

Andrew Lippa's
The Wild Party



The rhythm of life
Is a jazz rhythm,
Honey.
The gods are laughing at us.

The broken heart of love,
The weary, weary heart of pain,—
 Overtones,
 Undertones,
To the rumble of street cars,
To the swish of rain.

Lenox Avenue,
Honey.
Midnight,
And the gods are laughing at us.

- Langston Hughes

Lenox Avenue: Midnight (1926)

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Introduction

The Wild Party covers a wide range of topics in a short period of time. Two hours is not nearly enough time to truly dive into the depths of all the topics touched on in the piece. Because of this, the audience is being asked to enter blindly into a world where the liquor is ever-flowing and passions are dangerously high. While properties like *The Great Gatsby* paint pictures of beautiful flappers and the glamorous nightlife of the 1920's, *The Wild Party* offers a different look into the iconic decade. There is no green light off in the distance to distract the audience from the risky realities of persisting amidst prohibition and being trapped in potentially-lethal living situations. There is no way an innocent audience member could understand all of the cultural influences that led this selected cast of characters to their breaking points.

That's where this packet comes in.

The following compilation of information touches on several societal aspects weaved within the book of *The Wild Party*. Some sections are to be expected like Prohibition and Vaudeville, while other sections may come as more of a surprise like Religious References and Race Relations. Every section has been examined through the lens of being an attendee at Queenie and Burrs' party, tailoring broad topics to specifics that interact with Andrew Lippa's lyrics and dialogue. No matter how familiar you may feel with the topics covered in this document, I encourage you to page through each section. This not a collection of short historical essays, but rather primers to help you navigate party conversations you may not remember the next day. The only way to guide a lost audience member through this piece is by being an informed tour guide.

A drunk informed tour guide.

You will notice that several sections have a Content Warning at the top of the section. This is to help you be informed about what you are about to read while accounting for your mental health.

Theatre has an uncanny ability to connect to one's personal life and bring difficult truths to light. Because of this, Page 19 has a comprehensive list of resources should you find yourself in a moment of crisis like those seen in *The Wild Party*. You are worthy, you are loved, and are not alone.

Enjoy this journey through the 1920's! There's pictures and everything.


Sheridan Schreyer

Domestic Violence

Content Warning: The following text describes and discusses intimate partner violence. Please read at your own discretion.

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence, occurs between two people in a close relationship. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Department of Justice qualifies four types of behavior as intimate partner violence:

1. Physical Violence: trying to hurt a partner through physical force
2. Sexual Violence: forcing a partner to take part in a sex act without consent
3. Stalking: pattern of repeated unwanted attention by a partner that causes concern for one's own safety
4. Psychological Aggression: the use of verbal and nonverbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or exert control

Intimate partner violence most often occurs in a cycle of three stages. First, the abuser will use will use words or threats as a means of ridicule. Next, the abuser will become angry in response to a perceived action by the other person and will act upon the previously mentioned rage through acts of violence. Finally, the abuser will "cool off," ask forgiveness, and assure their partner that it will never happen again. At this point the victim is not likely to leave the situation due to fear of what their partner is capable of. But this is not always the case, as some partners who feel that they have no outside protection may turn to means of self-protection. Victims of domestic violence who act upon their desire for self-protection are often scrutinized in a court of law; fewer than one-third of domestic violence victims are acquitted based upon their testimony describing their experience in the relationship.

The 1920's provided unparalleled growth, employment opportunities, and higher standards of living. This was a direct result of World War I disrupting social norms, allowing for a new set of morals to emerge that allowed an obsession around sexual freedom to develop. This combination of women becoming more liberated and men setting themselves free from the restraints of the Victorian Era made for potentially lethal living situations.

LGBTQ+ Culture in the 1920's

Content Warning: The following section contains harsh language towards the LGBTQ+ community. Please read at your own discretion.

With the abandonment of strait-laced Victorian ideals, openly acting upon one's sexuality became more accepted in queer-centric spaces. Some places that fall into this category in 1920's New York City includes lesbian-majority neighborhoods in Harlem and the Village as well as nightclubs that featured performances by "female impersonators."

In the early 1900's reformers seeking to uphold the values of the previous era noticed a rise in gender-non-conforming men having relationships with each other in major American cities. This group dubbed these individuals as "male sex perverts," and this mindset from vocal opposers of queer culture led an underground presence to form. This rise in LGBTQ+ activity allowed for more gay, lesbian, and transgender performers to take to the stage, making New York City the epicenter for "The Pansy Craze" sweeping the nation.



1920's Drag Queens

At the height of The Pansy Craze and its sister the "Sapphic Craze," queer nightlife thrived in the 20's through the mid-30's. Acts featuring LGBTQ+ individuals and underground drag "balls" would begin to emerge across America. The audiences in attendance at said events consisted of both straight people looking for a fun night out and LGBTQ+ individuals seeking to gain a sense of community. However this did not last long, as the onset of the Great Depression and World War II would soon change the general perception of the queer community. During the 1930's, the LGBTQ+ community received waves of backlash as they were attributed to be a part of the cultural experimentation that led to the economic downfall.

Notable Figures

Content Warning: The following text discusses sexual abuse and attempts to take one own's life. Please read at your own discretion.

Clara Bow (1905 - 1965)

Bow's life began on July 29, 1905 in the Bay Ridge neighborhood of Brooklyn. Her home growing up was not a safe one, as her father was sexually abusive and her mother's poor mental health resulted in a threat to end her daughter's life. To escape her household, Bow entered a beauty contest that would take her across the country to Hollywood. It was here she would win her first minor role in the 1922 film *Beyond the Rainbow*. With this role under her belt, she persevered to earn bigger film roles while managing the death and institutionalization of her mother.



Bow's big break came from the 1927 film *It*, adapted from a novella of the same name. Her performance was the epitome of the flapper persona that has become an icon of the 1920's. Bow was soon called the "It" Girl as a result of her star turn. After six more years of fame, she retired once movies with sound were on the rise and she struggled to find work due to her thick Brooklyn accent.



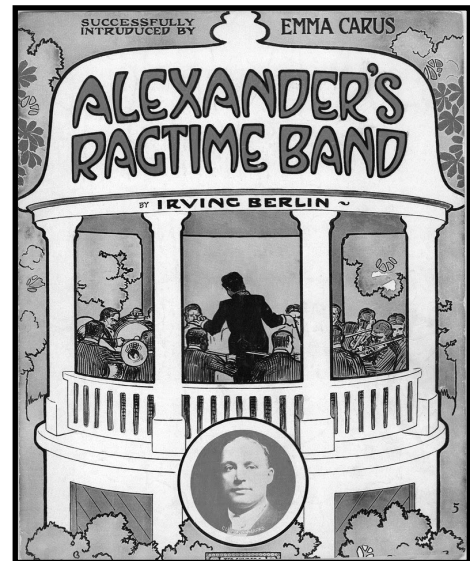
Throughout Bow's career her personal life was a subject of speculation and gossip. This scrutiny in addition to lingering trauma led her to enter a sanitarium following a mental breakdown. Her struggle with mental health continued into her 40s, most notably resulting in an attempt to take her own life.

In 1931 she would marry actor Rex Bell and live quietly with him on his cattle ranch in Nevada. She lived to be 60 years old, and is remembered as a trailblazer in the silent film era and a pop culture icon.

Irving Berlin (1888 - 1989)

Irving Berlin (born Israel Beilin) was born on May 11, 1888 in Tolochin, Byelorussia. One of eight children, Berlin immigrated with his family to New York City in 1893 and began busking on the street for pennies and working as a singing waiter in a café in Chinatown.

Berlin published his first song in 1907 titled "Marie from Sunny Italy," launching his career as a song plugger. In this position he would write songs by ear to potentially sell to music publishers. He had his first breakout hit in 1911 with "Alexander's Ragtime Band," gaining international popularity. Berlin stated in an 1914 interview that "the melody came...right out of the air. I wrote the whole thing...surrounded on all sides by roaring pianos and roaring vaudeville actors." The song's lyrics tell the story of the singer inviting their significant other to see a performance of Alexander's Ragtime Band because they are "the best band in the land."



Over the next fifty years Berlin would write some of America's most popular songs, including "White Christmas," "There's No Business Like Show Business," and "God Bless America." These songs were fashioned into seventeen Broadway musicals and revues and several movie musical classics. His songs are used to this day to create memorable scenes within some of America's favorite movies.



Irving Berlin's legacy lives on today through his myriad of achievements in the music and theatre industries. Berlin was a co-founder of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), founder of his own publishing company, and builder of the Broadway theater now known as The Music Box Theater.

Berlin passed away on September 22, 1989 at the age of 101.

Prohibition

Prohibition was a 13-year-long period in United States history where alcohol was made illegal in the United States as a part of the temperance movement. The idea of a nationwide ban on alcohol began during World War I, where prohibitionists felt the manufacturing of alcohol wasted resources that could be used to support American troops abroad. In 1918 a resolution was introduced to prohibit the manufacturing, sale, and importation of "intoxicating liquors." This resolution passed in 1919, and shortly after was ratified as the 18th Amendment. Prohibition officially began on January 17, 2020, and would soon define a whole decade.

However, no amount of legislation could prevent from Americans partaking in the consumption of alcohol. By 1930 there were over 280,000 illegal distilleries and 500,000 speakeasies across the United States. Many loopholes were found by the public, including doctors prescribing whiskey for "medical purposes" and brewing beer at home. Crime syndicates began trafficking alcohol under the radar, charging their customers a significant amount for the opportunity to buy such a scarcity.

The illegal purchasing and consumption of alcohol wasn't the only type of crime that increased during Prohibition. Homicides increased by over 16 percent, and robberies increased by over 83 percent while prohibition legislation was in effect. Alcohol-related deaths and "alcoholic insanity" steadily increased throughout the 1920's with the majority of cases spiking in major cities including New York City.

Enforcing prohibition legislation was not just frustrating to the public, but it was incredibly expensive as well. The Bureau of Prohibition's budget peaking as high as 11 million dollars in 1926, or over 178 million in present-day currency. The Coast Guard had its own prohibition-enforcement budget of 10 million, or over 162 million present-day dollars.

In 1933, the 21st Amendment was passed repealing the 18th Amendment and ending the Prohibition Era. There was a hope that alcohol-related jobs would assist in economic recovery amidst the Great Depression, but the effects of prohibition would continue for years to come. Most notably female attendance at bars would remain high and immigrants would make their own wines at home to avoid taxes.

Race Relations in the 1920's

Content Warning: The following text discusses hate groups, police negligence, xenophobic sentiments, and violence towards the Black and Asian communities. Please read at your own discretion.

The 1920's were an interesting juxtaposition in regards to race — while moral standards were rapidly changing, relationships between mainstream American culture and people of color moved marginally. However this did not stop BIPOC artists (most notably Black creatives) from creating some of the most formative hallmarks of the decade.

The Harlem Renaissance:

One of the most iconic artistic movements of the era was the Harlem Renaissance, a flourishing of art, writing, and jazz within its namesake neighborhood in New York City. Gifted artists made a home above 125th Street, creating a hub of Black excellence that attracted white audiences and intellectuals. The rise of Jazz also provided Black musicians with unprecedented opportunities to work along white artists in select nightclubs and speakeasies. Some other notable achievements from this period include *Seven Arts* becoming the first desegregated white magazine and several Broadway plays featuring Black casts. Langston Hughes also rose to notoriety during this time, becoming a household name for his poetry.



The Case of Dr. Ossian Sweet:

Despite the amount of Black joy manifested in the art produced by the Harlem Renaissance, tensions continued to bubble in white suburbia. Throughout the 1920's over a million Black people moved from the South to northern cities in search of employment, only to be met by both

housing and job discrimination. Black people were promptly redlined into crowded neighborhoods that were segregated and expensive.



Dr. Ossian Sweet

The following discrimination can be seen best within the case of Dr. Ossian Sweet. In February 1925, Sweet moved with his family to a house on Garland Avenue on the outskirts of a neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Their new white neighbors were upset with the Sweets' presence, and the family began receiving anonymous death threats. In response to these, Dr. Sweet made it clear that he has an arsenal of firearms

at his disposal and hired Black bodyguards to accompany him everywhere he went. White vandals continued to throw rocks at their home and local police did nothing to stop these actions.

Petty vandalism escalated into violence on the evening of September 9, 1925 when several white young men had an altercation with two of Dr. Sweet's brothers on the street. A mob quickly formed around them with white onlookers chanting racist slogans; before long the fist-fight would turn into a shooting taking the life of one rioter and wounding several others. The police arrived after all of the mentioned action took place and arrested all of the male Sweets and their bodyguards on the spot.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) quickly came to the Sweets' defense, calling the prosecution to come a "judicial hanging." The trial against Sweets was filled with tampering; one female witness admitted that the police had coached her to testify that no violent mob gathered, and the prosecution was never able able to prove their contention that Sweet's bodyguards conducted a premeditated attack on white pedestrians. After the first trial's hung jury, both of Dr. Sweet's brothers were tried separately and acquitted in April 1926.

Other Significant Events:

- In 1921 the first emergency immigration restriction act was passed establishing a limit on the amount of European immigrants allowed into American borders per year. After the post-war economic slump this

legislation went away, but the anti-immigrant sentiment behind the the law stayed.

- The Texas General Assembly enacted a statute in 1923 that barred all "persons of color" from voting in state Democratic Party primaries.
- In 1923 the state of Oklahoma limited the amount of crimes committed by the Klu Klux Klan under martial law. In the three weeks following the passing of the law more than four thousand Klansmen were taken into custody.
- The National Origins Act was passed in 1924, lowering the limit of European immigrants allowed to enter the United States. The immigration of Asian individuals was banned outright.
- Klu Klux Klan membership peaked at over four million members in 1924.
- In 1925 a Chinese-American student was denied admittance to a Mississippi high school due to the school being reserved exclusively for white pupils. The student's father filed a case against the state on her behalf and it went to the Supreme Court. The student was able to be admitted based on the court's determination that the term "colored" referred exclusively to Black individuals.
- The Supreme Court ruled against segregated primaries in March of 1927 after a Black dentist was barred from voting in a Texas Democratic primary. This set a precedent for court cases moving forward concerning Black voting rights.

Religious References

Content Warning: The following text includes descriptions of acts of Anti-Semitism and genocide. Please read at your own discretion.

The following religious references are mentioned in "Raise the Roof" and "Wild, Wild Party."

Tower of Babel:

The story of the Tower of Babel appears in the book of Genesis and is often pointed to as a reasoning for the creation of different languages. A group of people migrated to Babylonia and collectively decided to build a "city and a tower with its top in the sky." By building this feat, the architects would have a claim to fame and would never have to be torn apart from their creation. This search for grandeur displeased God, and those building the project were cast away to all areas of the world. In doing so the universal language was destroyed, resulting in a diverse range of languages all over the world. While the act of building is what initially made God upset, there is no specific sinful act mentioned,

Adam and Eve:

The story of Adam and Eve appears across the texts of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) within the myth commonly known as the Creation Story. After creating the universe, planets, and the Earth's ecosystems God created the first human, a man named Adam. Once created, Adam was charged with the task of naming all of the animals God created in the Garden of Eden. He was also told that he could eat from any tree in the garden except one tree dubbed the "Tree of Knowledge." Eating this tree's fruit would create evil inclinations and an awareness of immortality.



Once Adam saw that all the animals he named had a mate, he felt a desire to have a mate himself. Once Adam fell into a deep sleep God took one of his ribs from his side and used it to create the first woman, Eve. When he woke up, Adam immediately recognized her as his perfect partner and lived together with no shame of being unclothed.

A serpent in the Garden of Eden soon approached Eve and pressured her until she ate from the Tree of Knowledge. After eating the fruit, she then

gave it to Adam. Once they both ate from the Tree, they became suddenly gained intellectual maturity and became aware of their nakedness. In turn they made makeshift outfits out of fig leaves to cover themselves before being discovered by God.

Consequences for the consumption of the "forbidden fruit" were tailored to each transgressor. Eve was punished with pain in childbearing and Adam received the curse of needing to work the land to produce food. Both would now die at the end of their lives and would be banished from the Garden of Eden.

Sodom and Gomorrah:

Abraham, the first "patriarch" of the Israelites and direct descendant of Noah, was informed by God that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were going to be destroyed due to the sinful acts of its people. Abraham is distressed at this news, as his nephew Lot is one of many just inhabitants in the cities. God however continued with the plan of destruction as not even ten good men could be found. But before the extinction, two angels were sent to Lot and his family out of Sodom. The group was instructed to turn around and look at the city's destruction, but Lot's Wife still turned around. As a result she turned into a pillar of salt, not moving forward

The actions within Sodom and Gomorrah that made them sinful have often been associated with homosexuality and sexual immorality. Other schools of thought consider the cities' sinfulness centered around a lack of overall hospitality and aggression. Regardless, it is understood that according to portrayals across Abrahamic texts Sodom was the physical manifestation of wickedness and evil.

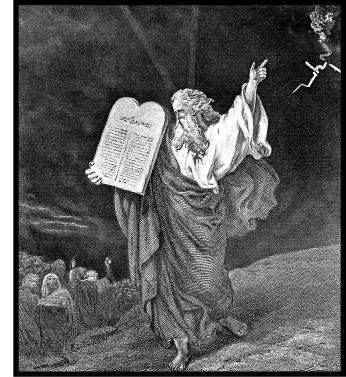
Moses and the 10 Commandments:

The religious figure Moses is best known for being charged by God to lead the Israelites of Egypt from slavery to nationhood. When he was an infant, a decree from the Pharaoh commanded all newborn male Israelites to be killed at birth. When midwives showed mercy on the children, another instruction went out to drown all remaining newborn Hebrew boys in the Nile river. His parents crafted a wicker basket to protect Moses from the oncoming persecution, and hid him among the reeds growing on the river bank. It was here he was discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter and was adopted into Egypt's royal family.

Throughout his upbringing Moses was raised as an Egyptian while remaining aware of his Hebrew heritage. He would repeatedly intervene when encountered with the persecution of his people, and would

eventually flee Egypt when his actions were discovered by the Pharaoh. It was leaving the land he called home that began Moses' rise to leadership with the assistance of his older brother Aaron. After being charged by God directly and allowing the performance of three "wondrous signs" to assert his authority, Moses kept the Israelites safe during ten devastating plagues cast on Egypt.

In their travels out of Egypt they had to outrun Pharaoh's forces and escape through a parted Sea of Reeds (commonly known as the Red Sea). Once the sea returns to its original state, the soldiers behind them drown and the Israelites are officially out of their clutches. Three months into their journey towards their "Promised Land," Moses was told of ten laws with which to guide his people on the top of Mount Sinai. The moral precepts were relayed as follows:



1. I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and they mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house or wife.

These commands formed a bond between God and the Israelites, and were transcribed on two stone tablets. After remaining on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights, Moses left the mountain to find that in his absence his followers created a golden calf to worship as an idol. Upon Moses seeing this, the tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them shattered. The calf was later destroyed, the Israelites were ultimately forgiven, and Moses continued to lead the group through the desert until his death.

Other Vocabulary:

Yaweh: the Hebrew name of God revealed to Moses; commonly abbreviated as YHWH

Baruchatah: Hebrew phrase meaning "praise God;" formal

Sex Work in the 1920's

Antivice legislation began to emerge during World War I, and set a precedent of discrimination against sex workers throughout the 1920's. Several reform groups argued that sex work was an medical problem that economically exploited "diseased" women, and if "red light" districts could be abolished the industry would disappear entirely. However, the waves of sexual freedom throughout the 1920's did not stop the sex work industry from maintaining a strong presence among underground nightlife.

Sex workers were known for conducting their business in the "back room" of bars, privately meeting clients of the opposite sex. While sex workers catered to all parties regardless of how they identified, this was notable as men and women did not go out to bars together; patrons would go out



Attendees at a "petting party," or a gathering that encouraged sexual experimentation

with people who shared their gender-identification, and pairing up with someone opposite of their identification was telling that a sex worker was involved. In a bar setting, women regulars would drink at a discount and receive a commission on the drinks bought by their male clients. Outside of an already existing business, sex workers would set the price for their clients (anywhere between 30 and 70 of modern-day dollars) and decide where they would meet.

By the 1920's, women were seen rebelling against their families and state-enforced middle-class morality. Social reform began to focus on breaking the silence surrounding sexually-transmitted diseases and birth control, all in the hope that it would improve the quality-of-life of American women. But this hope was continuously exploited by men. While women were expected to determine the degree of sexual involvement, their male clients would often force them to keep up their presumed "end of the bargain" in exchange for a night out. While sexual liberation rang throughout the 1920's, the tension surrounding traditional gender roles was still present underneath.

Vaudeville

Content Warning: The following text contains xenophobic sentiments and discusses minstrelsy and blackface. Please read at your own discretion.

From the moment it first arrived from France in the 1870s, vaudeville took America by storm. By the 1900's vaudeville was the most popular form of entertainment, employing over 25,000 performers across the country. Acts seen on vaudeville stages included any kind of popular entertainment that would appeal to the country's urban middle class, including comedy, dance, acrobatics, magic, and trained animals. This type of live variety show was relatively inexpensive and lacked formality, attracting a wider audience than other art forms.

Despite its harsh living conditions vaudeville attracted many minority groups, including female, disabled, and BIPOC performers. While they received discrimination on and off the stage, these groups were afforded opportunities in vaudeville that were significantly better than other industries. Should they become a famous performer in touring circuits, performers could make up to three times what they would be paid as a laborer. While this employment seemed inclusive, that did not mean the material being performed would be. Several vaudeville script writers would use ethnic humor and exaggerated dialects in their acts. Minstrelsy still took the stage and had a looming presence over the American entertainment industry; while some Black performers would begin reclaiming aspects of the performance style by "blacking up" their own faces, pre-Civil War sentiments remained at the forefront.

While vaudeville's variety shows were considered an amateur performance setting, many acts and performers were considered world-famous. Some of the most successful acts had roots in clowning and British pantomime. Slapstick physical comedy and humorous songs would become a means of "insurance" that audiences would remain enthusiastic throughout the night. Burlesque was also a major influence of vaudeville, with comedy skits often being interspersed with women performing dances designed to show off their legs.

As the film industry grew in the late 1920's, vaudeville's relevance began to decline. Not only could movies provide escapism to the public during the beginning of the Great Depression, but they could do so at a low price. Just as Radio City Music Hall opened its doors, vaudeville was gone for good.

Resources

The Wild Party covers a range of difficult topics including domestic violence, drug abuse, sexual assault, and suicidal ideation. The following are resources available to you should the themes hit "too close to home."

The National Domestic Violence Hotline:

- Call: 1-800-799-7233
- Text: "START" to 88788
- Online Chat: <https://www.thehotline.org/>

Prudence Crandall Center:

Offers comprehensive services to women, men, and children who are victims of domestic violence.

- Address: 594 Burritt Street, New Britain, CT 06050
- Call: 1-888-744-2900
- Website: <https://prudencecrandall.org/>

National Drug Helpline:

- Call: 1-844-289-0879
- Email: resources@drughelpline.org
- Website: <https://drughelpline.org/>

RAINN/The National Sexual Assault Hotline:

- Call: 1-800-656-4673
- Online Chat: <https://hotline.rainn.org/online>
- Website: <https://www.rainn.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:

- Call: 988 or 1-800-273-8255
- Online Chat: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Crisis Text Line:

- Text: "HOME" to 741741
- WhatsApp: https://api.whatsapp.com/send?phone=14437877678&text=HELLO&app_absent=0
- Website: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

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