were not willing to give up drinking.
To obtain liquor illegally, drinkers went underground to hidden saloons known as speakeasies.
People also bought liquor from bootleggers who smuggled it in from Canada, Cuba and the West Indies.
ORGANIZED CRIME

- Prohibition contributed to the growth of organized crime in every major city
- Chicago became notorious as the home of Al Capone – a famous bootlegger
- Capone took control of the Chicago liquor business by killing off his competition

Al Capone was finally convicted on tax evasion charges in 1931
Eventually, Prohibition’s fate was sealed by the government, which failed to budget enough money to enforce the law.

The task of enforcing Prohibition fell to 1,500 poorly paid federal agents --- clearly an impossible task.

Federal agents pour wine down a sewer.
By the mid-1920s, only 19% of Americans supported Prohibition. Many felt Prohibition caused more problems than it solved. The 21st Amendment finally repealed Prohibition in 1933.
Another battleground during the 1920s was between fundamentalist religious groups and secular thinkers over the truths of science. The Protestant movement grounded in the literal interpretation of the bible is known as fundamentalism. Fundamentalists found all truth in the bible – including science & evolution.
In March 1925, Tennessee passed the nation’s first law that made it a crime to teach evolution.

The ACLU promised to defend any teacher willing to challenge the law – John Scopes did.

Scopes was a biology teacher who dared to teach his students that man derived from lower species.
The ACLU hired Clarence Darrow, the most famous trial lawyer of the era, to defend Scopes.

The prosecution countered with William Jennings Bryan, the three-time Democratic presidential nominee.
SCOPES TRIAL

- Trial opened on July 10, 1925 and became a national sensation
- In an unusual move, Darrow called Bryan to the stand as an expert on the bible – key question: Should the bible be interpreted literally?
- Under intense questioning, Darrow got Bryan to admit that the bible can be interpreted in different ways
- Nonetheless, Scopes was found guilty and fined $100
[10] “Papa!” (Thomas in the Detroit News)
Despite the guilty verdict, Darrow got the upperhand during his questioning of Bryan.
After the tumult of World War I, Americans were looking for a little fun in the 1920s.

Women were becoming more independent and achieving greater freedoms (right to vote, more employment, freedom of the auto).
During the 1920s, a new ideal emerged for some women: the Flapper.

A Flapper was an emancipated young woman who embraced the new fashions and urban attitudes.
The fast-changing world of the 1920s produced new roles for women. Many women entered the workplace as nurses, teachers, librarians, & secretaries. However, women earned less than men and were kept out of many traditional male jobs (management) and faced discrimination.
THE CHANGING FAMILY

- American birthrates declined for several decades before the 1920s.
- During the 1920s that trend increased as birth control information became widely available.
- Birth control clinics opened and the American Birth Control League was founded in 1921.

Margaret Sanger and other founders of the American Birth Control League - 1921
As the 1920s unfolded, many features of the modern family emerged. Marriage was based on romantic love, women managed the household and finances, and children were not considered laborers/wage earners but rather developing children who needed nurturing and education.
During the 1920s, developments in education had a powerful impact on the nation.

- Enrollment in high schools quadrupled between 1914 and 1926.
- Public schools met the challenge of educating millions of immigrants.
WE INTERRUPT THIS POWERPOINT FOR A LOOK AT SOME OF BART SIMPSON’S FUNNIEST SENTENCES HE WROTE ON THE SCHOOL BLACKBOARD
I am not authorized to fire substitute teachers.
   I will not spank others.
   I will not aim for the head.
   I will not barf unless I'm sick.
I will not expose the ignorance of the faculty.
I saw nothing unusual in the teacher's lounge.
   I will not conduct my own fire drills.
   Funny noises are not funny.
   I will not snap bras.
   I will not fake seizures.
This punishment is not boring and pointless.
   My name is not Dr. Death.
I will not defame New Orleans.
I will not prescribe medication.
   I will not bury the new kid.
   I will not teach others to fly.
   I will not bring sheep to class.
   A burp is not an answer.
   Teacher is not a leper.
   Coffee is not for kids.
I will not eat things for money.
I will not yell "She's Dead" at roll call.
The principal's toupee is not a Frisbee.
I will not call the principal "spud head."
   Goldfish don't bounce.
Mud is not one of the 4 food groups.
No one is interested in my underpants.
   I will not sell miracle cures.
   I will return the seeing-eye dog.
I do not have diplomatic immunity.
Organ transplants are best left to professionals.
The Pledge of Allegiance does not end with "Hail Satan."
I will not celebrate meaningless milestones.
There are plenty of businesses like show business.
**Five days is not too long to wait for a gun.**
I will not waste chalk.
I will not skateboard in the halls.
I will not instigate revolution.
I will not draw naked ladies in class.
I did not see Elvis.
I will not call my teacher "Hot Cakes."
Garlic gum is not funny.
**They are laughing at me, not with me.**
I will not yell "Fire" in a crowded classroom.
I will not fake my way through life.
Tar is not a plaything.
I will not Xerox my butt.
It's potato, not potatoe.
I will not trade pants with others.
I am not a 32 year old woman.
I will not do that thing with my tongue.
I will not drive the principal's car.
I will not pledge allegiance to Bart.
I will not sell school property.
I will not burp in class.
I will not cut corners.
**I will not get very far with this attitude.**
I will not belch the National Anthem.
I will not sell land in Florida.
I will not grease the monkey bars.
I will not hide behind the Fifth Amendment.
I will not do anything bad ever again.
I will not show off.
I will not sleep through my education.
I am not a dentist.
Spitwads are not free speech.
**Nobody likes sunburn slappers.**
High explosives and school don't mix.
I will not bribe Principal Skinner.
I will not squeak chalk.
I will finish what I started.
I will not use abbrev.
"Bart Bucks" are not legal tender.
Underwear should be worn on the inside.
The Christmas Pageant does not stink.
**I will not torment the emotionally frail.**
I will not whittle hall passes out of soap.
Wedgies are unhealthy for children and other living things.
I do not have power of attorney over first graders.
I am not the reincarnation of Sammy Davis Jr.
**I am not certified to remove asbestos.**
"Bagman" is not a legitimate career choice.
I will not retransmit without the express permission of Major League Baseball.
I will remember to take my medication.
The boys room is not a water park.
Beans are neither fruit nor musical.
Nerve gas is not a toy.
"Bewitched" does not promote Satanism.
The First Amendment does not cover burping.
Ralph won't "morph" if you squeeze him hard enough.
**Cursive writing does not mean what I think it does.**
No one wants to hear my armpits.
EXPANDING NEWS COVERAGE

- As literacy increased, newspaper circulation rose and mass-circulation magazines flourished.
- By the end of the 1920s, ten American magazines -- including *Reader’s Digest* and *Time* -- boasted circulations of over 2 million.
Although print media was popular, radio was the most powerful communications medium to emerge in the 1920s. News was delivered faster and to a larger audience. Americans could hear the voice of the president or listen to the World Series live.
AMERICAN HEROES OF THE 20s

- In 1929, Americans spent $4.5 billion on entertainment (includes sports)
- People crowded into baseball games to see their heroes
- Babe Ruth was a larger than life American hero who played for Yankees
- He hit 60 homers in 1927
America’s most beloved hero of the time wasn’t an athlete but a small-town pilot named Charles Lindbergh.

Lindbergh made the first nonstop solo transatlantic flight.

He took off from NYC in the Spirit of St. Louis and arrived in Paris 33 hours later to a hero’s welcome.
Lindbergh’s airplane “The Spirit of St Louis”

Because he placed the main fuel tank in front of the pilot’s seat, Lindbergh needed a periscope to see ahead.

Extra fuel tanks occupied the cabin space.

The wingspan was increased to accommodate the weight of the fuel.
Even before sound, movies offered a means of escape through romance and comedy.

First sound movies: *Jazz Singer* (1927)

First animated with sound: *Steamboat Willie* (1928)

By 1930 millions of Americans went to the movies each week.

Walt Disney's animated *Steamboat Willie* marked the debut of Mickey Mouse. It was a seven minute long black and white cartoon.
Famed composer George Gershwin merged traditional elements with American Jazz.

Painters like Edward Hopper depicted the loneliness of American life.

Georgia O’Keeffe captured the grandeur of New York using intensely colored canvases.

Radiator Building, Night, New York, 1927

Hopper’s famous “Nighthawks”
WRITERS OF THE 1920S

- The 1920s was one of the greatest literary eras in American history
- Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in literature, wrote the novel, *Babbitt*
- In *Babbitt* the main character ridicules American conformity and materialism
WRITERS OF THE 1920s

- Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald coined the phrase “Jazz Age” to describe the 1920s.
- Fitzgerald wrote *Paradise Lost* and *The Great Gatsby*.
- *The Great Gatsby* reflected the emptiness of New York elite society.
WRITERS OF THE 1920S

- Edith Warton’s *Age of Innocence* dramatized the clash between traditional and modern values.
- Willa Cather celebrated the simple, dignified lives of immigrant farmers in Nebraska in *My Antonia*. 
Ernest Hemingway, wounded in World War I, became one of the best-known authors of the era. In his novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, he criticized the glorification of war. His simple, straightforward style of writing set the literary standard.
Some writers such as Hemingway and John Dos Passos were so soured by American culture that they chose to settle in Europe.

In Paris they formed a group that one writer called, “The Lost Generation.”
Between 1910 and 1920, the Great Migration saw hundreds of thousands of African Americans move north to big cities. By 1920 over 5 million of the nation’s 12 million blacks (over 40%) lived in cities.

Migration of the Negro by Jacob Lawrence
AFRICAN AMERICAN GOALS

- Founded in 1909, the NAACP urged African Americans to protest racial violence.
- W.E.B Dubois, a founding member, led a march of 10,000 black men in NY to protest violence.
Marcus Garvey believed that African Americans should build a separate society (Africa).

In 1914, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

Garvey claimed a million members by the mid-1920s.

He left a powerful legacy of black pride, economic independence and Pan-Africanism.

Garvey represented a more radical approach.
HARLEM, NEW YORK

- Harlem, NY became the largest black urban community
- Harlem suffered from overcrowding, unemployment and poverty
- However, in the 1920s it was home to a literary and artistic revival known as the Harlem Renaissance
The Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary movement led by well-educated blacks with a new sense of pride in the African-American experience. Claude McKay’s poems expressed the pain of life in the ghetto.
Langston Hughes was the movement’s best known poet. Many of his poems described the difficult lives of working-class blacks. Some of his poems were put to music, especially jazz and blues.
Zola Neale Hurston wrote novels, short stories, and poems. She often wrote about the lives of poor, unschooled Southern blacks. She focused on the culture of the people—their folkways and values.
During the 1920s, black performers won large followings.

Paul Robeson, son of a slave, became a major dramatic actor.

His performance in *Othello* was widely praised.
Jazz was born in the early 20th century

In 1922, a young trumpet player named Louis Armstrong joined the Creole Jazz Band

Later he joined Fletcher Henderson’s band in NYC

Armstrong is considered the most important and influential musician in the history of jazz
In the late 1920s, Duke Ellington, a jazz pianist and composer, led his ten-piece orchestra at the famous Cotton Club. Ellington won renown as one of America’s greatest composers.
Bessie Smith, blues singer, was perhaps the most outstanding vocalist of the decade. She achieved enormous popularity and by 1927 she became the highest-paid black artist in the world.
1920’s Movies