

The Roaring Twenties: From Riches to Rags Timeline

1920

- The U.S. Census reports that population is over 100 million people and that, for the first time, more Americans live in urban areas than rural areas.
- The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants women the right to vote.
- Warren G. Harding is elected president by a wide margin.
- The U.S. Senate refuses to ratify the Versailles Treaty or authorize U.S. participation in the League of Nations.
- Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer declares that a “Red Menace” exists and launches a period of government persecution of radical political dissidents that causes a Red Scare to sweep the nation. Thousands of immigrants will be arrested and deported because of their political views.
- The Ku Klux Klan launches a recruitment campaign that produces 85,000 new members.
- Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, immigrant Italian radicals, are arrested and subsequently convicted, after a controversial trial, of murdering two men during an armed robbery of a shoe factory in Massachusetts.
- The American Civil Liberties Union is founded by Roger Baldwin and others.
- The Volstead Act is enacted to implement the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, prohibiting the manufacture, transport and sale of intoxicating beverages.
- John L. Lewis becomes president of the United Mine Workers of America and will remain in that position until 1960. He will become instrumental in the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).
- A bomb explodes in the J.P. Morgan bank building in New York City, killing 30 people and injuring 200. The bombing was never solved.
- Cotton prices rise to 42 cents a pound, causing Southern farmers to plant the largest cotton crop in U.S. history. The resulting overproduction causes a collapse in cotton prices and cotton farmers will work in near-depression conditions throughout most of the 1920s.
- Marcus Garvey organizes the Universal Negro Improvement Association.
- Radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh, the world’s first commercial radio station, begins broadcasting regularly.
- The first radio news program in Detroit is broadcast.
- Phonofilm, an optical sound-on-film system, is developed by Lee de Forest and Theodore Case.
- The Flapper, a silent comedy film, is the first film in the U.S. to portray the “flapper” lifestyle, which would soon become a 1920s fad.
- The American Professional Football League is formed, comprising eleven teams. It will become the National Football League in 1922.
- The Negro National League (baseball) is established.

1921

- Both houses of the U.S. Congress pass a joint resolution officially ending World War I.
- Congress passes the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act, allowing federal funds to be given to states to help reduce the infant mortality rate.
- Former president William Howard Taft is appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Congress passes the Emergency Quota Act to restrict the number of immigrants admitted from any country annually to 3% of the number of residents from that same country living in the U.S. as of 1910.
- President Harding convenes the Washington Naval Conference, the first international conference held in the U.S. and the first disarmament conference in history. The conference, which produced three major treaties, preserved peace during the 1920s.
- A nationwide recession begins. Wage cuts and massive unemployment cause unrest and an increase in violence. The Hoover Commission suggests price cuts and shorter hours rather than an increase in wages. The average working day is 12-14 hours.
- Coal miners strike for nearly six months to protest wage cuts. The strike cripples the coal mining industry.

- A large-scale, racially motivated conflict occurs in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which whites attack the black community and burn to the ground the Greenwood District, the wealthiest black community in the U.S. An estimated 300 black residents were killed, 10,000 were left homeless and 35 city blocks composed of 1,256 residences were destroyed.
- Margaret Sanger forms the American Birth Control League.
- The first burial is held at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.
- Baseball's World Series is broadcast on radio for the first time.
- The first Miss America Pageant is held in Atlantic City.
- Copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses* are seized by the U.S. Post Office as obscene material and are burned.
- Ford production exceeds 1 million cars per year, nearly 10 times more than Chevrolet, the next-largest selling car.
- An overhead garage door is invented by C.G. Johnson in Detroit.

1922

- Congress passes the Fordney-McCumber Tariff, which raises American tariffs on many imported goods in order to protect U.S. factories and farms. The tariff will boost the economy during the 1920s.
- Congress authorizes the creation of a commission to negotiate repayment by Great Britain and France of the \$11 billion that they owe the U.S. from World War I.
- Congress passes the Cable Act, which reverses the law that required women to forfeit their U.S. citizenship when marrying a foreigner.
- 400,000 railway workers begin a nationwide strike known as the Great Railroad Strike of 1922. It is the largest railroad work stoppage since the American Railway Union's Pullman Strike of 1894.
- The Teapot Dome scandal begins when a Senatorial investigation reveals that Albert B. Fall, secretary of the interior, received bribes to lease Navy petroleum reserves at Teapot Dome in Wyoming and two other locations in California to private oil companies at low rates without competitive bidding. Fall resigns and will be sentenced to one year in prison.
- Albert Einstein is awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics.
- Insulin is developed by Frederick Banting, J.J.R. Macleod, Charles Best and Clark Noble.
- The first issue of *Reader's Digest* is published by Dewitt and Lila Wallace.
- T. S. Elliot publishes *The Waste Land*, and Booth Tarkington wins the Pulitzer Prize in Literature for *Alice Adams*.
- The discovery of the Tomb of King Tutankhamun in Egypt provokes a craze for Egyptian artifacts, known as "Egyptomania" or "Tutmania." This craze affected cinema, fashion, jewelry and, in particular, the development of the Art Deco style of design.
- The Lincoln Memorial is dedicated.
- A retractable hardtop system (convertible automobile) is invented by Ben Ellenbeck, but is never produced.

1923

- President Warren G. Harding dies and Vice President Calvin Coolidge succeeds him.
- The Equal Rights Amendment, written by Alice Paul, is introduced to the Senate to guarantee equal rights for women.
- Congress passes the Agricultural Credits Act to relieve the recession in the farm economy of the 1920s by providing loans to farmers.
- The American Indian Defense Association is formed to protect the religious freedom and tribal property of Native Americans.
- U.S. Steel implements the eight-hour workday policy.
- *Time* magazine is published for the first time.
- General Motors moves its headquarters to the recently completed Durant Building in Detroit and Alfred Sloan becomes its president.
- The A.C. Nielsen Company is founded to provide measurements of radio audiences for advertisers.
- Bessie Smith, known as the "Empress of the Blues," records her first album, *Cemetery Blues*.

- The Charleston, named for the city of Charleston, South Carolina, becomes a popular dance.
- Harlem's Cotton Club opens and presents all-black performances to white-only audiences. Entertainers will include Lena Horne, the Nicholas Brothers and Cab Calloway.
- German Shepherd Rin Tin Tin becomes film's first canine star.
- Walt Disney produces Alice's Wonderland, a short black-and-white silent film.
- Country Club Plaza, the first shopping center in the world designed to accommodate shoppers arriving by automobiles, opens in Kansas City.
- Yankee Stadium opens in New York City.
- Dr. Louis W. Sauer develops a pertussis vaccine to prevent whooping cough.
- Vladimir Zworykin, an employee of RCA, develops the iconoscope, the first television transmission tube.
- The cotton swab, which is later sold under the name "Q-Tip," is invented by Leo Gerstenzang.
- An instant camera with self-developing film is invented by Samuel Shlafrock.

1924

- Calvin Coolidge is elected president.
- Nellie Tayloe Ross is elected governor of Wyoming, the first woman governor in U.S. history. Miriam "Ma" Ferguson is elected governor of Texas.
- Edward Jackson, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, is elected governor of Indiana, which has the most powerful Ku Klux Klan in the nation (over 30% of its white male citizens).
- Congress passes the Immigration Act, which limits the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the U.S. in 1890. These restrictions would remain in place until 1965.
- Congress passes the Indian Citizenship Act, by which all Native Americans who had been born in the U.S. were granted citizenship.
- J. Edgar Hoover is appointed director of the Bureau of Investigation, the predecessor to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb confess to murdering a 14-year-old. Clarence Darrow, their defense lawyer, gets them life imprisonment instead of the death penalty.
- Ford makes its 10 millionth Model T.
- Horace Saks and Bernard Gimbel open Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City.
- About 2.5 million radios are in use in the U.S., with over 500 radio stations broadcasting.
- Computer Tabulating Recording Company is re-organized and becomes known as International Business Machines Corp (IBM).
- The first Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade is held.
- George Gershwin composes Rhapsody in Blue.
- Robert Frost wins the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.
- Edwin Hubble demonstrates that spiral nebulae are composed of stars similar to our own galaxy.
- Wheaties begins its marketing campaign known as "Breakfast of Champions."
- The first Winter Olympic Games are held in France with sixteen nations sending athletes, including the U.S., which won four medals.
- Gas chamber execution is introduced by Nevada to make criminal executions more humane.
- The radio altimeter, which measures the altitude of an airplane above the terrain, is invented by Lloyd Espenschied.

1925

- High school teacher John Scopes is arrested and found guilty of violating Tennessee's new law prohibiting the teaching of the theory of human evolution.
- 35,000 KKK members march in Washington, D.C., their white-hooded procession filling Pennsylvania Avenue. The KKK reaches five million members.

- David C. Stephenson, Grand Dragon of the Indiana Ku Klux Klan, is convicted in the abduction, rape and murder of a young white schoolteacher. Denied a pardon by the Indiana governor in 1927, he releases to reporters a list of elected officials in the pay of the Klan. This information leads to a number of indictments in Indiana.
- A massive tornado travels 219 miles across Missouri, Illinois and Indiana, killing 695 people.
- Al Capone becomes the boss of the crime syndicate known as the Chicago Outfit. The Outfit's annual revenue is an estimated \$100 million, which is generated through illegal enterprises, such as gambling, prostitution and, most importantly, the sale of liquor.
- The Chrysler Corporation is founded by Walter Chrysler.
- The Hudson Motor Car Company is the third-largest U.S. car maker, after Ford Motor Company and Chevrolet.
- Philip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.
- Ben-Hur, costing a record-setting \$3.95 million to produce, is released.
- The Grand Ole Opry is broadcast for the first time.
- Bruce Barton publishes *The Man Nobody Knows*, one of the best-selling books during the 1920s.
- F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby*, which portrays Prohibition-era America.
- Alain Locke's *The New Negro* was published, which expressed cultural aspirations of the Harlem Renaissance.
- The first automatic pop-up toaster, which could brown bread on both sides simultaneously, is introduced.

1926

- Congress passes the Railway Labor Act to regulate labor relations in the railroad and airline industries. It seeks to replace strikes with bargaining, arbitration, and mediation.
- Congress passes the Air Commerce Act to ensure civil air safety. Under this law, the Department of Commerce is to regulate all aspects of the aviation industry.
- The Army Air Corps, the forerunner of the U. S. Air Force, is established.
- The U.S. Marines land in Nicaragua to suppress a revolt. They will stay until 1933.
- The Sesquicentennial Exposition opens in Philadelphia to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.
- RCA, General Electric and Westinghouse establish the NBC radio network, the first major American broadcast network.
- The Book-of-the-Month Club begins to sell books at reduced prices by mail.
- Robert Goddard launches the first liquid-fueled rocket, which flies 184 feet in 2.5 seconds.
- Ernest Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*. Langston Hughes publishes *Weary Blues*. Sinclair Lewis wins the Pulitzer Prize in Literature for *Arrowsmith*.
- Gertrude Ederle swims the English Channel in 14 hours, 31 minutes.
- Richard E. Byrd and Floyd Bennett fly to the North Pole and back in a three-engine monoplane. They are awarded the Medal of Honor.
- Martha Graham, the American pioneer of the modern-dance revolution, gives her first New York performance, which features 18 barefoot, evocatively costumed dancers.
- Magician and escape artist Harry Houdini dies.
- Carter G. Woodson, a history professor at Howard University, proposes Negro History Week, the forerunner of Black History Month.
- Hugo Gernsback starts the modern genre of science fiction by founding the first magazine dedicated to the subject, *Amazing Stories*.
- A drive-up window is first used by City Center Bank of Kansas City, Missouri.

1927

- Congress passes the McNary–Haugen Farm Relief Act, a highly controversial plan to subsidize American agriculture by raising the domestic prices of farm products. The bill was vetoed by President Calvin Coolidge.
- Sacco and Vanzetti are executed in the electric chair, despite worldwide protests.
- United Independent Broadcasters' network is founded in Chicago, the predecessor of the Columbia Broadcasting System (later called CBS), which is the second national radio network in the U.S.

- Model T production ends and Ford introduces the Model A, is available in four standard colors and prices ranging from \$385 (roadster) to \$1400 (Town Car).
- Charles Lindbergh makes the first solo trans-Atlantic flight of 3,600 miles in the Spirit of St. Louis. The flight takes thirty-three and one-half hours.
- The Holland Tunnel opens to connect Manhattan with New Jersey.
- Sculptor Gutzon Borglum begins work on the gigantic sculpture at Mount Rushmore, which will take fourteen years to complete.
- The Great Mississippi Flood occurs, affecting over 700,000 people.
- Andrew Kehoe detonates over 500 pounds of dynamite in an elementary school in Bath Township, Michigan, killing 44 people.
- The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson, debuts as the first full-length “talkie” (motion picture with sound). Its success marks the beginning of the end of silent movies.
- The Broadway musical links with opera in Jerome Kern’s revolutionary Show Boat.
- Mae West is found guilty of obscenity by a New York court and sentenced to ten days in jail.
- Clara Bow’s appearance in the film It brings her global fame and the nickname “The It Girl.” Bow comes to personify the “Roaring Twenties” and is considered its leading sex symbol.
- Babe Ruth hits his 60th home run of the season, a record that will stand for more than 30 years.
- The Harlem Globetrotters play their first game in Hinckley, Illinois.
- Philo T. Farnsworth invents the first fully functional, all-electronic image pickup device (video camera tube), as well as the first fully functional, all-electronic television system.

1928

- Herbert Hoover runs on the platform of “A chicken in every pot, a car in every garage,” and is elected president.
- Congress approves the construction of the Boulder, later Hoover, Dam.
- J.C. Penney opens its 1000th store.
- Former Chicago city council member Oscar DePriest is elected to Congress. He is the first black representative to be elected in a northern state.
- Richard E. Byrd begins his expedition to the Antarctic, from which he will return in 1930.
- Amelia Earhart becomes the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.
- Thornton Wilder wins the Pulitzer Prize in Literature for The Bridge of San Luis Rey. Claude McKay, a seminal figure in the Harlem Renaissance, publishes Home to Harlem.
- The St. Francis Dam in Southern California gives way, killing over 500 people.
- The cartoon characters Mickey and Minnie Mouse debut in Steamboat Willie, an animated short film in black-and-white directed by Walt Disney. This cartoon is considered the debut of the two characters.
- Anthropologist Margaret Mead publishes Coming of Age in Samoa.
- The first regularly scheduled television service in the U.S. begins when the Federal Radio Commission authorizes Jenkins Television Corporation to broadcast from an experimental station. At first, the station could only send silhouette images, but black-and-white images were later transmitted.
- General Electric establishes an experimental television station in Schenectady, New York. It is able to broadcast images via shortwave as far as Los Angeles. The Queen’s Messenger, a one-act play, is the world’s first live drama broadcast on television.
- Penicillin is discovered by Sir Alexander Fleming.
- The recliner is invented by Edward Knabusch and Edwin Shoemaker in Monroe, Michigan.
- The rubber ice cube tray is invented by Lloyd Groff Copeman of Hadley, Michigan.

1929

- In order to stop the downward spiral of crop prices, Congress establishes the Federal Farm Board to support prices of farm products by buying, selling and storing agricultural surpluses and lending money to farmers to buy seed and food for their livestock.

- The League of United Latin American Citizens, the first organization to fight for the civil rights of Hispanic Americans, is founded in Corpus Christi, Texas.
- In the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, six gangsters from the "Bugs" Moran gang and another man are gunned down in a Chicago garage by members of Al Capone's gang dressed as police officers. The killings are part of a decade-long turf war over control of the lucrative bootlegging business.
- The Graf Zeppelin lands in Lakehurst, New Jersey, completing its 21-day, round-the-world flight.
- The Museum of Modern Art opens in New York City.
- The Academy Awards are handed out for the first time.
- Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown*, a study of an average American town, is published.
- Freon, which is used in air conditioning and refrigeration, is invented by Charles Midgley Jr. and Charles Kettering, employees of General Motors.
- Despite efforts by J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller to shore up stock prices, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plummets a record 20 percent over a two-day period, setting off the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and marking the first financial disaster of the Great Depression. U.S. securities initially lose \$26 billion in value, increasing to \$50 billion in 1931. The Dow declines from a high of 381.17 in 1929 to a low of 41.22 in 1932. The Dow would not reach its 1929 level until 1954.