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The Hemline Index: Skirt Lengths and Finance

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Hemlin Index Skirt

The Roaring Twenties, a time of jazz, cinema, and “scandalous” fashion — skirts are getting shorter and shorter each year. But, what’s the connection between these rising hemlines and the booming economy of the 1920s? This ‘phenomenon’ can be explained through a concept recognized by Wharton Business School professor George Taylor, “The Hemline Index”.

The hemline index suggests that when the economy was prospering, the hemlines would creep up to match the ‘vibe’ of the period, falling back down when a recession hit. Taylor predicted this theory in 1926, during the economic boom of the Roaring Twenties when shorter, flapper skirts were popular; shift dresses and flappers were well known, and extravagance and maximalism were in the house. Once the Great Depression hit in 1929, the hemlines dropped to the lower calf, reflecting the somber mood of the economic crisis.

The trend continued throughout the decades — and is still present today. The wartime booms during the 1940s, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the strengthening US economy, once again gave rise to the decrease in skirt’s length — til the miniskirt of the '60s. In 1960, mini skirts were



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TikTok), 'longer' and more modest skirts are now seen as 'classy' and 'old-money', whilst flashy and shorter skirts are viewed as 'tacky' and 'tasteless'.



Figure 1: Midi Skirt



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Figure 2: Maxi Skirt

References

- <https://thegauntlet.ca/2022/10/31/the-hemline-index-how-fashion-reflects-economic-trends/>
- <https://oaklandpostonline.com/47204/politics/when-fashion-meets-finance-the-hemline-index/>

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