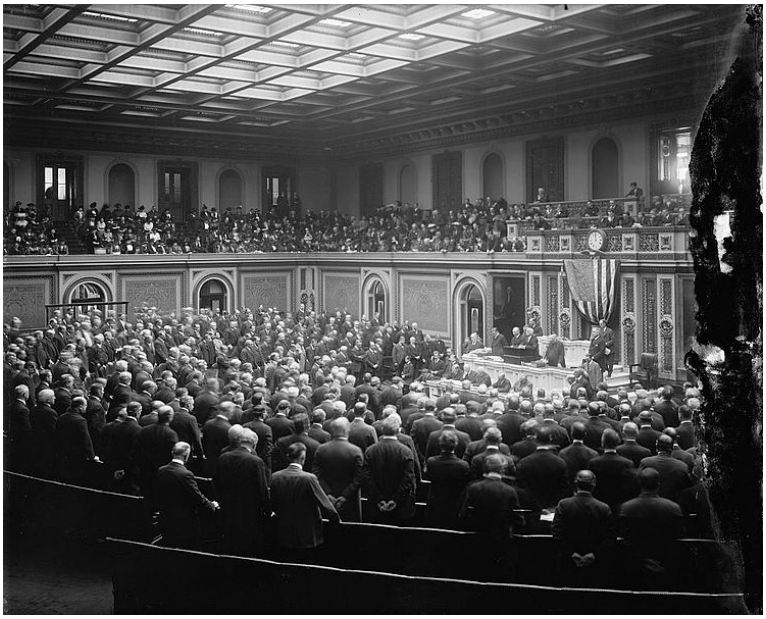
KEY QUESTION 1 : Immigration

INTRODUCTION : How was the United States of America governed?



Source 1: the US Congress in session in 1915

The type of government used in the United States of America is called a **federation** – a group of local states that join together under a single national government. The United States of America had started with 13 states in 1776. By 1910 there were 46 states, although this increased to 48 when New Mexico and Arizona joined in 1912.

When the United States of America had won their independence from Britain in the 18th century the **Founding Fathers**, the leading politicians of the new country, wrote a set of rules for their new government called the **Constitution**. If enough states agree then changes could be made to the Constitution later, which were called **amendments**. These rules laid down how the government was to be run, what powers it would have and how it would get its money. They also included a system of 'checks and balances' to make sure that no one person or part of the system could become more important than the rest.

There are two important levels of government in the USA –

- **Federal government**, which is national
- **State government**, which is local

Federal government

This is the government of the whole of the USA. Many Americans did not consider this to be as important as state government, a view which is known as **federalism**. The federal government is responsible for defence, foreign relations and inter-state trade. It is made up of three branches of government:

1. **The EXECUTIVE BRANCH** [*decision-making*] –

   This is headed by the **President** who is elected every four years. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy, the head of government (like the British Prime Minister) and the head of state (like British monarch). The President is advised by the Cabinet, a group of advisers known as Secretaries, who are chosen by the President but approved by the Senate.

2. **The LEGISLATIVE BRANCH** [*law-making*] –

   Congress makes the laws and controls the federal budget. It is made up of two houses - the Representatives (made up of 435 representatives elected every two years – 1 per 450,000 people, so New York State had the most with 46 representatives and Wyoming had the least with 1) and the Senate (made up of 96 senators elected for six years - 2 per state).

3. **The JUDICIAL BRANCH** [*reviewing decision and laws*] –

   The **Supreme Court** is made up of 9 judges, known as justices. They're appointed by the President and approved by the Senate to make sure the President and Congress do not break the US constitution when making decisions or passing laws. It is also the highest appeal court in the USA so deals with important court cases which cannot be decided at state level.

State government

This is the government of an individual state, run by a locally elected Governor with its own locally elected state Congress and courts. State governments are responsible for education, welfare, as well as law and order.

EXECUTIVE: state governments are headed by an elected Governor, elected every 2 or 4 years

LEGISLATURE: each state has a parliament with two houses, except Nebraska which just has one

JUDICIARY: each state has its own court system and Supreme Court

Political Parties

DEMOCRATS (*symbolised by a donkey*): supported by white people in the Southern states as well as Irish, Jewish and Italian Americans and **trade unions** – the Democrats believed in the USA getting involved in world affairs, and in stopping businesses from exploiting workers.

REPUBLICANS (*symbolised by an elephant*): supported by most white people outside the South as well as by businessmen – the Republicans believed that America should isolate itself from the rest of the world, and that businesses should be left alone to make as much money as they could.

Voting

In 1863 President Lincoln described the system of democracy, voting for the government, in the USA as "government of the people, by the people, for the people". The 14th Amendment to the Constitution passed in 1868 said that all male citizens, men born in the USA, had the right to vote. However, women could only vote from 1920 and many native and black Americans were excluded from voting because of discrimination.

Why did immigration become such a major issue in American society?

How much did American attitudes to immigration change in this period?

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."

From an inscription on the Statue of Liberty

America has always been proud of being made up of a number of groups of different people; the national motto "*E Pluribus Unum*" means '*one country made of many people*'. Immigration over hundreds of years made the USA a very mixed society that some people called 'the melting pot', made up of:

- *White Americans*, older immigrant families from Britain, Germany and Scandinavia whose descendants tended to hold the best jobs, the most money and political power; but increasingly newer immigrant families from Southern and Eastern Europe especially from Russia, Poland and Italy, many of whom were Jews and Catholics.
- *Black Americans*, the descendants of the millions of Africans who had been brought to America to work as slaves; slavery had ended in the 1860s.
- *Native Americans*, sometimes known as Indians, what remained of the people who originally lived across the whole of the continent; they were forced off their land during the 19th century and lived in reservations across America.
- *Hispanics*, from central and southern America.
- *Asians*, especially from China and Japan.

Between 1850 and 1914, 40 million people came to live in the USA, the numbers increasing year on year, although this did slow down after the First World War.

TABLE 1: Immigration into the USA by decade

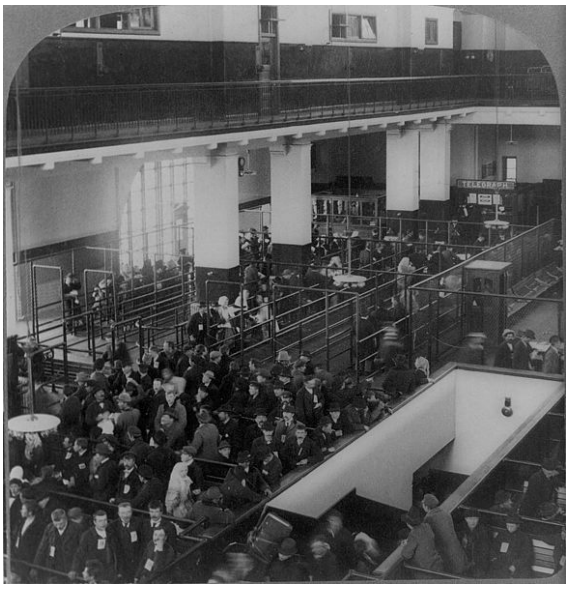
Years	Immigrants
1890-1899	3,694,294
1900-1909	8,202,388
1910-1919	6,347,380
1920-1929	4,295,510

People came to America for a variety of reasons and not all immigrants coming in to the USA were the same. Rich immigrants came to enjoy the wealth and business opportunities. Poor immigrants came to escape from persecution or poverty. They were attracted by the '*American Dream*' of living a happy, prosperous life free from oppression. At the start of the 20th century Europe was increasingly overcrowded and many countries had rising unemployment. The USA was seen as a '*Land of Opportunity*' where anyone could succeed with hard work.

Immigration had a huge impact on certain areas of the United States. By 1910 a third of the population of the 12 largest cities in USA were immigrants and another third were the children of immigrants. By 1914 New York had more Italians than Naples; it had twice as many Irish as Dublin; it had 1.4 million Jewish people in a total population of 4.7 million. While the impact was the greatest in New York as it was the first place that many immigrants arrived in America, it could also be important elsewhere, for example by the First World War a tenth of the population of the state of California was Chinese.

European immigrants to the USA arrived in steamships from across the Atlantic Ocean. Ellis Island was the reception point in the bay outside New York where all immigrants to the USA were processed before they were allowed in. Immigrants were given health checks to make sure they were not bringing infectious diseases into USA. They queued to have their papers checked and their details taken before being allowed in. It was commonly known as the '*Isle of Tears*' as in 1911 2% of people rejected on health, age or education grounds.

Source 2: immigrants queuing in the main reception hall of Ellis Island in 1904



Once they were allowed into the country most immigrants found themselves living in poverty, in appalling conditions in urban ghettoes. They were blamed for rising urban crime and drunkenness and increasingly became the victims of violent racism in the 1920s. As one Italian immigrant put it: "*First the streets weren't paved with gold, second they weren't paved at all, and third I was expected to pave them*".

Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant writing in 1900, described a tenement block in New York: "*2781 people on 2 acres of land, nearly every bit of which was covered with buildings. There were 46 babies in the block, but no bath tub... Of the 1538 rooms, 441 were dark with no ventilation or outside air. In 5 years 32 cases of tuberculosis had been reported from that block and in that time 660 different families in the block had applied for charity*".

Most immigrants did not move beyond the cities. They did not have the money to set themselves up in farming. Leaders of immigrant communities got newly-arrived immigrants jobs and housing. They tended to end up in ethnic neighbourhoods like Little Italy in New York. Some cities found that immigrants from particular countries were concentrated in them, such as the Irish in Boston, Italians in New York, Czechs and Poles in Chicago. Many of the poorer immigrants found it hard to adjust to their new country. They were used to the peasant outdoor life which was dominated by the weather and the seasons, but had to adjust to the indoor clock-dominated life of factories. As they were paid such low wages wives and children had to work as well.

"The immigration policy of the US should be to ensure that the number of foreigners in the country at any one time shall not exceed that which can be assimilated with reasonable speed, and to favour immigrants whose standards are similar to ours."

Republican Party election campaign literature 1920

Economically immigrants boosted US industry first as workers, then consumers as well.

However, while immigrants were cheap and willing labour they were also easy targets for people resentful of the impact of industrialisation: they would do jobs for lower wages than American citizens; they were used as strike breakers; they were blamed for contributing to overcrowding in cities; their religious beliefs, as they were often Catholics or Jews, were seen as a challenge to the Protestant Christianity of many Americans; they were portrayed as un-American. This led to a rise in nativism, the belief that the values of those born in the USA were superior to those of immigrants. This would form the background of the revival of the Ku Klux Klan and the Red Scare.

Although America technically had an '*open door*' policy, allowing anyone into the country, there were already some restrictions on immigration by 1910: in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, in 1903 anarchists were not allowed in, and from 1907 disabled and diseased people were not allowed in.

The First World War encouraged opposition to immigration. There were fears for the loyalty of new immigrants especially from Germany and Austria-Hungary who people began to think might be spies. The Russian Revolution of 1917 added fears about communists coming to the USA to spread their revolutionary ideas. Against the President's wishes Congress passed the 1917 Immigration Act which introduced the Literacy Test as a requirement before immigrants could be allowed in to America. Immigrants had to read out a 40 word passage in English which discriminated against poorly educated people from Southern and Eastern Europe in particular.

After the war the mood of America turned against involvement in the rest of the world. The increased **isolationism** led many to become more concerned about on-going immigration. Senator Parish of Texas in 1921 explained why he felt there should be further restrictions placed on America's immigrant intake: "*The steamship companies haul them over to America, and as soon as they step off the decks of their ships the problem of the steamship companies is settled, but our problem has begun... They fill places that belong to the loyal wage-earning citizens of America... They are of no service whatever to our people. They constitute a menace and a danger to us every day...*" As a result of attitudes like this Congress passed a number of laws to restrict immigration.

The 1921 Emergency Quota Act introduced the quota system which restricted annual immigration from a country to 3% of the people already in the USA from that country, according to the 1910 census. This meant that if there were 1,000,000 people from UK in the USA in 1910 they would let in 30,000 more a year, which was 3% of 1,000,000. However, as richer Europeans from Northern and Western Europe had been coming to the USA for a lot longer, this discriminated against those coming from Southern and Eastern Europe who had only started coming over more recently. It was aimed at restricting the 'wrong' sort of foreigners from coming to America, and in many ways it worked as can be seen in Table 2 below.

There were many who thought that this did not go far enough. President Calvin Coolidge said in his first address to Congress in 1923, "*New arrivals should be limited to our capacity to absorb them into the ranks of good citizenship. America must be kept American. For this purpose, it is necessary to continue a policy of restricted immigration.*" In 1924 Congress passed the National Origins Act (AKA the Johnson-Reed Act) which reduced the quota down to 2% of people from a country based on the 1890 census which discriminated even more harshly against those coming from southern and eastern Europe as they had only just started to come to America at that point.

A cap on the total number of immigrants into the USA was put in place in 1929 restricting total migration to 150,000 a year. Priority was given to the educated and skilled, as well as those from northern Europe as a result of the quotas. However, unregulated immigration from Canada, Mexico and Puerto Rico continued throughout the 1920s. The Mexican population of California rose from 90,000 to 360,000 during the 1920s. It was not until the 1960s that the quota system of immigration was replaced with a system that did not discriminate against immigrants from

particular countries.

Table 2: impact of immigration restrictions

	Immigrants from north and west Europe.	Immigrants from other countries especially south and east Europe.
Average number	176,983	685,531
Quotas under Act	198,082	158,367
Quotas under National Origins Act 1924	140,999	21,874
Quotas under National Origins Act 1929	132,323	20,251

How xenophobic were Americans towards immigrants?

"It is my belief that while they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have caused irritating strikes, and while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and their unclean morals we can get rid of them and not until we have done so shall we remove the menace of Bolshevism [communism] for good"

Mitchel Palmer, US Attorney General in 1920

Communism is the belief that everyone is equal, that all wealth should be shared equally amongst all of the people. Richer people were afraid of Communism because they would lose everything, while poorer people supported Communism because it could make their lives better.

Very few people knew what communism really was, and many confused **anarchists** who believed that there should be no government with communists who wanted the government to make everyone equal, even though this was to be done using violent means and by denying citizens their democratic rights. Most Americans believed in capitalism - people should be free to make as much money as they can, however they can. For them the most worrying aspect of communism was that it taught that capitalism leads workers to be exploited by capitalist bosses.

In 1917 there was a violent revolution in Russia in which the emperor – the Tsar - and the Russian aristocracy were exterminated by Communists. Many people believed that the Communists wanted to spread revolution around the world. There was widespread concern that such ideas could spread to the USA via Eastern European immigrants. This fear of communist infiltration was known as the '**Red Scare**'. As communism and anarchism were ideas that came to America from Europe it led to an increase in **xenophobia** – fear of foreigners - despite the fact that communists and anarchists made up less than 0.1% of the American population.

Xenophobia was one of the motivations for Congress to pass laws to restrict immigration in the 1920s. As Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama said in 1921, "*There can be nothing so dangerous as for us to allow the undesirable foreign element to poison our civilisation and thereby threaten the safety of the institutions that our forebears have established for us... Now is the time to keep from our shores forever those who are not in sympathy with the American ideals.*"

There was an indiscriminate association of any 'un-American' ideas with Communism. As a result when workers in America went on strike or protested against low wages and poor working conditions those in positions of power assumed it was because communists were encouraging them. The scale of strikes increased after the First World War as demand for goods and prices

fell and workers were either sacked or had their wages reduced. 400,000 workers went on strike in 3,600 separate strikes in 1919 alone.

There was a general strike in Seattle, and the Boston police, coal miners, and steel workers all went on strike as well. Employers used heavy handed tactics to break up these strikes. Workers were beaten, sacked or starved into submission. And yet these strikes had nothing to do with foreigners, communists or anarchists. They were protests against the appalling working conditions and low pay that American workers faced in this period.

The American Plan was organised by factory owners and federal government to destroy **trade unions** – organisations that represented workers - and break up strikes by force. Employers were encouraged not to negotiate with unions and the Supreme Court made decisions in favour of business owners. Union membership fell from 6 million in 1920 to just over 3 million by 1923 as a result of this pressure. Some employers like Henry Ford encouraged their workers not to join unions by offering them higher wages and shorter working hours.

After a bomb attack on his house Mitchell Palmer, US Attorney General – the politician in charge of legal system - made it his mission to hunt out "Red" activity. An anarchist pamphlet called 'Plain Truth' was found near Palmer's house. It warned, "*There will have to be bloodshed… there will have to be murder… there will have to be destruction… We are ready to do anything to suppress the capitalist system*".

In a series of violent raids Palmer sought out everyone he could find with "unusual" political beliefs. 6,000 suspected communists were arrested and 556 "aliens", who were mostly not communists or anarchists, were deported. There was not a lot of public sympathy for suspected communists and anarchists. Billy Sunday, evangelical preacher in a Seattle newspaper interview in 1919 said about communists, "*If I had my way, I would fill the jails so full with them that their feet would stick out the windows…*"

Source 3: Political radicals waiting at Ellis Island for deportation from the USA in 1920

"*The Justice Department has been tearing out the communist seeds and their poisonous theories. Robbery is the ideal of communism and the American government must prevent crime. The Justice Department discovered over 60,000 of these supporters of communism in the United States and we are now sweeping the country clean of such filth*," wrote Mitchell Palmer in "The Case Against the Reds" (1920), an essay justifying why communist suspects had to be deported.

A young clerk called J. Edgar Hoover was put in charge of the Palmer Raids, as they became known. The interstate organisation that was set up to do this became the F.B.I, the Federal

Bureau of Investigation. The first main task of the FBI was to hunt down "Reds" and stop "Un-American" activity, although later in the 1920s they were used to tackle the problems caused by prohibition.

There were Palmer Raids in 33 cities. Those arrested were held in filthy over-crowded temporary prisons, beaten up and forced to sign confessions. After all of those investigations only 3 pistols were found between the 6,000 suspects arrested. Palmer had not followed the proper legal due process in the raids, and had spread anti-communist propaganda to newspapers to inflame public opinion.

Palmer ordered raids on magazine offices, private houses, union headquarters and public meetings without warrants, personally leading the May 1920 raids in New York. Five elected members of the New York Assembly were disqualified from taking their seats because they were suspected of being communists, an example that other states followed. However, Congress refused to pass an extreme sedition bill that Palmer demanded.

These raids led to police and mobs attacking socialist May Day parades, while newspapers carried headlines like "Reds Planned May Day Murders". Palmer had claimed that these May Day parades would be the start of a communist uprising and had put the police and army on alert. When the parades had finished peacefully people came to realize that Palmer had exaggerated the 'red' threat to increase his own power and influence and he was sacked. However the violence continued. In 1920 the Wall Street bombing killed 30 people.

"Judge Thayer told his friends around

He would cut the radicals down;

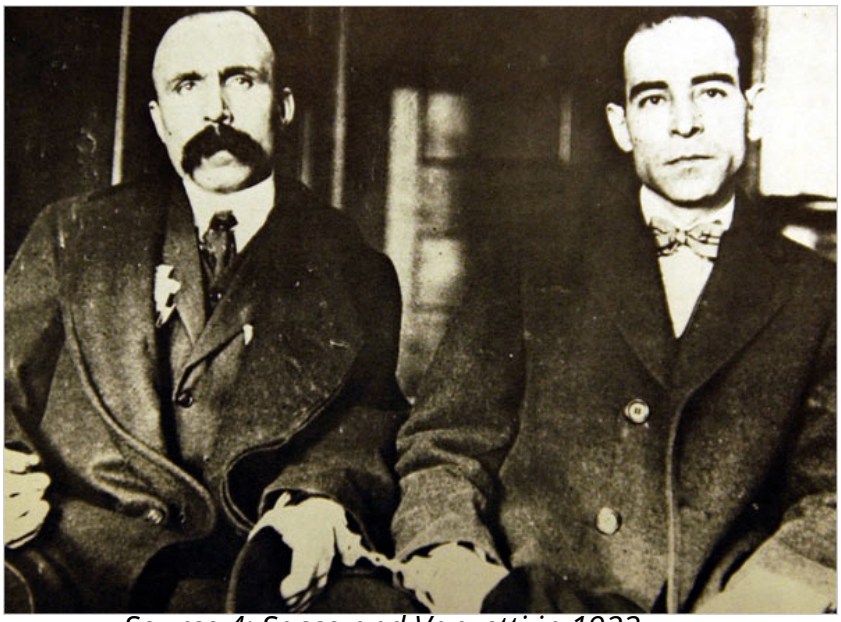
Anarchist bastards was the name

Judge Thayer called these two good men"

Lyrics from 'Two Good Men', a song by Woody Guthrie, recorded in 1946.

In 1920 known anarchist Andrea Salsedo was arrested in New York City. He was denied his constitutional right to a fair trial and a lawyer, which was guaranteed by the 5th Amendment, and imprisoned for 8 weeks without contact with his family or a lawyer. One day his crushed body was found dead 14 floors below where he was being held by the FBI. The official explanation was suicide. This was the reason why many anarchists started carrying guns, including two of Salsedo's friends called Sacco and Vanzetti.

On 15th April 1920, Allesandro Berdelli and Frederick Parmenter were robbed and murdered near the Slater and Morrill shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts. They had been carrying the company payroll of $15,776. Before he died from gunshot wounds the factory guard said he had been shot by two slim '*olive-skinned foreigners*'. Sacco and Vanzetti were accused. They were already under suspicion of being anarchists having opposed American involvement in the First World War, avoided the military draft and supported strikes. Judge Thayer, a conservative Republican, had already tried Vanzetti on a charge of armed robbery.



Source 4: Sacco and Vanzetti in 1923

The trial of Sacco and Vanzetti was controversial right from the start. 875 jury members were considered before both sides agreed on the final 12 as it was so difficult to find unbiased citizens to serve in the trial. Judge Thayer was clearly very biased against Sacco and Vanzetti, referring to them during the trial as '*sons of bitches*' and '*dagos*'. After a 45 day trial the jury delivered its verdict of 'guilty' in one day. This was very quick for such a complex case. They were both sentenced to death. Both men were finally executed in 1927 after the public outcry about their verdict had led to several appeals and demands for re-trials. They were posthumously pardoned in the 1970s by the Governor of Massachusetts.

Many people thought that Sacco and Vanzetti did not have a fair trial, that they were victims of xenophobia. After the trial was over, Judge Thayer was heard saying, "*Did you see what I did to those anarchistic bastards the other day?*" Felix Frankfurter, a lawyer who campaigned for a re-trial for Sacco and Vanzetti, described Judge Thayer in 1930 as "*a narrow-minded man; he is an unintelligent man; he is full of prejudice; he is carried away by fear of Reds*".

There were a lot of problems with the evidence:

- 61 eyewitnesses identified them as the killers but 107 people supported their alibis – that Sacco was at work (supported by his timecard) and Vanzetti was getting a passport and out with his friends at the time of the murders – however most of these witnesses were Italian immigrants who did not speak very good English and their evidence at the trial was difficult to follow.
- Both men were carrying loaded guns when they were arrested and forensic experts said the gun used in the murder matched Sacco's pistol, even though the bullets used in the attack were a different caliber to the ones carried by Vanzetti and it was not a crime to carry a gun, especially when you were worried about being attacked for being an immigrant as many of their friends had been.
- Circumstantial evidence supported the prosecution case - witnesses knew the killers had an Italian accent and Sacco's friends were known anarchists, as well as Vanzetti having a previous conviction for armed robbery even though there was no proven connection between these things and the murders at the shoe factory.

As he was led to the electric chair Vanzetti said, "*I want to tell you that I am innocent and that I have never committed any crime but sometimes some sin... I wish to forgive some people for what they are now doing to me.*"

RECOMMENDED VIEWING – Key Question 1

Immigration documentary https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBJcqxI7kas and a short piece about the changing origins of US immigrants https://youtu.be/behsmaHh2bg and a film about Ellis Island https://youtu.be/8X4CypTaOQs but the varied experience of immigrants is best illustrated by the BBC programme American Voices : Immigration https://youtu.be/txB7_9E1E8Q

Sacco and Vanzetti documentary (part 1) https://youtu.be/DdstXviXwYA with songs by Joan Baez https://youtu.be/nY8uEYsFoJs and Woody Guthrie https://youtu.be/dNKg54bvObQ and a clip on Red Scare and Palmer Raids https://youtu.be/cOUNmfG9CDo

GENERAL 1920s AMERICA SUPPORTING VIDEO MATERIAL :

Crash Course History - Roaring 20s https://youtu.be/VfOR1XCMf7A

BBC 20th Century Boom and Bust https://youtu.be/4Xrz69_W4ew

BBC American Voices : clips on Timelines TV https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvsS9mRi0sXb78FqO8DACjXgoF-sih5K-

BBC American Voices : full episodes

1. Immigration https://youtu.be/txB7_9E1E8Q
2. Boom and Bust https://youtu.be/iwy5HNuHNes
3. Hard Times https://youtu.be/OenNGPd6n-I
4. New Deal https://youtu.be/Re-XsLwyICo
5. Black America https://youtu.be/_4wiOs5T9go

The Century: America's Time –

1. The Beginning: Seeds of Change https://youtu.be/dssfiPirT2U
2. 1914-1919: Shell Shock https://youtu.be/1GBWDQ5cF_U
3. 1920-1929: Boom To Bust https://youtu.be/RN7ftyZigYs

GLOSSARY :

Federation	A group of local states that join together under a single national government.
Founding Fathers	The leading politicians of the new country.
Constitution	A list of rules a government has to follow.
Amendments	Changes to the Constitution.
Federal government	National government, responsible for defence, foreign relations and inter-state trade.
State government	Local government, responsible for education, welfare, as well as law and order.
Federalism	The belief that state government is more important than national government.

President	Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy, the head of government and the head of state.
Congress	Makes the laws and controls the federal budget. It is made up of two houses - the Representatives and the Senate.
Supreme Court	The highest appeal court in the USA so deals with important court cases which cannot be decided at state level by the Supreme Court.
Democrats	Believed in the USA getting involved in world affairs, and in stopping businesses from exploiting workers.
Republicans	Believed that America should isolate itself from the rest of the world, and that businesses should be left alone to make as much money as they could.
Isolationism	Being more worried about your own country than what is happening in other countries.
Communism	The belief that everyone is equal.
Anarchists	Believed that there should not be any government.
Red Scare	Fear that communists were trying to take over the USA.
Xenophobia	Fear of foreigners.
Trade unions	Organisations that represented workers.

REFERENCES :

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