AMERICA’S PRESIDENTS

* Americans presidents have adopted different roles depending on what the nation’s needs have been.
  + Washington, Adams, and Jefferson helped establish federal courts and a system for [financing](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/american-politics-today2/core/ch/11/outline.aspx) the new nation.
  + Polk oversaw the admission of Texas into the union as well as the Oregon Treaty.
* The late 1800s and early 1900s mandated that presidents develop systems to adapt to a growing nation and economy.
  + Woodrow Wilson attempted to form an international organization to help prevent future world wars but was resisted domestically by Congress and abroad by foreign leaders.
  + FDR’s New Deal helped the United States climb out of the Great [Depression](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/american-politics-today2/core/ch/11/outline.aspx).
  + JFK and Lyndon Johnson helped established programs that would grant civil liberties to blacks and also helped establish domestic programs like [Medicare](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/american-politics-today2/core/ch/11/outline.aspx), Medicaid, and increased funding for education, among others.
  + Johnson and Nixon attempted to unify North and South Korea but ultimately failed.
  + Clinton’s policies spurred continuous and stable economic growth but were often met with great resistance (i.e., proposed health care policy, peacekeeping in Rwanda).
* While presidents help forge the nation, their powers are kept in check by the judicial and legislative branches of the government.
* Presidents must also appeal to the general public and other politicians to increase chances of reelection and policy adoption.

THE PRESIDENT’S JOB DESCRIPTION

* A president’s **constitutional authority** derives from the provisions of the Constitution that outline the president’s role in government. Supplementing (and hopefully not contradicting) that is a president’s**statutory authority**, originating in laws enacted by Congress that add to the powers and responsibilities given to the president mentioned in the Constitution. The president is the **head of government** – exercising authority over the executive branch—and the **head of state**—symbolically and politically representing the country as stated by the Constitution’s **vesting clause.**The precise meaning of the vesting clause has been debated for more than 200 years, with some arguing for an expansive interpretation and others arguing that the clause is so vague as to be meaningless.
  + The president is responsible for ensuring that new laws are properly enforced by using judgment regarding budgets and regulations.
  + The president appoints ambassadors, the federal judiciary, and senior bureaucrats.
    1. The Senate is able to limit presidential power by confirming or denying appointments to high-level positions (i.e., the federal judiciary).
    2. The president can skip Senate approval by making a **recess appointment** in which the president temporarily appoints an official while the Senate is not in session. Recess appointees, however, must be approved by a subsequent Senate vote, or they serve only to the end of the congressional term.
  + Presidents also have the power to issue **executive orders,** or proclamations that change government policy without congressional approval.
    1. The extent of executive order often remains unclear by design and is meant to be interpreted as appropriate by a given situation.
  + The president serves as the commander in chief, but it is the right of Congress to declare war.
    1. The president may grant the deployment of troops and the use of physical force prior to Congress declaring war.
    2. The Constitution is purposefully vague in determining the necessity of force and any given situation must be interpreted appropriately..
  + Treaty-making power is shared between Congress and the president.
    1. Congress considers treaties only when negotiations have failed and it cannot force the president to negotiate a treaty.
    2. Treaties can be negotiated under **fast-track authority**, wherein no amendments are allowed and ratification requires a simple majority rather than the two-thirds majority needed in both the House and Senate.
    3. The president enjoys a **first-mover advantage** in the treaty-making process. Congress cannot initiate treaties and can only consider them once they have been negotiated.
    4. Presidents can form an **executive agreement** with foreign states without Senate consent (i.e., the Kyoto Protocol).
  + Lawmaking is a shared power between the president and Congress.
    1. Presidential legislative power stems from the ability to veto bills, which then must be approved by a two-thirds vote of both House and Senate.
    2. Vetoes most likely occur under a divided government.
    3. Veto threats by the president provide an additional source of power as they allow the president to specify what kinds of proposals she or he is willing to accept from Congress.
    4. The **State of the Union**is an annual speech in which the president addresses Congress to report on the condition of the country and recommend policies.
  + The president is granted the power to pardon criminals convicted of federal crimes.
  + **Executive privilege** gives immunity to the president and his subordinates as they leave the White House.
    1. Executive privilege allows the president and his staff to communicate freely and discuss hypothetical ideas without worry that conservations could leak and become costly.
* Much of the time, it is necessary for presidents to gain support from legislators and citizens to accomplish their goals.
* Presidents try to fulfill campaign promises in order to generate future support and increase **presidential approval,**an index of citizens’ opinion of the president.
  + The president acts as the leader of his party and gains support from fellow party members in Congress.
  + The president may chose to **go public**, appealing directly to citizens in order to draw attention to a particular issue and increase support for his or her stance.
* If the president were to become incapacitated, the vice president would assume command. The line of succession continues with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the president pro tempore of the Senate, and then a sequence of cabinet secretaries.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND THE PRESIDENT

* Studies show that Americans want a president who displays good, ethical judgment; they are less concerned with political experience and are willing to compromise.
* Because of the limited powers afforded the executive in the Constitution, it is necessary that the president cultivate public support to ensure his preferred policies are enacted.
  + Often, a president must choose between maintaining a traditional view as dictated by his party, and being flexible to gain support from an opposing side.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

* The **Executive Office of the President** **(EOP)**, a group of policy-related offices that serve as support staff for the president, is responsible for helping the president and his or her party realize their various goals.
  + Both large and small political offices within the White House carry important positions.
  + EOP staff members are presidentially appointed and maintain their positions as long as the president is in power.
    1. Traditionally, the president is most concerned with loyalty from the EOP staff and has less regard for their general public or policy experience.
    2. Often, EOP staff are people who supported the president during his campaign.
    3. Ocasionally exceptions occur and EOP staffers receive jobs based solely on expertise.
  + The vice president is in charge of presiding over Senate proceedings as well as casting the tie-breaking vote, if need be, though both these roles are commonly regarded as symbolic.
  + The vice president’s role as confidant and advisor are relatively new roles; vice presidents have traditionally served to balance a presidential ticket in order to increase support.
    1. Vice President Cheney was the most powerful vice president in American history due to his extensive political experience, expertise, and loyalty to President George W. Bush.
* The presidential **cabinet** is comprised of the heads of fifteen executive departments.
  + The cabinet chiefly serves to implement the president’s agenda.
  + Cabinet members are often chosen by a combination of loyalty and expertise.

ASSESSING PRESIDENTIAL POWER

* Some scholars think that Constitutional ambiguities give the president the ability to take **unilateral action**without consulting Congress or other branches of government.
* **Unitary executive theory** holds that the Constitution’s vesting clause gives the president the authority to issue orders and policy directives that cannot be undone by Congress unless specifically stated otherwise.
  + A **signing statement**is a document issued by the president when signing a bill into law explaining his or her interpretation of the law, which often differs from the interpretation of Congress, in an attempt to influence how the bill will be implemented.
    1. To counter a signing statement, Congress can write laws in a way that limits the president’s interpretation.
* Many officials will deliberately take advantage of constitutional ambiguities and omissions without legal consequence.
* Congress may remove the president or vice president for abuses of power by using the **impeachment**process, a negative or checking power over the other two branches that allows Congress to remove “officers of the United States” for abuses of power.
  + Impeachment is a drastic move and, though two presidents have been impeached by the House, no president has ever been convicted by the Senate and removed from office.