

1920s Culture

The 1920's – the decade that roared.

It seems after the horrors of World War I and with glimmers of economic promise, Americans in the 1920 were seeking outlets of escape, of creativity, of fun.

Many new fads were sweeping the nation. Radio was becoming popular and now the entire country was hearing the same music, the same news.

One popular trend was the woman flapper. After years struggle, women finally had the right to vote.

Women were working hard to create voting awareness and the League of Women Voters was founded.

Women wanted more and were also working to add the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution.

The young women of the 20's were uninterested in these large scale goals and it seemed just wanted to have fun.

A flapper was a northern, urban, single, young, middle-class woman. Women were working more and more, with an increase in the use of the telephone, women were needed as phone operators. There were more department stores and consumer outlets. As young women were working, they had more money to spend and many had a very active nightlife. Jazz clubs were popping up in the cities along with the speakeasies. The young women consumed alcohol, smoked and danced. They were taking on activities previously only taken only men. Many women were making a declaration of independence. They challenged traditional look and cut their hair short, they wore dresses above the knee, used make-up and wore high heels.

Flappers weren't the only ones making changes. African Americans had endured centuries of slavery and racism and the 20's proved a time for cultural change. Life in the south saw a revival of white supremacy where 90 percent of African Americans lived. In the 1890s a great many African Americans were migrating north. This Great Migration saw more moving to the urban north where they were able to

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share a common history, experience and culture. There was an explosion of cultural pride during the Harlem Renaissance.

With an alarming amount of racism in the south, growing hate groups and crimes which was justified by Jim Crow laws, the Great Migration of African Americans began. Families began to move from the Deep South to the northern cities. Most blacks in the south could not escape the endless cycle of debt brought on by sharecropping. Many sought a better life. The north offered better lives with a better economy and industrial jobs. There was still a racist environment present in the north and many white laborers did not appreciate African Americans flooding the workplace and working for lower wages. Most were segregated to the run down slums of the cities. The largest being Harlem in New York.

Many famous writers came from the Harlem Renaissance, the most famous being Langston Hughes. He wrote poetry with the rhythmic meter of blues and jazz. Other writers, poets and actors wrote powerful verses which called for African Americans to stand up for their rights. The Harlem Renaissance is probably most known for their music scene, particularly Jazz. Jazz broke the traditional rules of music with modified rhythms and use of instruments. Thousands of people from the cities flocked to the new Jazz clubs to see performers such as Duke Ellington and singers like Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday. Men like Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong drew audiences of white and black people. Harlem offered an outlet and brought notice to talent that may never have been discovered due to severe hardships and racism African Americans faced. The artists of the Harlem Renaissance had transformed African American culture and had taken the eye of White America as well.
