Harding, Warren Gamaliel (gəmăˈlēəl), 1865–1923, 29th President of the United States (1921–23), b. Blooming Grove (now Corsica), Ohio. After study (1879–82) at Ohio Central College, he moved with his family to Marion, Ohio, where he devoted himself to journalism. He bought the Marion Star, built up the newspaper, and became a member of the small group that dominated local affairs. He entered Ohio Republican politics and was (1899–1903) a member of the state legislature. Harding served as lieutenant governor (1904–5), but he was defeated (1910) as Republican candidate for governor. His talent for public speaking and his affable personality won Harding the support of the political leaders as well as of the people and enabled him to rise into national politics; he was picked to nominate William Howard Taft at the convention of 1912, and he was elected (1914) to the U.S. Senate. His six-year stay in the Senate was undistinguished, for he followed the party whips on domestic legislation and Henry Cabot Lodge on issues concerning the peace. In 1920, Harding was nominated for the presidency, largely through the efforts of a group of senators, after successive balloting for Gen. Leonard Wood and Frank O. Lowden had deadlocked the Republican convention. His vague pronouncements on the League of Nations and his noncommittal utterances in the campaign helped him to win the election, defeating the Democratic candidate, James M. Cox, by an impressive majority. The administration that followed was marked by one achievement, the calling of the Washington Conference (see naval conferences).

Harding, conscious of his own limitations, had promised to rely on a cabinet of “best minds,” but unfortunately he chose—along with more capable advisers—men who lacked any sense of public responsibility. At the time of the legislative deadlock of 1923 came rumors of scandals in the Veterans' Bureau, in the Office of the Alien Property Custodian, and in the departments of the Interior and Justice. In the midst of these rumors, Harding died suddenly (Aug., 1923) in San Francisco on his return from a journey to Alaska. Thus he was not troubled by the exposure of the Teapot Dome scandal and was spared the humiliation of seeing his appointees Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall and Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty brought to the bar of justice. Lesser political and personal scandals were also exposed, including revelations of romantic affairs and of an illegitimate daughter (revealed in 1927, confirmed in 2015 by genetic testing), and Harding's administration has been stigmatized as one of the most corrupt in American history.

See biographies by S. H. Adams (1939, repr. 1964), F. Russell (1968), L. R. Wade (1989), and J. W. Dean (2004);
Downes, R. C., The Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding (1970);
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