

## Knowledge Map: USA 1910 – 1929 5. The role of women

<b>Summary:</b>	During the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century, attitudes towards the role and status of women changed. The First World War played a key role in accelerating this, and women were able to adopt a new social and political position. Some women, known as flappers, embraced new fashions, and new social life and adopted a more independent lifestyle. However for many women there was little change in their status or employment opportunities.
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### Women in the pre – war years

#### Summary

The lives of women in this role were very restricted and few women were independent from men.

#### Key knowledge

1.	Political role	Women were not allowed to play a part in politics and were only allowed to vote in a few states.
2.	Social role	It was thought to be unladylike for a woman to smoke, drink or play sports in public. A woman would be accompanied by a chaperone if she went out during the day or evening. Divorce and sex before marriage were very rare.
3.	Employment	Most middle and upper class women did not go out to work as they were expected to be mothers and housewives. The few who did work would be teachers or nurses. The few working class women who worked did low paid jobs like dress making or cleaning.
4.	Appearance	Women were expected to wear restrictive clothing consisting of tight – waisted, ankle – length dresses. They were discouraged from wearing make – up.

### The changing role of women

#### Summary

The American entry into the First World War in 1917 provided greater opportunities for women in terms of employment. This then led to greater freedom for women and advances in politics.

#### Key knowledge

5.	The impact of the First World War	During the war 90,000 women enlisted into the US military serving in supporting roles such as clerks, radio operators, chemists, accountants and nurses. They also served in the Red Cross and Salvation Army, and worked as farm labourers. They did jobs traditionally done by men, such as heavy industry and transport. The war also encouraged greater freedom and women could smoke and drink in public and go out un-chaperoned.
6.	Female suffrage	Women's suffrage groups such as the North American Women Suffrage Association (formed in 1890) and the Congressional Union for Women's Suffrage (formed in 1913) had been campaigning for the vote, but had been unsuccessful. The First World War was a turning point and made their demands for political equality hard to resist.
7.	The 19 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Became law in 1920. It was a federal law so gave women in all states the right to vote in national elections. However many women had little interest in politics.
8.	Women in political positions	In 1920 Jeanette Rankin represented Montana to be the first female Congressman. In 1924 Nellie Tayloe Rose of Wyoming became the first woman to be elected Governor of a state. In 1926 Bertha Knight Landes became the first female mayor of an American city, Seattle.

9.	Employment	More skilled and educated women were hired. 30% of employees in clerical office or sales positions were women. However women were paid less than men for the same job.
10.	Education	By 1928 women earned 39% of college degrees in America, up from 19% in 1900. However they still faced limited access to higher education in subjects like law and medicine.
11.	Other advances	The use of birth control was promoted for the first time in the 1920s. Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic in 1928. Pilots were traditionally men.

### The Flapper lifestyle

#### Summary

Flappers were middle and upper class, young women who had more freedom than ever before. However they were seen as too extreme by many traditional groups.

#### Key knowledge

12.	Behaviour	Flappers would drive motor cars which gave them more freedom. They would behave in a more masculine way and smoke and drink in public, without chaperones. They would dance to Jazz music. They did not feel pressure to find a man, settle down, marry or have children.
13.	Appearance	They cut their hair short and wore make up. They wore short skirts and bright colours – sometimes their clothes would be more masculine, other times provocative. They wore revealing swimwear on public beaches.
14.	Joan Crawford	The most famous flapper. She kissed, drank, smoked and danced the Charleston in films. Women loved it and tried to copy her.
15.	Other flapper icons	Louise Brooks was a silent film star. She played flappers in a number of films. Clara Bow was seen as the leading 'sex symbol in the 1920s.
16.	Opposition to the flapper lifestyle	In many areas, especially rural areas where the Church still shaped people's attitudes, attitudes towards women did not change and flappers were not welcome. The President of Florida University said the low cut gowns and short skirts 'are born of the devil, they are carrying the present generation to destruction'. In some states women were arrested for wearing bathing costumes that were too revealing.

#### Key words

<b>Chaperone</b>	Being accompanied in public by an older man or woman.
<b>Suffrage</b>	The right to vote.
<b>Enlisted</b>	Joining up to the armed forces.
<b>Anti – Flirt League</b>	Formed by mothers to protest against the actions of their flapper daughters.