

US History

Social & Political History of the 1920s

Learning Target:

I can examine the youth culture, entertainment industry, and religious changes that developed in the 1920s.

9. Youth Culture, Entertainment, & Religion

Youth Culture –

- Many members of the younger generation openly rejected the values and morals of the previous generation
- As a result a new youth oriented culture emerged in the 1920s

The “New Woman” –

- A major rejection of traditional values was the style and dress of younger women
- Portrayed in magazines as stylish, adventurous, independent, and career-minded

Flappers –

- Became the symbol of the “new woman”
- Stopped wearing a heavy corset in favor for short skirts and silk hose
- Often wore a short hair style
- Many drove cars and participated in sports
- Not all women adopted this lifestyle but it became glamorized by the media

Working Women –

- Percentage of women working did not rise during the decade
- However, women did begin working in areas never before seen
- Some drove taxis, ran telegraph lines, became stenographers, and even flew airplanes
- Most women still stayed in traditional careers such as teaching & nursing

Entertainment –

- Economic boom of the 1920s meant many had more money and free time
- To help fill this leisure time many turned to radio, movies, and sports for entertainment

Radio –

- Commercial radio stations emerged in the 1920s
- Detroit’s WWJ and Pittsburgh’s KDKA were the first two stations on air in 1920
- 1929 – More than 800 stations reached over 10 million homes
- Advertising became a crucial component of radio and helped fund it
- NBC began offering national broadcasts to local stations in the late 1920s
- Americans began to have a shared cultural experience

Programming –

- Church services, local news, music, and sporting events
- 1921 – Two most listened two events:
The World Series and The Dempsy-Carpentier fight

Movies –

- Movies became a very popular form of entertainment in the 1920s
- Hollywood, CA replaced New York as the filmmaking capital

Silent films and Talkies –

- Silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin captivated moviegoers
- 1927 the silent film era ended when Warner Bros. introduced the first talkie – The Jazz Singer starring Al Jolson
- Led to the creation of musicals and newsreels at the movies

Attendance and Morality –

- 1929 – 80 million Americans attended the movies each week
- Standards of morality were often questioned in movies
- Groups were set up in 1922 to limit offensive material – censorship

Sports –

- Famous sports included football, baseball, and boxing
- New technology like the radio made professional sports grow in popularity

Football –

- Professional and college football both attracted attention
- Thanksgiving Day 1925 – 35,000 people watched the Chicago Bears

Baseball –

- The nation's most popular sport despite charges of corruption
- “Black Sox” Scandal included “Shoeless” Joe Jackson and 7 other White Sox players who took money to lose the 1919 World Series
- Baseball created a commissioner position to restore order
- Famous players of the decade included Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, and Lou Gehrig

Religion –

- Many Americans felt the social changes of the 1920s were more troubling than exciting
- Religion was still at the center of many American's lives

Fundamentalism –

- Protestant Christian movement grounded in a literal interpretation of the Bible
- Rejected the Charles Darwin's theory of evolution

The Scopes Trial

Background –

- 1925 – Tennessee outlawed the teaching of Darwin’s theory of evolution
- ACLU wanted to test the constitutionality of this
- Offered to defend any teacher who would teach evolution

Participants –

- John Scopes – Dayton, Tennessee teacher who accepted the ACLU offer
- Clarence Darrow – The ACLU and Scopes attorney
- William Jennings Bryan – The prosecution’s attorney

Results –

- The trial exposed divisions on the topic in the nation
- Darrow had little chance since the judge started the trial with a prayer and refused to allow testimony from scientific experts
- The prosecution won but many Americans began to view fundamentalism as narrow-minded