Politics & Economics

- Post-WWI & The Roaring Twenties/The Jazz Age
  - Everyone’s feeling great that the war is over; celebrations abound.
- Mass production
  - Mass production had been around for a while, but it really picked up steam in 20s, leading to cheaper goods and increased disposable income.
- Prohibition (1920-1933) & black market liquor
  - The U.S. government bans the sale of alcohol with a constitutional amendment, almost immediately leading to a thriving black market for buying & selling liquor.
  - Introduced quotas and limits on E.U. immigration to the U.S. for the first time ever. Completely excluded immigrants from Asia.
- Indian Citizenship Act of 1924
  - Made all Native Americans U.S. citizens in response to their participation in WWI. But many still couldn’t vote due to literacy tests.
- The Crash of 1929 and The Great Depression
- FDR & The New Deal
  - “First” (1933-1934) & “Second” (1935-1938) New Deal
  - The WPA

Arts & Culture

- The first feature “talkies” (film with sound) in 1926 – Don Juan/The Jazz Singer (1927)
- Federal Radio Commission (FCC) established in 1927 (re: FDR’s “fireside chats”)
- The Harlem Renaissance
  - Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Dubois, James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Jacob Lawrence, Paul Robeson, Bessie Smith, Cab Calloway, Billie Holiday, Jelly Roll Morton, the list goes on…!
- Art Deco
  - Heavily based in architecture/design/functional objects. E.g. the Chrysler building in NYC.
  - But not only! Painting & sculpture reflected the art deco aesthetic as well
- The Lost Generation
  - A generation of writers and thinkers who entered adulthood during WWI and whose work reflects a deep disillusionment with the ways of the world.
  - Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald
- American Regionalism
  - Grant Wood’s American Gothic (1930)
- Surrealism (started in Europe)
  - Dali and his ocelot, treacherous images, Andalusian dogs, etc.
ZOOMING IN: The Works Progress Administration (WPA)


- The WPA was part of FDR’s New Deal to get the U.S. out of its financial despair. It consisted of all kinds of programs and government initiatives to get people back to work and on their feet. Social Security emerged out of the New Deal, as well as the federal minimum wage. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was one specific program out of many within the New Deal, but it was one of the largest and most all-encompassing. It directly hired the unemployed to work on infrastructural projects like roads, bridges, parks, etc. But it ALSO focused on increasing jobs in the arts: theater, music, historic preservation, library collections, murals, and... MUSEUMS!

- Some museums/art centers that were built, renovated, or otherwise supported thanks to the WPA:
  - Anna Miller Museum – Newcastle, WY
  - Arizona Museum of Natural History – Mesa, AZ
  - Brooklyn Museum – Brooklyn, NY
  - Grand Rapids Public Museum - Grand Rapids, MI
  - Hanby House – Westerville, OH
  - Louisiana State Exhibit Museum – Shreveport, LA
  - Metropolitan Museum of Art - New York, NY
  - Museum of Contemporary Craft – Portland, OR
  - Philadelphia Museum of Art – Philadelphia, PA
  - Smithsonian Institution - Washington DC
  - And more!

- The Field Museum – “The Museum’s WPA employment force once numbered over 200 people, and eventually, a few were hired on a permanent basis after the program’s official end on July 1, 1940.” [https://www.fieldmuseum.org/blog/progress-and-creativity-during-great-depression](https://www.fieldmuseum.org/blog/progress-and-creativity-during-great-depression) For specific people.
Here’s a lil video that quickly summarizes MoMA’s history - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKUK1CxsOeo&feature=youtu.be

The Museum of Modern Art was established in 1929 by 3 wealthy ladies named Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.
  - “Over lunch in 1928, three women launched the radical idea of founding a museum in New York just to exhibit modern art. As Abby Aldrich Rockefeller recalled, ‘I began to think of women whom I knew in New York City, who cared deeply for beauty and who bought pictures, women who would be willing, and had faith enough, to help start a museum of contemporary art.’” https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/1920/three-women-have-a-vision/

Alfred H. Barr Jr., MoMA’s first director, envisioned the collection as “a torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past of 50 to 100 years ago.” He wanted to sell all works in the collection after they reached 50 years old, and constantly replenish the collection with new and fresh artworks. https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/1920/starting-a-collection-from-scratch/

Iris Barry – British film critic. In 1935, she became curator of MoMA’s brand new film library, “the first position of its kind in the US.” She struck a deal with American studios and production companies “in which they donated their prints after a movie had finished its commercial run.” She set the tone for film curating with her 1940 retrospective of D. W. Griffith, and seems like she was overall a total boss. https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/1930/iris-barry-and-the-expansion-of-film-at-moma/
3. Iris Barry c. 1940

4. A guard dog (named Don) at MoMA in one of its old buildings.

5. MoMA being built, September 12, 1938.
ZOOMING IN: What else is happening?


- **1930 – Robert W. Forest, President of Metropolitan Museum of Art expounds:**
  - We have been criticized as being too large and, therefore, tiresome to the average visitor. I think there is real danger of making our exhibition galleries too extensive. I think we should consider the separation of our galleries into exhibition galleries for the general public and study collections for students. Our exhibition galleries should, of course, contain the most important objects in our collections and they should be installed so as to be attractive and instructive to the average visitor, who has, it may be, no special knowledge in any particular field of art, and, it may be, no special interest in any particular department, and these exhibition galleries should be sufficiently limited as not to confuse or tire the average visitor. This means tasteful arrangement and adequate spacing in our exhibition galleries. But no such degree of space or taste in installation is needed for students.

- **1932 – Eugenics Exhibition at American Museum of Natural History**
  - It is the purpose of this exhibit to show the history, content, present researches and trends of eugenics, both as a pure and as an applied science. It will seek to emphasize the fact that eugenics is concerned primarily with racial and family-stock quality in the turnover of population from generation to generation. As a pure science eugenics tries to understand the forces which govern this turnover; as an applied science it strives to use these forces in the improvement of family-stocks and races. This exhibit, in taking stock of eugenics today, is meant also as an aid in orienting the eugenical work of the immediate future. If its plans are successfully carried out the scientist will find here displayed the most critical studies of his colleagues, and the intelligent layman will learn what eugenics as an applied science is all about, what its aims are, and how efforts may be well directed to realize them.

- **1939 - John Rowley on Selecting a Museum Director:**
  - One word as to museum directors. The common mistake is to select a museum director from the ranks of scientific men. No greater error can be made. The director or head of a museum should be a well-educated, broad-minded business man of good personal appearance and "mixing" qualities, without any leaning toward any particular branch of museum work, so that no favoritism may be shown one department at the expense of another. His duties should be to look after the large affairs of the institution, to meet and interest people, and get donations and bequests and otherwise build up the museum.
- Rowley, John. (1938). Taxidermy and Museum Exhibition, 324

- **1939 – Laurence Coleman, President of the American Alliance of Museums, speaking on Museum Studies**
  - Museum studies will be tempted "to develop technical jargon and pseudoscientific terminology—clap-trap naively calculated to make simple things look hard. This could do only harm. There will be attempts to standardize also; and these should be guarded against."

**Images**


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