

In Search of the American Dream: the USA, c.1917-96  
Topic 1: The Changing Political Environment

<b>Key Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Democrats	Members of one of the two main political parties. From the Roosevelt era, more supportive of government interventionism and more on the left of the political spectrum.
Republicans	Members of the more conservative of the two main political parties. Generally opposed to federal government interventionism on behalf of the less privileged, but often interventionist if business can be assisted.
Separation of Powers	The U.S. Constitution establishes three separate but equal branches of government: the legislative branch (makes the law), the executive branch (enforces the law), and the judicial branch (interprets the law). The Framers structured the government in this way to prevent one branch of government from becoming too powerful, and to create a system of checks and balances.
Congress	The law making body of the USA. It has two elected bodies, the Senate and the House of Representatives, that both have to agree to laws before they become active. The president can veto any laws agreed by Congress.
American Dream	Belief that the nature of US society enables an individual to fulfil his or her potential, especially through wealth.
Rugged Individualism	Belief that individuals can and should succeed by their own efforts rather than through government aid.
Isolationist	Terms used to describe US foreign policy and opinion during the 1920s and 1930s, when there was a frequently hostile reaction to suggestions of interaction with other countries that would place some limitation or obligation on the United States.
Tariffs	Taxes put on goods going into, or out of a country to encourage or discourage trading abroad.
Hire purchase	Buying goods on credit; taking them at once but paying for them in regular instalments over a set period of time.
Capitalism	Economic system under which, theoretically, there should be no government intervention to interfere with the free market.
Wall Street Crash	When the US stock market collapsed, sending the USA, then many other countries, into the Great Depression.
Great Depression	Period of large scale unemployment in America beginning in the winter of 1929-30 and ending with the outbreak of the Second World War.

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New Deal	Roosevelt's plan to get the USA out of the Depression; an unprecedented programme of federal aid to those most in need.
Laissez-faire	French for 'leave well alone'. This policy meant minimal government interference: for example, not regulating businesses and not providing welfare for the poor.
Ku Klux Klan	A white supremacist organisation, suppressed in the 1870s and refounded in 1915, the racist, anti-communist and anti-immigrant.
Federal government	The national government of the United States, based in Washington DC and consisting of the President (the executive), Congress, (makes laws) and the Supreme Court (interprets laws).
Progressives	American reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who sought government action to deal with political corruption and economic and social problems. There were progressives amongst both the Republican and Democratic parties, and a short lived Progressive Party (1912-1918).
Prohibition	From 1920 to 1933 it was illegal to manufacture and sell alcohol in the US.
HUAC - House Un-American Activities Commission	House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC), set up in 1938, made permanent in 1945, investigated for all 'un-American' activities, but focused on 'communists.'
Red Scare	Period of hysterical American anti-Communism. The first was after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the second was in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
Voluntarism	Idea favoured by Hoover that individuals, businesses and state governments should handle problems such as the Great Depression through their voluntary cooperation and efforts.
League of Nations	International organisation in 1919 in order to help ensure world peace through collective security and disarmament.
Senate	One of the two chambers of US Congress. Two senators are elected from each state.
Communism	Political ideology based upon the belief that economic equality should be brought about by the revolutionary redistribution of wealth, following the takeover of society by the working class.
Amendment	Under the American Constitution, Congress could make additions to the Constitution. These needed ratification (approval) by 75 per cent of states.
Constitution	The rules and system by which a country's government works. The USA has a written constitution.
Anarchist	Someone who disapproves of the accepted forms of government and is usually willing to use violence to be rid of them.

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Protectionist	The favouring of economic policies such as tariffs that make foreign imports dearer and thereby help domestic industry.
Socialists	Believers in a political philosophy that favours more equal distribution of wealth than is attained under pure capitalism.
Executive Order	Under the US Constitution, the President possesses specific powers that he can exercise with little reference to Congress, particularly in relation to his position as Commander-in-Chief.
Impeachment	Under the US Constitution, Congress has the power to bring an errant President to trial, to impeach him.
Lend-lease	Second World War policy under which President Roosevelt gave supplies to Britain and the Soviet Union with no real assurance of any repayment.
Imperial presidency	During the Cold War, presidential power increased so much that some commentators thought the President was becoming like an emperor – hence 'Imperial.'
Cold War	The struggle between the capitalist USA and the Communist Soviet Union, c.1947-1988, characterised by an arms race, the struggle for influence over other countries, and several wars by proxy, for example in Korea and Vietnam.
McCarthyism	Anti-Communist hysteria triggered by Senator Joseph McCarthy.
Superpower	A popular term in the West from the 1950s, used in relation to the USA and the USSA, both of which had nuclear weaponry and global influence.
Truman Doctrine	Articulated in Truman's March 1947 speech to Congress, advocating US aid to any country threatened by Communism.
White-collar	Workers not engaged in manual labour, eg. Office workers
FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)	Set up in 1924 to help deal with crime. Particularly influential in the pursuit of Communists.
Alphabet Agencies	Federal government bodies set up by the Roosevelt administration during the New Deal, so-called because they became known by their initials, e.g TVA
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	The value of goods and services produced by a country.
Primaries	Before a presidential election, Democrats and Republicans hold elections in many states to decide which candidate will represent the party in the election.
Consumer society	A society in which there is exceptional interest in acquiring consumer goods such as cars and kitchen gadgets.
White flight	The post-Second World War exodus of white Americans from inner-city areas that were then left to minorities such as African Americans.

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New Frontier	Concept popularised by President Kennedy, who called for Americans to meet new challenges in the new decade of the 1960s.
Great Society	President Johnson said he wanted to create an American society free from poverty and racism.
War on Poverty	Early in his presidency, Johnson announced that he was declaring war on poverty in the US as part of his Great Society dream.
Domino Theory	President Eisenhower's belief that if one country fell to Communism, neighbouring countries would fall soon after.
Hippies	Young people (often students) who, in the 1960s rejected the beliefs and fashions of the older generation and favoured free love, drugs and communal living.
Detente	President Nixon's policy of improvement of relations with China and the USSR.
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
National Guard	State-based US armed forces reserves
New Right	A group of right-wing voters that became influential in the late 1970s. Their beliefs were a reaction to the counterculture of the 1960s and included opposition to abortion, busing and Darwinism.
Religious Right	Although not all members of the New Right were religious, members of the Religious Right were usually part of the New Right, whose conservative beliefs were a reaction to the counterculture of the 1960s.
Moral Majority	Organisation with conservative social values established by Baptist Minister Jerry Falwell in 1979 and influential in the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980.
Evangelical Christians	Some would say more openly enthusiastic kind of Protestants with tendencies towards social conservatism, often taking the Bible very literally.
Homemakers	Mothers who stay at home to look after their families, rather than going out to work.

**Expectation: You need to learn the spelling and definition of these key terms off by heart!**

Key Individual/ Group	Role, dates, importance etc
Warren G. Harding	
Calvin Coolidge	
Herbert Hoover	
Woodrow Wilson	
Franklin D. Roosevelt	
Joseph Stalin	
Winston Churchill	
Harry Truman	

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Dwight D. Eisenhower	
Nikita Khrushchev	
Fidel Castro	
Joseph McCarthy	
John F Kennedy	
Robert F Kennedy	
Lyndon B Johnson	
Richard M. Nixon	
Gerald R Ford	
James 'Jimmy' Carter	
Leonid Brezhnev	
Ho Chi Minh	
Phyllis Schlafly	
Walter Cronkite	