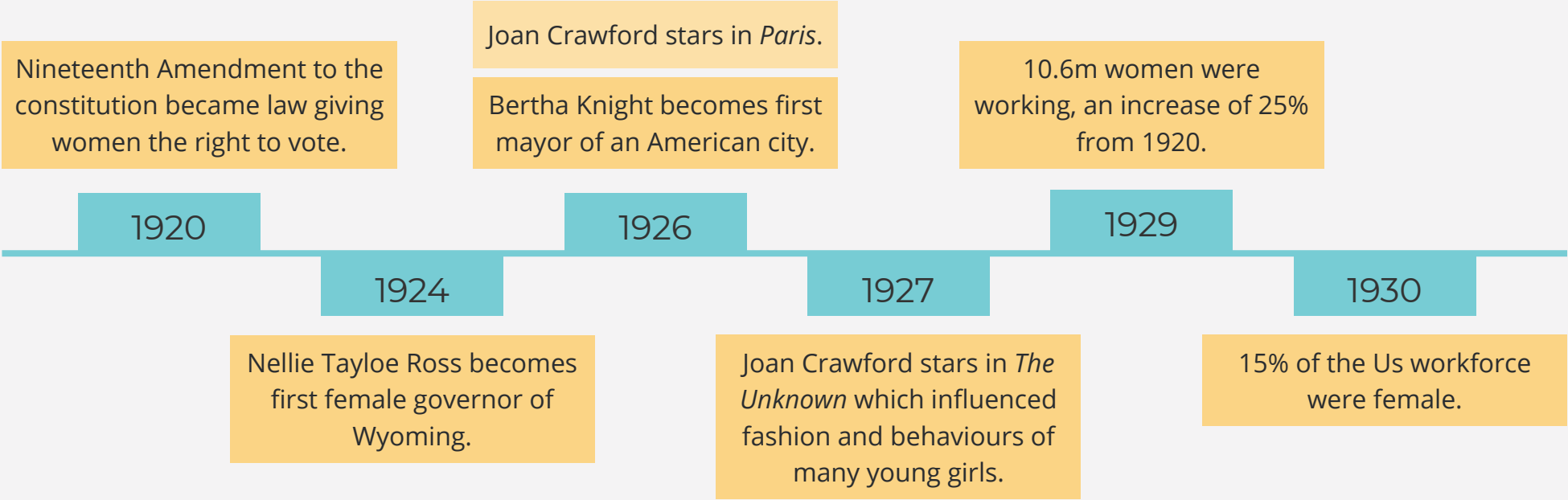


Key Question 7: How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

Timeline of events



Key words	
Flapper	the term used to describe a liberated, young, fashionable woman in 1920s America whose behaviour would have been considered unconventional
Chaperone	a person who would accompany and look after young women, typically on older relative
'Bob' haircut	short female haircut
National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)	group campaigning for the rights of women to vote
Anti-Flirt League	group set up to challenge the behaviour of flappers

Important concept

There's no doubt that the status of women changed during the period. Politically, in terms of the vote and greater representation, as well as socially, many women's lives were unrecognisable from those of their mothers' generation. However, this impact was not felt by all. It was certainly a time for change for the middle classes, the young and those in cities but perhaps less so for everyone else.

Changing attitudes towards women

- The general view is that attitudes towards women underwent a significant shift during the 1920s. Before the war, girls were expected to behave modestly and wear long dresses. When they went out, they had to be accompanied by an older woman or a married woman.
- It was totally unacceptable for a woman to smoke in public. Women were employed in jobs that were traditionally associated with women, e.g. servants, seamstresses, secretaries, nursing.
- During the war, women started to be employed in different types of jobs, e.g. factory work, replacing the men who had gone to fight in the war in Europe.
- Organisations such as the **National American Woman Suffrage Association** (NAWSA) had been fighting for decades to get the vote for women. As women had contributed so much to the war effort, it was difficult to refuse their demands for political equality. As a result, the **Nineteenth Amendment** to the constitution became law in 1920, giving women the right to vote. Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming became the first woman to be elected governor of state in 1924.
- There was a change as far as work was concerned too, with an increase of 25 per cent in the number of women working during the 1920s. By 1929, 10.6 million women were working.
- By now, independent women of the middle classes and above had more money to spend. Because of this, advertising companies started targeting women in their campaigns to encourage them to buy their new products.

Key Question 7: How did the lifestyle and status of women change during this period?

Changing attitudes to social etiquette

- Women started to smoke in public. It became acceptable for women to drive cars and take part in energetic sports.
- The young women of the 1920s were referred to as **flappers**. Hollywood films of the period characterised them, and as a result, their behaviour and dress sense was imitated by millions around the world.
- In 1919 women's skirts were about six inches above ground level, but by 1927 the hems of skirts were up to knee-level. Young women rebelled against the old-fashioned clothes of their mothers' era.
- The corset went out of fashion, and it became all the rage for women to cut their hair in a bob and wear a lot of make-up and jewellery.
- One famous flapper of the time was Joan Crawford. She started her career as a dancer on Broadway before moving to Hollywood to make a name for herself. She starred in films such as *Paris* (1926) and *The Unknown* (1927) in which she became famous for her flapper style. She drank, smoked, danced the Charleston and even kissed on screen. Many young girls admired and copied her style.

Influence of jazz culture

- Jazz wasn't just about the music – there was a wider cultural element associated with it.
- The Jazz clubs played a crucial role in allowing the flappers to express themselves. This is where they could smoke and dance. They also drank illegal alcohol in the speakeasies.
- Instead of dancing the waltz that was popular in the period before the war, people started to enjoy more daring dances such as the Shimmy and the Bunny Hug.
- **Petting parties** began where the flappers would kiss men in public.
- The flappers had their own slang. I have to go see a man about a dog was slang for going to buy whiskey, and a 'handcuff' or 'manacle' was an engagement or wedding ring.
- A number of the flappers' terms are still used today, e.g. 'big cheese' for an important person, 'bump off' for killing someone and 'hooch' for alcohol.
- But not every girl enjoyed the flappers' way of life. Poor women could not afford the new fashions and they didn't have the time to go out and enjoy social events. Black women could not benefit from the changing lifestyle either.
- Women in the **Bible Belt** did not adopt the new way of life. Also, many older women were outraged and some formed the Anti-Flirt Club.
- **It was the young and rich women who enjoyed the new way of life. Older people and religious people rejected the changes, and the poor people could not afford them.**