



The following definitions and explanations should give you a better understanding of this chapter.

- Bootlegging** To make, carry or sell illegal alcohol.
- Collective bargaining** A group of workers (usually a trade union) who negotiate for better conditions.
- Congress** The American parliament consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- Constitution** A set of laws and rules which control how a country is governed.
- Consumer** Someone who purchases goods.
- Discrimination** Unfair treatment of a person or racial group.
- Ghettos** A slum area of a town or city inhabited by a deprived group.
- Immigrants** People coming from abroad to live in a country.
- Isolationism** A policy of withdrawing from international affairs. America would concentrate on its own concerns and not get involved in the rest of the world's problems.
- Laissez-faire** A policy of non-interference by the government in industry and society.
- The Mafia** A secret organisation founded in Sicily and carried to the USA by Italian immigrants where it became a criminal organisation.
- Prohibition** The ban on the manufacture and sale of alcohol in the USA, 1920–33.
- Rugged individualism** The policy of 'standing on your own two feet' and not relying on government help.
- Supreme Court** The highest court in the USA which decides whether laws or policies follow the US Constitution.
- Tariff** Tax or duty on goods coming into a country.

# How could you become the President?

**A**MERICAN PRESIDENTS ARE extremely powerful despite the checks on their power built into the Constitution. They can affect the lives of every single American by the way they lead the country. So who the President is, is important.

In theory anyone could become the President. One of the most famous Presidents of all was Abraham

Lincoln, who started life as the son of a poor farmer and worked his way up. Americans loved this sort of story: to them it was proof that America was the land of opportunity. In practice, however, in the twentieth century, there were certain qualities that helped you become President.



## WOODROW WILSON 1856–1924

**President:** 1913–21

**Born:** Virginia

**Father:** church minister

**Religion:** Protestant

**Job before election:** university professor. Had no career in politics before he became President

**Party:** Democrat

**Comments:** clever, arrogant and stubborn. Wilson was a great crusader who thought the government should do more to tackle problems in America and around the world.



## WARREN HARDING 1865–1923

**President:** 1921–23

**Born:** Ohio

**Father:** poor farmer/vet

**Religion:** Protestant

**Job before election:** newspaper owner and US Senator

**Party:** Republican

**Comments:** good socialiser and speaker. Harding got on well with people but was not clever or able. He liked girls and parties. He gave important jobs in the government to his friends from Ohio. Some of these were corrupt and took bribes, but Harding died before he could be involved in any scandal.



## CALVIN COOLIDGE 1872–1933

**President:** 1923–29

**Born:** Vermont

**Father:** storekeeper

**Religion:** Protestant

**Job before election:** lawyer and Governor of New York, Harding's Vice President

**Party:** Republican

**Comments:** quiet and reserved, known as 'Silent Cal'. An honest and upright man, Coolidge believed that the best type of government was one that interfered least in the lives of its citizens. He did very little as President, and insisted on twelve hours sleep and an afternoon nap each day.



# HOW AMERICA IS GOVERNED: THE PRESIDENTS OF THE 1920s

As you have found out, the President of America has a great deal of power. He is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, head of state and head of the government. He is the most powerful elected leader in the world. What kind of men held this important office during the 1920s?

## Woodrow Wilson, 1913–21

In 1920 the American President was a Democrat, Woodrow Wilson. Under his leadership, America had entered the Great War in 1917 on the side of the Allies. In 1919, when the war was over, Wilson went to Paris to help draw up peace treaties.

Wilson's main aim at the Paris Peace Conference was to set up a world peace-keeping organisation. He succeeded, and a League of Nations was created in 1920.

But the Republican Party in Congress did not want America to join the League of Nations. There was a strong feeling throughout the country that America should have nothing more to do with the affairs of Europe.

Wilson tried to get support for joining the League by going on a tour of America, making speeches. But half way through his tour Wilson collapsed with a stroke. Now he was an invalid, paralysed down one side of his body. While he lay ill in the White House, the Senate voted against joining the League of Nations. It was the start of a period of isolation in American history, when America kept out of the affairs of other countries as far as possible.

In November 1920 there was an election for the Presidency. Wilson was too ill to stand for re-election. Anyway, the voters had turned against his ideas of peace and international brotherhood. With a record number of votes they elected a Republican, Warren G. Harding, to be their next President.

## Warren G. Harding, 1921–3

When Harding won the election, one Republican Senator said 'Harding is no world-beater. But he's the best of the second-raters'.

Harding knew he was not a brilliant politician, so he gave the best jobs in the Cabinet to first-rate politicians who knew what they were doing. However, he also gave important jobs to his friends. They were known as the Ohio Gang, after the state

of Ohio that Harding came from. The Ohio Gang was soon meeting in the White House to do the things that Harding liked best – drinking whisky and playing poker for high stakes.

Several members of the Ohio Gang were very dishonest. Charles Forbes, Harding's closest friend, was the director of a government department called the Veterans' Bureau. His job was to take care of disabled American soldiers. During his two years as director, over \$200 million of the Bureau's money disappeared, much of it into Forbes's pockets.

Another member of the Ohio Gang, Albert Fall, sold an oil company the right to drill for oil at Teapot Dome in the state of Wyoming. The oil was not his to sell, for Teapot Dome was government-owned land. Albert Fall made \$100,000 out of the deal.

The public knew almost nothing of these scandals while Harding was President. Harry Daugherty, the Attorney-General at the head of the American legal system, was one of the Ohio Gang, and he managed to cover up the scandals for several years.

Warren Harding was a popular President. He promised to take America 'back to normalcy'. This meant getting back to the kind of life that the Great War had interrupted. Americans could now concentrate on building up the country and making themselves prosperous instead of being involved in foreign affairs.

Harding died suddenly of a stroke in 1923 and was succeeded by his deputy, Vice-President Calvin Coolidge.

## Calvin Coolidge, 1923–9

Calvin Coolidge was mean and dull, and he said very little. For this reason he was known as 'Silent Cal'.

One of the things that 'Silent Cal' did say was 'the business of America is business'. He meant that Americans should concentrate on making themselves prosperous – by setting up companies, by investing money, and by working hard.

Under Coolidge, many Americans became rich. This was not due to him, however. As a Republican, he believed that the government should not interfere in people's lives. He therefore did very little as President, working an average of only four hours a day. The people who got rich did so by their own efforts.

Coolidge was an honest man and one of the few

# HOW AMERICA IS GOVERNED: THE CONSTITUTION

'My country! 'tis of thee,  
Sweet Land of Liberty,  
Of thee I sing.  
Land where my fathers died!  
Land of the Pilgrims' pride!  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring!'

These lines are from 'America', a patriotic American song. It has the same tune as the British national anthem. One reason why Americans call their country a 'land of liberty' is their democratic system of government. Before going any further we need to understand how America is governed.

## A union of states

The USA was born on 4 July 1774 when thirteen British colonies in North America declared that they wanted to be independent. After fighting a War of Independence against Britain, the Americans joined the thirteen colonies together into a new nation, the

United States of America. The original thirteen states are remembered by the thirteen stripes on the American flag. Since then, other states have been formed and have joined the union. Now there are fifty states, represented by fifty stars on the flag.

## The Constitution

Soon after winning independence the Americans drew up a **Constitution**. The Constitution is a set of rules describing how America must be governed. Part of it, called the **Bill of Rights**, also describes the rights of the people.

The constitution describes a **federal** system of government. This means that the job of running the country is divided between two kinds of government – the central, or federal, government in Washington, and the local governments of each of the fifty states.

As you can see from the diagram opposite, there are three branches of the federal government. The **legislative** branch makes the country's laws, the

**executive** branch carries out these laws, and the **judiciary** makes sure the laws are obeyed. Nobody is allowed to belong to more than one of these branches, so nobody can get too much power.

The fifty state governments are also divided into three branches. Each state has a Governor at the head of the executive branch, a legislature for making state laws, and a system of state courts. In each state the laws are different, so gambling is against the law in some states but quite legal in others. The police of one state cannot chase a criminal into another state. Only federal police, such as the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), can cross state borders.

## Democracy

The American system of government is a **democracy**. This means that all adults in America have certain equal rights. The first is the right to vote. Americans vote in elections for the President and for Congress. They also vote in local elections for their state Governors and Legislatures, and for public officials such as the judges of law courts.

In addition to the right to vote, Americans have many rights which safeguard their freedom. These are listed in the Bill of Rights. They have the rights of free speech and a free press, as well as the right of free assembly – the right to meet and form groups such as trade unions. The Bill of Rights even gives them the right to carry weapons to protect themselves.

In elections, voters have two main political parties to choose between. The **Democratic Party** tends to be liberal – it favours helping the poor and the old, for example. The **Republican Party** is more conservative – it often supports businessmen and wealthy people.

### The legislative branch

*Congress* makes laws. It is the American parliament and has two houses.

#### *House of*

#### *Representatives*

435 members, or 'Congressmen'. Each Congressman represents about 450,000 voters. They are elected for two years.

#### *Senate*

100 members, or 'Senators'. There are two Senators from each state. They are elected for six years.

### The executive branch

#### *President*

Elected every four years. The President is

- Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy;
- head of government (like the British Prime Minister);
- head of state (like the British monarch).

#### *Cabinet*

A group of advisers to the President, called Secretaries. They are like Ministers in the British government.

### The judicial branch

#### *Supreme Court*

Nine judges appointed by the President. Their job is to make sure that Congress and the President run the country according to the Constitution.