



**CALIFORNIA CONTENT  
STANDARD 11.5.6**

## *The Spread of Popular Culture*

**Specific Objective:** Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.

**Read the summary to answer the questions on the next page.**

### **American Life in the 1920s**

- Labor reforms and union activities achieved shorter working hours for industrial workers. Americans had more leisure time and took up many new types of hobbies.
- During most of the decade, people had more money to spend than previous years. They spent it on consumer goods as well as entertainment.

### **The Rise of Radio**

- Wireless radio communication was still being developed in the early 1900s.
- Radios were used for military reasons during World War I and private radios banned.
- Radio manufacturers tried ways to increase personal radio sales after the war. Westinghouse Electric started a commercial radio station in 1920 in Pittsburgh. Programs included recorded music, news, and sports scores without commercials.
- The station was so successful that other radio manufacturers, such as General Electric (GE) and Radio Corporation of America (RCA), started stations in New York and other areas. People quickly bought radios so they could listen.
- There were about 60,000 home radios in the United States in 1922. The number increased to 3 million in 1924, 10 million by 1930, and 20 million by 1934.
- Stations began raising money with paid commercials. By the mid-1930s, radio was a \$100 million business.
- Large networks such as National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Columbia Broadcast System (CBS) formed to link stations across the country. They linked these stations so they could all broadcast some of the same programs.
- Radio provided a link between people in different areas of the country. People in rural and urban areas, and in the North, South and West could all hear the same sports event or radio comedy or drama. They could learn about news as it happened.
- Entertainment shared by many came to be known as popular culture.

### **Motion Pictures**

- Movies in the early 1900s were silent. Musicians played music in theaters while they were shown. Any dialogue was provided by printed words on the screen.
- Millions went to silent movies as an escape from everyday life. Stars of comedies and romances influenced fashions and were covered in fan magazines.
- “Talkies” brought sound to motion pictures in 1927 in *The Jazz Singer*. Mickey Mouse was the first cartoon to speak in 1928. Soon all movies had sound. Movie attendance doubled in just three years.
- Like radio, movies allowed people across the country to share popular culture.