

University of Michigan Law School

## University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository

---

Book Chapters

Faculty Scholarship

---

2012

### Armstrong, Louis; Capablanca, José Raúl; and Waller, Fats.

Howard J. Bromberg

*University of Michigan Law School, hbromber@umich.edu*

Available at: [https://repository.law.umich.edu/book\\_chapters/295](https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_chapters/295)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.law.umich.edu/book\\_chapters](https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_chapters)



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

#### Publication Information & Recommended Citation

Bromberg, Howard J. (1996-2000, 2008- ). "Armstrong, Louis", "Capablanca, José Raúl" and "Waller, Fats." In *The Twenties in America*, edited by C. Rollyson, vol. 1: 52-3, 140; vol. 3: 904-5. Ipswich, Mass.: Salem Press, 2012.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

# **The Twenties in America**



Louis Armstrong. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

## ■ Armstrong, Louis

**Identification:** American jazz musician

**Born:** August 4, 1901, New Orleans, Louisiana

**Died:** July 6, 1971, Queens, New York

*Armstrong pioneered the transformation of jazz from its New Orleans roots to nationally popular music. An innovative musician, he also became an influential and beloved entertainer.*

The 1920s saw the spread of jazz from New Orleans to the largest cities in the United States. When Louis Armstrong joined his mentor, Joe “King” Oliver, in Chicago in 1922, he was already an accomplished trumpet and cornet player. His stints with King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band in Chicago and the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in New York helped establish those cities as new centers of jazz. Armstrong combined the hot, bluesy sounds of New Orleans with the swing-oriented, solo-focused sound of the big cities, dazzling audiences with his bravura solos, scat singing, and talent for improvisation.

In New Orleans, Armstrong had married at a

young age, but the relationship did not last. He was married for the second time in 1924, to Lillian “Lil” Hardin, a successful pianist in her own right. With Hardin’s help, Armstrong assembled a group of musicians to make some studio recordings. The band was originally called Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, though for some recordings they were the Hot Four or the Hot Seven, depending on how many showed up at the studio. The sixty-five songs they recorded from 1925 to 1928 are some of the most influential in the history of jazz. Their 1928 recording of “West End Blues” is certainly one of the genre’s most acclaimed; it opens with a dazzling cadenza by Armstrong, followed by his soulful scat singing and a climatic eight-bar solo. That same year, he recorded a groundbreaking duet with Earl “Fatha” Hines entitled “Weatherbird.”

In 1929, Armstrong began fronting orchestras in Chicago and New York. He would stick with big bands until 1947, when he would return to the smaller combo format with his group Louis Armstrong and His All Stars. Armstrong and Hardin separated in the early 1930s but remained friends throughout their lives.

**Impact**

Louis Armstrong was one of the most important musicians in the history of jazz, a great influence on American popular music, and an icon of American entertainment. In the 1920s, he led the transformation of New Orleans jazz from ensemble variations on a song's melody to sustained solos, driving rhythms, and improvisations based on the chords and underlying structure. He had a hit recording in every decade from the 1920s to the 1960s and was one of the most beloved entertainers of the twentieth century.

*Howard Bromberg*

**Further Reading**

Schuller, Gunther. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.  
Stricklin, David. *Louis Armstrong: The Soundtrack of the American Experience*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010.  
Teachout, Terry. *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

**See also:** Cotton Club; Ellington, Duke; Hardin, Lillian; Jazz; Oliver, Joe "King"; Popular music; Waller, Fats

---

---

## ■ Capablanca, José Raúl

**Identification:** Cuban chess champion

**Born:** November 19, 1888, Havana, Cuba

**Died:** March 8, 1942, New York, New York

*José Raúl Capablanca was a talented chess player who held the title of world champion from 1921 to 1927. He became an international celebrity, touring the world and playing in tournaments and exhibitions throughout much of the decade.*

José Raúl Capablanca y Graupera began playing chess at four years old and went on to defeat the chess champion of Cuba around his thirteenth birthday. He enrolled in Columbia University in 1905, eventually leaving to pursue his chess career. After nearly two decades of competition and performance in traveling exhibitions, in which he established his reputation for elegant and precise game play, Capablanca became the world chess champion in 1921. His predecessor, Emanuel Lasker, had held the title since 1894 and attempted to pass it on without a match in 1920. However, the public insisted on a match, and the two agreed to play in Havana in the spring of 1921, with Lasker technically considered the challenger rather than the champion. The much younger Capablanca overwhelmed Lasker, winning four games, losing none, and drawing ten.

As world champion, Capablanca retained his air of invincibility. He became internationally famous as he traveled the globe, playing in tournaments and giving simultaneous exhibitions. He dominated international tournaments, winning forty-two games with only three losses. In a 1921 exhibition in Cleveland, he won a remarkable 102 games, while conceding a single draw and no losses. His international renown enabled him to continue his ongoing service as a goodwill ambassador for Cuba, and he appeared in a Soviet silent film, *Chess Fever*, in 1925. During this period, Capablanca married Gloria Simoni Betancourt, with whom he had two children.

In 1927, Capablanca lost the title of world champion to Alexander Alekhine. Unlike Capablanca, who preferred a more relaxed and straightforward style of game play, Alekhine prepared exhaustively for the match, searching his opponent's recorded games for any weaknesses. To the shock of the chess community, Alekhine won the championship with six wins, three losses, and twenty-five draws. Despite Capablanca's successes in tournaments in Berlin in 1928 and in Barcelona and Budapest in 1929, he never played a championship rematch against Alekhine.

### Impact

While the 1920s in chess had primarily been the decade of José Raúl Capablanca, his defeat in 1927 ushered in the era of Alekhine, who held the title throughout much of the next two decades, and the subsequent string of Soviet champions. This defeat also marked a shift in the game of chess itself, signaling a new age in which natural talent was accompanied by extensive study, opening preparation, and rigorous physical training.

*Howard Bromberg*

### Further Reading

Capablanca, José Raúl. *My Chess Career*. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1966.

Linder, Isaak, and Vladimir Linder. *José Raúl Capablanca: Third World Chess Champion*. Milford, Conn.: Russell Enterprises, 2009.

**See also:** Hobbies and recreation; Latin America and the Caribbean; Latinos

---

---

## ■ Waller, Fats

**Identification:** American jazz pianist and composer

**Also known as:** Thomas Wright Waller

**Born:** May 21, 1904, New York, New York

**Died:** December 15, 1943, Kansas City, Missouri

*Fats Waller was an accomplished African American stride pianist, a prolific and popular composer of jazz standards, and an inimitable comic showman.*

Thomas Wright “Fats” Waller started playing piano and organ at an early age and learned jazz as a house musician in movie theaters and nightclubs. He studied with pianist James P. Johnson. As a party entertainer in Harlem, he learned to intersperse his playing with humorous asides and physical mannerisms that became a trademark of his performing style.

Waller perfected the style of stride piano, a difficult form in which the left hand outlines rhythm and chord progressions while the right hand plays melodies and embellishments. In 1922, Waller made his first player piano roll, “Got to Cool My Doggies Now.” That same year, he made his first recordings for Okeh Records, “Muscle Shoals Blues” and “Birmingham Blues.” His music was broadcast on radio stations in New York and New Jersey, and he played as an accompanist to leading blues singers Alberta Hunter, Sara Martin, and Bessie Smith. In 1926, he began recording for Victor Records; he would go on to make over four hundred recordings for Victor over the course of his life.

As a composer, Waller scored his first hit with “Squeeze Me” in 1924. In the following years he wrote a steady succession of hits with lyricist Andy Razaf,

including “Honeysuckle Rose” (1928), “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue” (1929), “I’ve Got a Feeling I’m Falling” (1929), and “A Handful of Keys” (1929). His biggest hit was “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” written for the 1929 revue *Hot Chocolates* at the Harlem nightclub Connie’s Inn. It was popularized by jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong’s nightly performances in the show, as well as Armstrong’s recording of it on July 19, 1929.

In 1921, Waller married Edith Hatchett and they had one child, Thomas Jr., before divorcing. He married Anita Rutherford in 1927. They had two sons, Ronald and Maurice. Waller’s compositions and recordings brought him a steady stream of royalties that he spent on indulgent living and alimony payments.

**Impact**

Waller became a recording star in the 1930s with his six-piece band Fats Waller and His Rhythm. He died of pneumonia at age thirty-nine. Although he was best known for his novelty songs and comedic mannerisms, he was a master pianist and organist. His jazz compositions have stood the test of time. His performances recorded on albums and in film reflected both the absurdity of race relations in the United States and the surrealist ethos of the lost generation.

*Howard Bromberg*

**Further Reading**

Shipton, Alyn. *Fats Waller: The Cheerful Little Earful*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Vance, Joel. *Fats Waller: His Life and Times*. New York: Berkley, 1979.

Waller, Maurice, and Anthony Calabrese. *Fats Waller*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1977.

**See also:** Armstrong, Louis; Jazz; Music, popular; Smith, Bessie

---