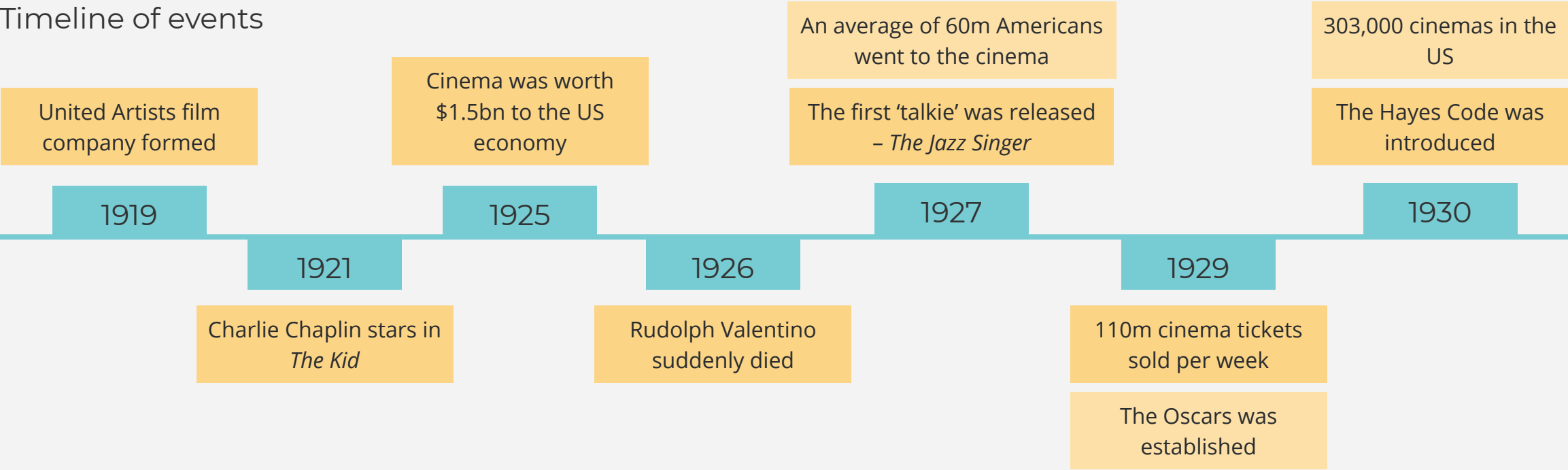


Key Question 4 : How far did the lives of women change in this period?

Timeline of events



Important concept

Perhaps the term 'roaring twenties' best applies to popular entertainment of the time. The seemingly strong economy meant that the glamour of cinema could be realised by many through fashion, parties, jazz clubs and dancing. This combination of greater wealth, new fashion, new music and an exciting 'speakeasy' culture certainly changed the cultural landscape for many.

Cinema

- The cinema was the most exciting development of the time. It influenced people in a number of ways - both in terms of fashion and the way in which people behaved.
- Every small town had a cinema and many Americans, with increased leisure time and disposable income due to changes in working patterns, could go several times a week as it was reasonably cheap.
- During the early 1920s, every movie was silent. Cinemas used to employ musicians to play the piano or electric organ during the films.
- **Hollywood** was the perfect place for outdoor filming as it was located near Los Angeles in the heart of a part of America that had a very dry and sunny climate. It also had a variety of landscapes such as mountains and coastline.
- The major movie companies in Hollywood during this period were Paramount, Warner Bros and MGM. By **marketing** their range of different movies extensively – cowboy movies, detective stories, comedies and romantic movies – they succeeded in generating a huge interest in the movie stars.
- The cinemas were luxurious and pleasant places in which Americans could socialise, and they could get to them easily in their cars.
- The stars also contributed to the increase in the popularity of the cinema. The Italian, Rudolph Valentino, was a very popular actor and his role in *The Sheikh* (1921) made him a sex symbol. He was a star and appeared in many of the early films, earning \$1 million. When he died suddenly in 1926, his fans were grief-stricken and a number of women committed suicide.
- Charlie Chaplin was a very influential figure and was one of the founders of the United Artists film company with Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and D W Griffith in 1919. He was also a famous actor, starring in silent films such as *The Tramp* (1915) and *The Kid* (1921). He was instantly recognisable with his tramp-like image and preferred the craft of the silent movie rather than the **talkies** that came later.
- Arguably women like Clara Bow, the original 'It Girl', were the Hollywood stars that had the most influence on society at the time. She played the part of a **flapper** in a number of films, and influenced many young girls to behave in the same way. She was the most popular actress in 1928 and 1929.
- Actors such as Gloria Swanson and Buster Keaton were also influential.

Key words

Flapper	the term used to describe a liberated, young, fashionable woman in 1920s America whose behaviour would have been considered unconventional
Hollywood	a centre in California for film creation and production
Silent Films	films with no sound
Talkies	films with sound
The Roaring Twenties	a period during the 1920s when people enjoyed cultural and economic developments
Flapper	the term used to describe a liberated, young, fashionable woman in 1920s America whose behaviour would have been considered unconventional
Hollywood	a centre in California for film creation and production

Key Question 4 : How far did the lives of women change in this period?

The 'Talkies'

- In 1927 an average of 60 million Americans went to the cinema on a weekly basis. This increased to over 100 million by 1929.
- The increase was partly due to the development of audio films in 1927, with Al Jolson starring in *The Jazz Singer* (1927) marking the beginning of the era of the talkies. The increase was also down to Hollywood's success in producing 500 films per year.
- The 1920s was also the era of the cartoon, with *Felix the Cat* (1925) and *Mickey Mouse* (1928) gaining popularity among people of all ages.
- In 1929 The Oscars were established to honour film stars.
- But not every American was happy with the new cinemas.
- The Hays Code was drawn up in 1930. In accordance with this code, scenes of nudity and dancing of a sexual nature were prohibited, a kiss could last for no more than seven metres of film, adultery was not to be portrayed in a good light, clergymen were not to be ridiculed and films should condemn killing.
- Some people, especially religious people, were very concerned about a lack of morals and the influence of the films on young people.

Popular music and culture

- Some referred to the 1920s as **The Roaring Twenties**. People had more money to spend and more time to listen to the music of the time.
- Jazz originated from the southern states of the USA, from the blues and ragtime music of the black people. Jazz was much more rhythmic and lively, and it was easy to dance to. This led to young people smoking, drinking and, according to some, behaving indecently. College students, especially, were willing to challenge their parents' values and lifestyle.
- A number of black musicians became very famous, including Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith, The Empress of the Blues. But racism was still a major problem during this period. When Bessie Smith had a serious car crash in 1937, she was taken to a hospital that was for white people only. The hospital refused to treat her because she was black and she died.
- Listening to the radio was arguably the most popular form of entertainment. Mass production, the spread of electricity and buying on hire-purchase meant that approximately 50 million people, that's 40 per cent of the population, had a radio set by the end of the 1920s.
- Also, as the popularity of jazz increased, more people bought radios, records and gramophones so that they could listen to jazz any time they wanted to.
- People could also listen to their favourite team taking part in sports matches, The radio was able to grow and succeed because companies paid to advertise their products on the medium.
- More daring dances became popular after World War One. These resulted from swing dancing that developed alongside jazz music, and so black people had a huge influence.
- Dances such as the **Charleston** and the **Black Bottom** became very popular with young people.
- Because many of these new dances were sexually suggestive, parents were shocked by their children's enthusiasm to dance them.
- The Lindy Hop also became a popular dance – this dance honoured **Charles Lindbergh** for crossing the Atlantic in an aeroplane in 1927. Jazz had been prohibited in a number of cities, for example New York and Detroit. So, the performances moved to the speakeasies, making the young people even more determined to rebel.