

# America Between the World Wars

Class 4  
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## What We Will Cover Today

- Automobile
  - The Auto & social life, the suburb & rural America
  - Social Inventions resulting from the auto
- The Impact of New Media
  - Tabloid Newspapers
  - Movies
  - Radio

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## Autos and Social Life

- Made Sunday pleasure drives an alternative to church attendance
- Replaced courtship in the family parlor or front porch with dating in an automobile
- Made driving vacations popular
- Led to vastly increased attendance at national parks and historic sites

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## Autos and Housing

- Modified housing design to conform to the needs of the car
  - Lawns and shrubbery yielded to the driveway and the garage or car port

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## Autos and Prohibition

- By making possible the transport of liquor by truck and car, the auto undermined any possibility of effective enforcement of Prohibition
  - If shipments of illicit liquor had to be done by either railroad or horse-drawn wagon, the logistics involved in moving liquor from rumrunning speedboats, the Canadian border, or illicit stills and breweries would have been much more difficult

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## Creating the Auto Suburbs

- Autos created the modern auto-dependent suburbs
  - Prior to the auto, the city consisted of a commercial hub surrounded by residences within walking distance followed by development of businesses and residences radiating out from the central hub like spokes from a wheel, with the railroad and the horse-car and then the trolley lines providing the spokes
- The creation of the auto-dependent suburbs began in the 1920s, but really took off after World War II

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## Creating the Auto Suburbs - 2

- The auto's ability to move laterally or perpendicularly to fixed trolley track opened up land for settlement that was previously too remote
  - This meant that vacant land between the transportation corridors could be platted and sold for home and business sites
- The auto released potential home buyers and renters from the necessity of living close to a bus or trolley line

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## Creating the Auto Suburbs - 3

- The auto transformed the central business district (CBD) from a shopping district to a skyscraper district of government and corporate headquarters
  - The skyrocketing rents, downtown traffic snarls, and inadequate parking forced small retail businesses out and they relocated elsewhere, usually to outlying areas of the city or to the new suburbs

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## Creating the Auto Suburbs - 4

- What set the modern suburb off from what existed previously was
  - Dependency on the auto not only for commuting to work but also for shopping
  - Relatively low density and larger average lot size due to cheaper land prices
- With the modern suburb and the auto eventually came the centerless city and commuting from suburb to suburb

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## Creating the Auto Suburbs - 5

- In the city before the car, life often took place on the sidewalk, the front porch or front steps, and the adjacent street
  - With the auto, urban residents now began to see the streets primarily as arteries for motor vehicles
- Instead of congregating at a trolley or bus stop to commute to work, people now began to commute individually in their cars
  - Instead of meeting neighbors at nearby stores that one walked to, people did their shopping at stores they drove to

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## The Auto and Rural America

- Auto reoriented rural space by:
  - Centralizing institutions and activity
    - Instead of shopping at the crossroads or village general store, farmers now drove to nearby towns
    - School buses permitted consolidation of rural schools, bringing about the demise of the one-room schoolhouse
  - Increased the amount of rural travel
    - Instead of traveling to town once or twice a year, farmers now traveled every week to a nearby town

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## Autos and Social Inventions - 1

- By its very existence, the automobile led to the following innovations - 1
  - Installment purchases
  - Auto insurance
  - Used car markets
  - Camping & picnicking
    - Auto campgrounds
    - Private campgrounds

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## Autos and Social Inventions - 2

- By its very existence, the automobile led to the following innovations – 2
  - Gasoline stations
  - Drive-in restaurants
    - Fast-food franchise restaurants
  - Motels and Motor Hotels
  - Gasoline credit cards
  - Traffic police & State highway patrols
  - Parking meters

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## Autos and Social Inventions - 3

- By its very existence, the automobile led to the following innovations – 3
  - Drive-in movies
  - Shopping centers
  - Malls
  - Parking lots
  - Traffic courts
  - Automobile tags
  - Driver's Licenses

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## Tabloid Newspapers & Magazines

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## Tabloid Newspaper

- A **tabloid** is a newspaper (generally smaller in size and spread than a regular newspaper) that contains lots of photos (both news and feature), and focuses on local-interest stories and entertainment. It tends to emphasize (and sensationalize) crime stories; scandals involving the personal lives of celebrities, sports stars, and politicians; and other so-called “junk food news.”

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## Tabloid Newspapers

- Combined the following:
  - The “yellow journalism” that William Randolph Hearst pioneered prior to the Spanish-American War
  - The tabloid or portrait (as opposed to the traditional landscape) newspaper format
  - Large-scale use of photographs – both from wire photos and from their own staff news photographers
  - Simple prose that let the picture tell the story

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## Photography - Newspapers

- Newspaper Photography and Photojournalism
  - In the early-1890s, it became commercially feasible to incorporate photographs in large newspaper editions. This was because of Halftone printing.
  - Halftone printing uses dots that vary in either size or spacing to create the optical illusion of a smooth tone photograph
    - Thus the halftone print of a black & white photograph that we see as containing a range of continuous tone shades of grey will consist of black and white dots that are so small that we perceive them as a continuous tone

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## What Photography Gave to the Newspapers

- The photograph depicts and organizes objects in space
- Verbal information in the form of a Narrative or Story places and organizes people and objects in time
- Describing space –whether it be a landscape, a street scene, or a person’s features – takes a considerable amount of words, but only one picture
- Thus photographs enabled a reporter to make the story shorter – to tell the story with fewer words by making the picture(s) take the place of words
  - It enabled the newspaper to make itself appealing to less educated people whose reading skills were poor

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## Tabloid Newspapers

- First U.S. tabloids were:
  - the *New York Daily News* – launched on June 26, 1919
    - Founded by Joseph Medill Patterson, a co-owner of the *Chicago Tribune*
    - Strongly influenced by Viscount Northcliffe’s London tabloid *Daily Mirror*
    - By June 1920, circulation was over 100,000. By 1925, over a million
  - Soon followed by the *New York Daily Mirror* (1920) and the *New York Evening Graphic* (1920)

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## Notes About Tabloid Newspapers

- Tabloids were popular not only because of their content but because they could be read while standing up on a bus or subway
- Tabloids got people used to reading the news with a dose of pictures
  - This paved the way for both
    - The picture essay (a group of photos on a single event or subject)
    - The picture magazines – *Life* and *Look*

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## What the Tabloids Did - 1

- Focused on news as entertainment
  - Turned popular focus on crime, natural disasters, scandals, celebrities, and sports
  - Generally ignored foreign affairs, economics, national politics (except for Prohibition) and the Federal Government (except for scandals)
- Popularized the idea that photos could be used as publicity stills for sustained narratives or serials of an ongoing story
  - E.g. the Snyder-Grey Murder Case

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## What the Tabloids Did - 2

- Popularized the gossip column
  - The *New York Graphic* launched the career of Walter Winchell
- Popularized the notion of using celebrities to cover and write about new events and trials
  - The *Graphic* hired prominent historian Will Durant, impresario David Belasco, the Reverend John Roach Stratton, and historian W. E. Woodward to cover the Snyder-Gray trial

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## What the Tabloids Did - 3

- Pushed non-tabloid newspapers into more of the same type of news coverage as the tabloids focused on
  - Thus tabloids helped give national play to the same entertaining events, celebrities, and scandals covered by the tabloids
- Distorted public perceptions on the prevalence of crime, suicide, and corruption

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## What the Tabloids Did – 4

- Helped popularize such newspaper features as crossword puzzles, comic strips, horoscopes, contests, and other features
- Helped popularize such spectator sports as baseball and college football by their extensive sports coverage

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## What the Tabloids Did – 5

- Launched the Age of Ballyhoo or Hype
  - Definition: A clamorous and vigorous attempt to win customers or advance any cause; blatant advertising or publicity.
  - E.g. the death and posthumous stardom of Rudolph Valentino
- Made celebrities out of a whole host of personalities, ranging from Charles Lindbergh to John T. Scopes to Al Capone
  - Initiated the era in which as Andy Warhol noted, everyone would have 15 minutes of fame

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## Tabloid Magazines

- Concepts originated by the tabloid newspapers soon migrated to magazines
  - Focus on entertainment, scandal, and the personal lives of celebrities
  - Plenty of pictures
  - Simple prose directed to readerships with a low educational level

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## Tabloid Magazines - 2

- The application of the above concepts led to the following types of magazines:
  - Led to picture magazines, such as *Life* and *Look*
  - Led to confession magazines, such as *True Confessions* & *True Story*
  - Led to fan magazines, such as *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*

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## Movies in the 1920s & 1930s

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## Motion Pictures

- Motion pictures are based on the illusion of continuous motion. This results from:
  - The persistence of vision
  - The Phi phenomena
- Because of persistence of vision, we do not see the dark interface areas of a projection print as it moves through the projector

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## Emergence of Hollywood - 1

- Prior to WWI, France and Italy regularly surpassed the U.S. in film exports
- WWI shut down the European film industry as celluloid film production was diverted to the production of explosives
- By the end of World War I, Hollywood had emerged as the center of U.S. film production

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## Emergence of Hollywood - 2

- Large demand for films required that film production be put on a year-round schedule
- Slow film speeds required that most shooting take place outdoors in available light
- Hollywood had an average 320 days of sun a year, a temperate climate, and a wide range of topography within a 60-mile radius

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## Why Hollywood Won Out

- Why Hollywood Became the Center of World Feature Film Production
  - Large domestic audience and consequently larger profits to finance productions with lavish sets and expensive stars
  - Development of the Star system
  - Studio control over distribution networks
  - Heterogeneity of the American population
  - Dependency of American films on commercial success

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## The Results

- Effects of WWI and the emergence of Hollywood
  - By the mid-1920s, approximately 95% of the films shown in Great Britain, 85% in the Netherlands, 70% in France, 65% in Italy, and 60% in Germany were American films
  - The beginning of the “Americanization” of first European and then World popular culture

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## Talking Pictures - 1

- The idea of uniting motion pictures and sound actually began with Edison
  - Edison’s associate, Dickson, synchronized Edison’s kinetoscope with his phonograph & marketed the device as the Kinetophone
  - By the 1910s, producers regularly commissioned orchestral scores to accompany prestigious productions

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## Talking Pictures - 2

- Lee De Forest in 1919 invented an optical sound-on-film system which he tried unsuccessfully to market to Hollywood
- Western Electric in 1925 invented a sound-on-disc system but was likewise rebuffed by Hollywood except for Warner Bros
  - Warner Bros bought the system and the rights to sublease it
  - Initially Warner Bros used it to produce films with musical accompaniment, starting with *Don Juan* in 1926

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### Talking Pictures - 3

- In 1927, Warner Bros released *The Jazz Singer* which included dialog as well as music. Its phenomenal success ensured the film industry's conversion to sound.
  - Warner Bros pioneering of talkies propelled it from the smallest, most poorly financed movie studio to a major studio and a force to be reckoned with in Hollywood

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### Talking Pictures - 4

- Rather than use Warner Bros sound system, however, the other studios decided to use a sound-on-film system
  - This enabled images and film to be recorded simultaneously on the same film medium, insuring automatic synchronization
  - Competition between Western Electric's Movietone and General Electric's Photophone competing sound-on-film systems led RCA to form RKO Pictures

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### Talking Pictures - 5

- Talking Pictures' interesting consequences - 1
  - Increased Hollywood's share of world cinematic revenue
  - Led to the demise of many "Silent Era" film stars
  - Made Bank of America a major financial institution since they, unlike other banks, were willing to finance Hollywood productions

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### Talking Pictures - 6

- Talking Pictures' interesting consequences – 2
  - Led most theaters to drop the interspersing of vaudeville acts and live music with motion pictures
    - Resulted in the fading of vaudeville
  - Led to the dominance of the studio system
    - Studios that seized the opportunity to make talkies – Warner Bros, Fox, M-G-M, & Paramount - soon gained dominance
  - Altered the behavior of moviegoers
    - The talking audience for silent pictures became the silent audience for talking pictures

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### Talking Pictures - 7

- Talking Pictures' interesting consequences – 3
  - Sound gave filmmakers new ways to attract and excite audiences
    - Allowed films to become more fast paced and complex
    - Boosted ticket sales
      - In 1930, weekly movie attendance rose to 90 million. This equaled 75% of the total American population
    - Boosted the popularity of war movies, horror movies, westerns, and films that depended on clever, fast-paced, and witty dialog

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### Talking Pictures - 8

- Talking Pictures' interesting consequences - 4
  - Sound allowed movies to become more complex and dramatic
    - Movie genres that benefited from dialogue and sound effects – such as westerns, war films, horror films, films with singing and dancing, and comedies with humor and witty dialog – became popular
  - Sound in turn led to the creation of distinct genres to facilitate marketing

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## Movies – The Studios - 1

- By the 1920s, the Hollywood studio system had fully emerged
  - The concept for this system originated in France with Charles Pathé
    - Involved actors under exclusive contract
    - Vertical integration – screenwriting, production, promotion, distribution & exhibition under one roof
    - Use of the profits of one film to fund the production of another

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## Movies – The Studios - 2

- To the ideas of Charles Pathé, the Hollywood studio system added the ideas of Thomas Harper Ince.
  - Ince at his studio in Inceville CA:
    - Functioned as the central authority over multiple production units, each headed by a director
    - Had each director shoot an assigned film according to a detailed continuity script, a detailed budget, and a tight schedule
    - Supervised the final cut

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## Movies – The Studios - 3

- Emergence of the Hollywood Studios reflected:
  - The successes of Pathe and Ince and the adoption of their approach by American moviemakers
  - Oligopolistic success in a highly competitive industry
  - The need to finance ever increasing production costs and the conversion of theaters to sound
    - Required an ability to obtain bank loans and Wall Street investment bank financing

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## Movies – The Studios - 4

- By the mid-1930s, Hollywood was dominated by 8 studios – the Big 5 and the Little 3
  - Big 5 – Paramount, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Warner Bros, RKO, and M-G-M
  - Little 3 – Universal, Columbia, and United Artists
  - A few independents – Republic & Monogram
- This system dominated Hollywood until the early-1950s

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## The Hays Office

- 1915 – The Supreme Court ruled that movie making was a business not subject to the protections of the First Amendment
- In the 1920s, the motion picture industry was rocked by sex scandals, sensational divorces, and accusations that sex was for sale in exchange for movie roles
- The 1920s saw conflict between those concerned that movies adversely affected public morals and movie producers/directors who resisted censorship and felt that movies devoid of sex and violence would not sell at the box office

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## The Hays Office - 2

- By 1927, the Hays Office developed a list of 11 DON'Ts and 25 BE CAREFULs
- In 1927, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was created with Douglas Fairbanks as first president
  - One of its projects was to bestow "Awards of Merit" to "encourage the improvement and advancement of the arts and sciences" of motion pictures – the Oscars (which were first awarded in 1928)

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## What Hollywood Wrought - 1

- Movies had the following effects:
  - Constituted a lifestyle classroom on a whole host of topics – clothes, hairstyles, social attitudes, behavior, and much else
  - Provided a set of shared experiences for almost the whole population
  - Affected people's concepts of historical fact
  - Served as a purveyor of a whole host of consumer goods

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## What Hollywood Wrought - 2

- Movies had the following effects – 2
  - Along with the automobile, movies led to the Drive-in movie
  - Initially supplemented and then supplanted lecture hall and vaudeville theater audiences
  - Brought the "Star" system to full fruition
    - Led to fan magazines and fan clubs
  - Played a major role in popularizing the myth of the "Wild West"

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## What Hollywood Wrought - 3

- Movies had the following effects – 3
  - Films made cultural production a major economic force
  - Films made commercial entertainment a center of American social life
  - As noted earlier, films constituted a major force in Americanizing world popular culture
    - As a backlash, it also led both intellectuals and traditionalists to react against aspects of American culture deemed incompatible with traditional values

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## What Hollywood Wrought - 4

- Movies had the following effects – 4
  - Popularized air conditioning
    - Seeing movies in comfort on hot summer day fueled a desire for air conditioning in the home and office
  - Gave us the animated feature cartoon
    - The marriage of the newspaper comic strip with the movie gave us the animated cartoon feature film

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## What Hollywood Wrought - 5

- Movies had the following effects - 5
  - Helped turn the American people against Prohibition
    - The urban jazz-age flapper and her boyfriend conveyed the impression that drinking was widespread and that violating Prohibition laws was socially respectable
  - Diverted artistic talent from other endeavors to the movies
    - People who formerly composed symphonies now wrote movie scores; persons who in the past wrote novels now wrote screenplays

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## Movies and the Great Depression - 1

- Movies were a low-priced amusement
  - 25 cents to see a double feature as late as 1940 (\$3.78 in 2009 prices)
  - For the unemployed and underpaid, they were comfortable places to sit
  - In 1940, weekly attendance averaged 80 million

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## Movies and the Great Depression - 2

- Effects of the Great Depression on Movies
  - Popularized escapist as distinct from topical films
    - Historical or literary-based films that showed people coping with difficult times and overcoming them
    - Animated films – Walt Disney
  - Led to various innovations as theater owners sought to attract customers
    - Drive-in movies
    - Serials
    - Double Features
    - Popcorn & candy sales
    - Bank Nights and Giveaways