

USA, 1929 – 2000: key Presidents and their domestic policies

Hoover - Republican (1929 – 1933)

Herbert Hoover won the election in 1928, meaning he was President as the Wall Street Crash struck, triggering the Great Depression. He was a very successful business man, and responded to the Depression following traditional Republican approaches of Rugged Individualism. He is often criticised for the way he dealt with the depression, but policies were put in place to help, e.g:

- Cutting taxes by US\$130 million
- Hawley Smoot Tariff Act, 1930
- Emergency Relief Act, 1932
- Home Loan Bank Act, 1932

Some of Hoover's policies were then carried on by Roosevelt, meaning they were in part successful. However, the event that really damaged Hoover's reputation was the Bonus Marchers in 1932.

Roosevelt – Democrat (1933 – 1945)

Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR) won a landslide election in 1932. He pledged a 'New Deal' for the American people. The New Deal (1933) was based on relief, recovery and reform and FDR communicated this through 'fireside chats' – using the radio to give speeches and boost public morale and confidence in the government. A Second New Deal was needed in 1935 as unemployment was still high. This included the landmark Social Security Act. FDR faced opposition e.g. from Republicans and the Supreme Court.

FDR's approach to WWII was to 'out-produce' the enemy and he set up the War Production Board in 1942 to manage this. FDR died in 1945 and his VP, Truman became President. He promised people a 'Fair Deal', and approach that was continued by his successor, Eisenhower.

Kennedy – Democrat (1961 – 1963)

In his acceptance speech following the 1960 election, JFK mentioned a 'New Frontier' – this became a programme of reform and change through which JFK hoped to make the USA a fairer place by giving equal rights to black people. Key measures in the New Frontier came under the headings of Civil Rights, the economy and social reform. JFK was proactive in Civil Rights, showing action in the James Meredith case, and the marches on Birmingham and Washington. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. JFK's work was continued by President Johnson, who developed the 'Great Society', which included the Civil Rights Act. Johnson's reputation was damaged by US involvement in Vietnam, meaning he decided not to run for re-election.

Nixon – Republican (1969 – 1974)

In terms of domestic politics, Nixon is perhaps most famous for the Watergate Scandal that led to him resigning office. He set up CREEP – the Committee to re-elect the President and set aside \$350,000 dollars for 'dirty tricks'. 5 members of CREEP were caught breaking into Democrat offices (Watergate building) where they were planting bugging devices. Nixon denied all knowledge, but it became clear that Nixon was part of the plan and directed a cover up. Nixon initially refused to hand over White House tape recordings, then the ones he did send were heavily edited. When the un-edited tapes were received it highlighted his involvement and lies in the investigation. Nixon resigned to avoid impeachment. The scandal had a big impact on foreign reputation and on the powers of the government – a series of measures were put in place to try to prevent future corruption, e.g. the Election Campaign Act in 1974.

Nixon was involved in the Détente period of the Cold War – he was part of the SALT agreements, and visited both Moscow and China, improving relationships with those countries.

Reagan – Republican (1981 – 1989)

Reagan inherited serious economic problems (unemployment, oil shortages and inflation). His economic strategy was called Reaganomics = cutting taxes for the wealthy to encourage more spending, meaning the benefits would 'trickle down' to the middle / lower classes. To do this he cut welfare programmes and Medicare benefits. He also increased total government spending, raising the national debt to its highest ever level (almost \$1trillion). This led to a severe stock market crash in 1987 and the economy went into recession.

A series of space disasters in 1986 led to Reagan delaying plans for a permanent space station. He suggested that environmental damage was a necessary price to pay for a strengthened economy. He initially opposed making Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday.

Reagan supported research into AIDS and put \$2.3 billion a year into its prevention. He declared a 'war on drugs' and created the Office of National Drug Control to coordinate drug-related policy through-out the government.

Bush Snr – Republican (1989 – 1993)

Bush promised to follow Reaganomics, but went back on this and increased indirect taxes. He cut military spending and increased tax on luxury goods. By 1993, inflation was low and unemployment high.

Successes were in key legislation = Americans with Disabilities Act and the Clean Air Act (1990). However, funding for the Drug Enforcement Agency had little impact and there were race riots in LA, Atlanta, Birmingham, Seattle and Chicago in 1992 following the beating of Rodney King, an African American arrested by 4 white police officers.

Clinton – Democrat (1993 – 2001)

3 major features of Clinton's domestic policies:
- move away from Reaganomics. Deficit reduced, 22 mil jobs created, and the value of the stock market tripled.

-Welfare and social reforms. The Family and Medical Leave Act implemented, minimum wage introduced and improved health care led to the infant mortality rate dropping to the lowest recorded in the USA.

-Scandals. Linked to the Whitewater Scandal (fraud). Proof of an affair with Monica Lewinsky, which he denied. He was impeached, but acquitted in 1999. He said he was 'profoundly sorry' for his actions.