

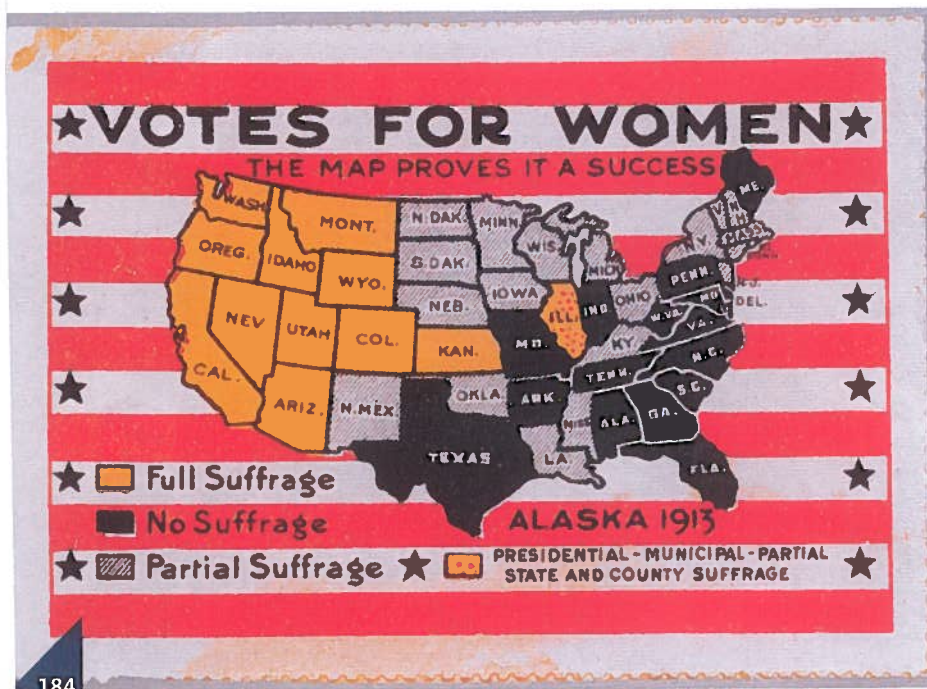
Effects of the war

Before the war, women in the USA were still struggling for suffrage (the right to vote). When the USA entered the war, the government asked women to do the work of men who had gone to war. Women went to work in their millions.

The war gave women the experience of independence, of earning wages and of showing what they were capable of doing. They had to work for lower wages than men, but even this was a victory. In 1918, even before the war was over, President Wilson urged the Senate to pass a federal law giving women equal voting rights, saying: 'We have made partners of the women in this war. Shall we allow them only a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil, and not a partnership of privilege and right?' The 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, giving women equal suffrage, became law on 18 August 1920. After the war, women were expected to let the returning men have their jobs back. Most young women worked. But this was seen as only temporary, until they married.

	1910	1920	1930
White-collar workers			
Male	6,019	7,176	9,564
Female	1,943	3,353	4,756
Manual and service workers			
Male	13,469	16,172	18,956
Female	4,327	4,115	5,088
Farmworkers			
Male	10,359	10,221	9,414
Female	1,175	1,169	908
Total workers, male and female	37,292	42,206	48,686

Source B: Men and women in the workforce, taken from US government statistics (in thousands).



Examination question

'In the 1920s the position of women changed enormously.'

Use the sources and your own knowledge to explain whether you agree with this view.

(15 marks)

Source A: This 'Votes for Women' stamp from 1913, despite its positive message, shows that less than half the US states allowed women the vote on an equal level with men. The map shows states where women have 'partial suffrage' – some voting rights, but not equal to men.

In what ways did the position of women change?

The position of women before 1917

POLITICAL POSITION
Women played no part in politics. They did not have the vote.

SOCIAL POSITION
It was thought to be un-ladylike to smoke or drink in public. A woman would be accompanied by a chaperone if she went out during the day or evening. Divorce was rare, and so was sex before marriage.



EMPLOYMENT
Opportunities were limited. Most middle- and upper-class women did not go out to work as this would interfere with their domestic role as mother and housewife. Most working women were employed in low paid jobs, such as cleaning, dress-making and secretarial work.

APPEARANCE
Women were expected to wear tight-waisted, ankle-length dresses, have long hair which was tied back and to wear no make-up.

Source A: Elementary schoolgirls learning to cook, Washington, DC, 1900



Changes after 1917

After 1917, several factors changed the position of women – especially a group known as the flappers.

- The USA's entry into the First World War provided new employment opportunities for women, especially in heavy industry. They proved they could do these jobs just as well as men. This sort of work also encouraged freer behaviour. For the first time, women smoked and drank in public and went out unchaperoned.
- Women were given the vote in 1920. This increase in political power encouraged some to campaign for further change.
- During the consumer boom of the 1920s, the development of new labour-saving devices, such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines, gave women more opportunities for leisure and work.

The flappers

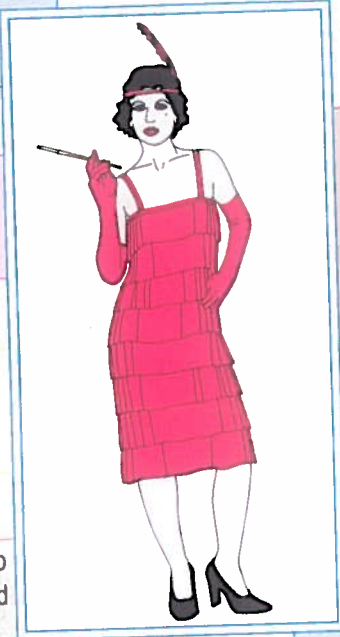
In the 1920s a number of women, generally from middle- and upper-class families living in the northern states, decided to challenge society's traditional attitudes towards women. They became known as the flappers. Their aim was to become more independent in their social life and to take a freer approach to their behaviour and appearance.

They cut their hair short and wore make-up.

They wore short skirts and very bright clothes.

They smoked and drank in public.

They went out to speakeasies and to the cinema without a chaperone.



They openly danced with men in public. Their particular favourite was the new craze, the Charleston. They also listened to controversial new music known as jazz.

They drove cars and even motorbikes.

They wore very revealing swimming costumes on public beaches.

Source A: A view of flappers from the *New York Times*, 1922

A flapper is shameless, selfish and honest but at the same time she thinks of these things as good. Why not? She takes a man's point of view as her mother never could. When she loses she is not afraid to admit defeat, whether it be a lover or \$20 at an auction. She will never make you a husband or knit you a necktie, but she'll drive you from the station on hot summer nights in her own sports car. She'll put on trousers and go skiing with you or, if it happens to be summertime, go swimming.

Source B: Flappers dance the Charleston at a New York club in 1926



Source C: F Scott Fitzgerald was a famous American author who wrote about the roaring twenties. In 1920 he married Zelda Zayre, who was a typical flapper

Flirting, kissing, viewing life lightly, saying damn without a blush, playing along the danger line in an immature way – a sort of mental baby vamp.

Source D: An article with the title 'Flapper Jane' from a US magazine, 1925

Jane's a flapper. Let us take a look at the young person as she strolls across the lawn of her parent's suburban home, having just put the car away after driving sixty miles in two hours. She is, for one thing, a pretty girl. Beauty is the fashion in 1925. She is frankly, heavily made up with poisonously scarlet lips and richly ringed eyes. As for her clothes, Jane isn't wearing much this summer. Her dress is brief. It is cut low. The skirt comes just below the knees. The bra has been abandoned since 1924.

Source E: From a letter written to the *Daily Illini*, 1922

The word 'flapper' to us means not a female that smokes, swears and kisses her gentlemen friends goodnight, although there is no harm in any of that. We think of the flapper as the independent young woman who feels like punching someone when called the 'weaker sex', who resents being put on a pedestal and who is responsible for the advancement of women's condition in the world.

In some respects, however, the flappers did not advance the cause of women's rights in the 1920s. Many traditional groups, especially in rural areas, saw them as too extreme, and they met with strong disapproval from religious societies. Some flappers deliberately flouted the law and were arrested – for example, for wearing revealing clothing such as banned swimsuits (see Source F). Other observers dismissed the flappers as simply pleasure-seeking women with few other attributes.

Source F: A group of flappers in Chicago being arrested for wearing banned one-piece bathing suits which were seen as too figure-hugging



Source G: An English journalist writing about flappers in the USA in 1921

Think of the modern young American girl of this great country. Do they ever think? Do they ever ask whence they have come? It would seem not. Their aim appears to be to attract men and to secure money. What can a man with a mind find to hold him in one of these lovely, brainless, cigarette-smoking creatures of undisciplined sex whom he meets continually?

Other changes in the position of women

There were other important developments in the status of women in the USA in the 1920s.

Employment opportunities

There was certainly progress in the numbers of women in employment. By 1930 two million more women were employed than had been the case ten years earlier. However, these women tended to do poorly paid unskilled jobs. Despite the fact that a third of university degrees were awarded to women in 1930, only 4 per cent of university professors were women. Medical schools allocated only 5 per cent of places to women. Consequently, the number of female doctors actually declined in the 1920s.

A man doing the same job as a woman still received a lot more pay. Women received no support from the **Supreme Court**, which banned all attempts to set **minimum wages** for women. In 1927, when female textile workers in Tennessee went on strike for better pay, the government took the side of the employers. The strikers were arrested by the local police.

There were some new career opportunities for women, but these were in so-called 'women's jobs', such as librarians and nurses.

Source H: A table showing the percentage of women in certain jobs in the years 1900–30

	1900	1930
Professional and technical workers	8	14
Managers and officials	1	3
Clerical and sales workers	8	28
Skilled craftspeople	1	1
Workers and labourers	26	19
Domestic servants	29	18
Other service workers	7	10
Farmers	6	2

Marriage

The media, and especially magazines, reminded women that they should marry and have children. Once women married, they generally gave up work. Nevertheless, married women in the 1920s tended to have fewer children and lived longer than their mothers and grandmothers had. In 1900, the average lifespan for a woman was

51 years. By 1925 this figure had increased to 63. In 1900, American women had an average of 3.6 children. This figure had fallen to 2.6 by 1930.

Women were less likely to remain in unhappy marriages in the 1920s. In 1914 there were 100,000 divorces. There were twice as many in 1929.

Politics

Women were given the vote in 1920. A few women did make progress in gaining political power. For example, in 1924 Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming became the first woman to be elected **governor** of a state. Two years later, Bertha Knight Landes became the first female mayor of an American city, Seattle.

However, these women were the exception, and women made little progress in politics itself. Political parties wanted their vote but did not see them as realistic candidates for political office. By 1920 there were only a handful of female politicians. Most women, in any case, had little interest in politics. The **women's movement** failed in its attempt to get the Equal Rights Amendment Act passed. The act would have given women equality in law with men.

Entertainment

The popularity of the cinema, radio and dance halls provided further opportunities for women. For example, Mary Pickford and Clara Bow became stars of silent movies; they were so successful that they joined two other stars in setting up their own film company. Mae West, Gloria Swanson and Jean Harlow became stars of the 'talkies' and role models for many younger American girls.

Society

The flappers did pave the way for a more tolerant approach to the social position of women. More women worked, and with more money of their own, working women increasingly made the decisions about whether to buy new items for the home. Even women who did not earn their own money were increasingly seen as the ones who took these purchasing decisions. Advertising was aimed specifically at women for this reason. It has even been suggested that it was pressure from women that convinced Ford to offer other colours, apart from black, for their cars.

Middletown woman

In the early 1920s two researchers led a team of people in a survey of the life of a small American town. In the book they wrote about it they did not name their town but called it Middletown. It was in fact Muncie, Indiana. It gives us one of the most complete portraits of American women and home life in this period that is available.

Summary of some of the findings

86% owned their own homes.

99% of homes wired for electricity. Electricity consumption had gone up by 25% in four years.

Differences between middle- and working-class homes

Middle class	Working class
All homes had a telephone	Half had a telephone
All had a car	60% had a car
None of the housewives got up before 6 a.m.	40% of housewives got up before 5 a.m., 90% before 6 a.m.

Views of women on women's issues

- Women should make a good home for their husbands and care for children but also earn money outside the home.
- Mothers thought that the behaviour of their daughters was changing; for example, they didn't want to learn sewing. They wanted to go out, they were more aware of sex, largely through the cinema, and were more likely to make the first moves on boys.
- Labour-saving devices had helped ease the burden of housework. Running water, coal fires (instead of wood) and linoleum floors (instead of wood or stone) had helped to reduce domestic chores. Canned goods, bakers' bread, and ready-made clothing were also very helpful.

SOURCE 11 The views of Dorothy Dix who wrote the advice column in the local newspaper that was read by the majority of Middletown women

“The old idea used to be that the way a woman helps her husband was by being thrifty and industrious, by peeling the potatoes a little thinner and making over her old hats and frocks. But the woman who makes of herself nothing but a domestic drudge is not a help to her husband. She is a hindrance and a man's wife is the show window where he exhibits the measure of his achievement.

Good looks are a girl's trump card. Dress well and appear 50% better looking than you are, make yourself charming, cultivate bridge and dancing, the ability to play jazz and a few outdoor sports... In general brains seems to be regarded as of small importance in a wife.”

SOURCE 9 Items sold by five electrical goods shops in Middletown May–October 1923

“ Curlers	1173
Irons	1114
Vacuum cleaners	709
Toasters	463
Washing machines	371
Heaters	114
Fridges	11 ”

SOURCE 10 Comments of middle- and working-class mothers on their daughters

“Girls aren't so modest nowadays; they dress differently. It's the girls' clothing; we can't keep our boys decent when girls dress that way.

Girls have more nerve nowadays – look at their clothes!

Girls are far more aggressive today. They call the boys up to try to make dates with them as they never would when I was a girl.”

Activity

Some of the statements below are correct, some are wrong. Copy the correct ones. Copy **a corrected version** of the wrong ones.

- a American women got equal voting right to men in 1918.
- b The number of women working rose sharply between 1910 and 1930.
- c 'Flappers' was the name given to young, single, independent women who did not conform to the traditional image of women.
- d Flappers who married changed their ways and behaved exactly as their mothers and grandmothers had.

Build Better Answers

'In the 1920s the position of women changed enormously'. Use the sources and your own knowledge to explain whether you agree with this view. (15 marks)

Paper 2, Section A part (c) questions expect an extended piece of writing, weighing up how far the sources and your own knowledge support a statement.

■ **A basic answer (level 1)** will make a generalised statement.

● **A good answer (level 2)** will give an answer supported by the sources and/or own knowledge. An answer for and against the view will gain higher marks.

▲ **A better answer (level 3)** will use detail from three or more of the sources for and against the statement. Adding own knowledge will gain higher marks in the level.

▲ **An excellent answer (top of level 4)** would use detail from three or more of the sources and their own knowledge to give an overall view on the level of support (for and against) the statement.