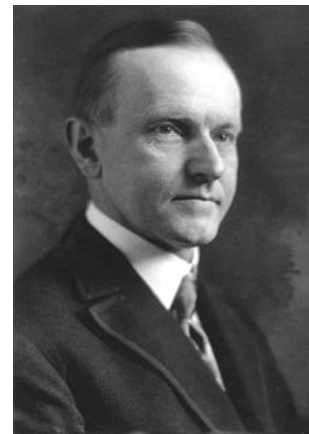


President	Calvin Coolidge
Chronological Order	30
Life Span	1872-1933
Home State	Massachusetts
Elected	Vice President in 1920, succeeded to the presidency in 1923. Elected President 1924.



Political Party	Republican
Vice President	Charles G. Dawes
First Lady	Grace Goodhue Coolidge
Children	2 sons
Physical Attributes	5' 10" tall, slender, red hair, blue eyes

Undergraduate Education	Amherst College
Military Service	None

Profession	Attorney
Other Political Offices	Governor

Nickname	Silent Cal
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Family Lineage:	English (primarily), Scottish, Welsh
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Religious Affiliation	Congregationalist
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Biographical Notes	<p>1. Coolidge was not an activist president like Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson. He sought to reduce the role of the federal government and did not initiate any new legislation other than tax cuts. He vetoed fifty bills (compared to Harding's six), including pensions for World War I veterans and relief for farmers. Except for his vetoes, he favored a hands-off leadership style and a restrained view of the executive, delegating tasks to his Cabinet, leaving many issues to the states to resolve, and even on federal matters deeming restraint to be the wiser course than bold action. He believed that "If you see ten troubles coming down the road, you can be sure that nine will run into the ditch before they reach you."</p> <p>His chief concern was economics, where he favored lowering taxes on the wealthy, reduced regulation of business, reduced federal spending, and a balanced budget. Coolidge followed the lead of his Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, the wealthy Pittsburgh industrialist who advocated "trickle-down" economics. Coolidge and Mellon passed legislation that gave massive tax breaks to wealthy Americans. Although many observers at the time gave the President credit for the so-called "Coolidge Prosperity" that characterized the five and a half years of his presidency, in retrospect he failed to try to stop the feverish stock-market speculation toward the end of his term that contributed to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 that occurred just seven months after he left office. Coolidge also fought against farm-relief legislation that might have shored up the depressed farm economy. The stock market crash and the rural bank failures caused by farm foreclosures greatly contributed to the Great Depression that followed Coolidge's time in office.</p> <p>2. Coolidge was a quiet and serious man who rarely smiled. "Silent Cal" was, literally, a man of few words, but he did have a good sense of humor about it. A female dinner companion once said to him, "You must talk to me, Mr. Coolidge. I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you." Coolidge replied, "You lose."</p> <p>While on summer vacation in 1927, Coolidge summoned the reporters who were following him, told them to line up, and handed each of them a thin sliver of paper that said, "I do not choose to run for president in 1928." He took no questions and did not make any further comments. On the day of the decision, Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas, who was present when Coolidge informed the reporters, asked Grace Coolidge what she thought of her husband's announcement. "What announcement?" she replied. She then remarked, "Isn't that just like the man. He never gave me the slightest intimation of his intention. I had no idea."</p>
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It seems counterintuitive, but Coolidge was a highly visible president, despite his general discomfort with chit-chat and his philosophical dislike of excessive leadership. He was the first president to give regular press conferences, which he did approximately twice a week. For the press conferences, Coolidge required reporters to submit their questions to him in writing beforehand. He spoke “on background,” meaning that the reporters could attribute his words to “a White House spokesman” but not the president himself. Coolidge also spoke on the radio once a month to national audiences. He enjoyed being photographed, sometimes in outlandish outfits like a Sioux headdress or a full cowboy outfit.

Coolidge was notoriously frugal. From his marriage to the time he became vice president, he lived in the same two-family home in Northampton, Massachusetts. Coolidge never owned a car, and he was one of the few presidents who saved money from his salary while in office.

3. Coolidge was born in 1872 in Plymouth Notch, a small farming community near the eastern slopes of the Green Mountains in central Vermont. The Coolidge family had lived in the area since the 1780s. The town had 1,300 residents, almost all of English Puritan descent like the Coolidges.

The living conditions were rough and rugged. Winters were cold and long. Gas lamps, running water, and coal furnaces were not available to make life easier. Even young boys like Calvin had to work hard: building fences, caring for the animals and tapping trees to make maple syrup. Coolidge thrived in this atmosphere because he loved being out in nature. Later, he commented: “Vermont is my birthright. Here one gets close to nature, in the mountains, in the brooks, the waters of which hurry to the sea.”

The Coolidge family shared the attitudes common to the region: the Puritan piety, the esteem for hard work and thrift, and what Coolidge recalled as the refusal to show disdain towards others “except towards those who assumed superior airs.” The people of Vermont were overwhelmingly Republican. For them, the GOP embodied their values of civic duty and robust individualism. They did not trust the unruly, ethnically diverse Democratic Party, with its immigrants, wage earners, and urbanites. Vermont voted Republican in every presidential election from 1856 to 1988, except for 1964 (the year of Lyndon Johnson’s landslide).

4. Public service was a Coolidge family tradition. Coolidge's great-great-grandfather, John Coolidge, was an American military officer in the Revolutionary War and one of the first selectmen of the town of Plymouth, Vermont. (Plymouth Notch is just outside Plymouth.) His grandfather Calvin Galusha Coolidge served in the Vermont House of Representatives. His father, John Calvin Coolidge, was a remarkable man. He ran his farm and the Plymouth Notch country store for thirteen years. After that, he ran the farm and a blacksmith shop. He was, according to his son, “nearly all his life a Constable or Deputy Sheriff.” John Coolidge served six years in the Vermont House of Representatives and one term in the Vermont Senate.

Calvin’s mother had tuberculosis for as long as Calvin could remember, and she succumbed to it on her thirty-ninth birthday when Calvin was twelve. He wrote in his autobiography, “The greatest grief that can come to a boy came to me. Life was never to be the same again.”

Five years later, his only sibling, his sister Abigail, died of appendicitis at the age of fourteen. She had recently joined Calvin at the Black River Academy in nearby Ludlow, where she was his favorite companion. Her sudden death – she was sick only one week – was nearly as devastating as the loss of his mother. Beyond the obvious grief, the precise effect of these two traumas on Calvin is hard to determine. They did not create his restrained personality or his fear of the unplanned, which had been evident from a young age. But they must have reinforced those traits.

5. Coolidge attended Amherst College in nearby Amherst, Massachusetts. At first, he was a loner, but, over time, he made some good friends, including Harlan Fiske Stone and Dwight Morrow. As president, Coolidge nominated Stone for the U.S. Supreme Court, where he served for twenty-one years. He nominated Morrow for Ambassador to Mexico, where he served for three years. Morrow resigned from his post in Mexico to become a U.S. Senator from New Jersey.

Coolidge’s classmates came to appreciate his deadpan wit and talent for speech-making, which he developed through conscientious application in and out of class. In his junior year, he shared the prize for the best orator in the class. As a senior, his peers chose him to deliver the Grove Oration, a humorous send-up of the senior class, at commencement. Coolidge graduated cum laude.

6. After graduation, he studied law in the offices of two experienced attorneys in nearby Northampton, Massachusetts and passed the bar in 1897. He then opened a law office and began participating in local Republican politics.

Coolidge's rise in politics was methodical and steady. Beginning around 1900, his work in the local Republican Club in Northampton won him a spot on the City Council, appointment as city solicitor in 1900, election as county clerk in 1903, and the chairmanship of the local Republican Party organization in 1904. He ran for and lost a bid for a seat on the Northampton School Board in 1905--the only loss he ever

experienced at the polls. Two years later, he was elected to the state legislature. In 1910, the citizens of Northampton selected him as their mayor, and then he won a seat in the Massachusetts Senate in 1912, serving as Senate President in 1914. Moving up the ladder of state politics, Coolidge became the lieutenant governor in 1916, serving until 1918, when he was elected governor.

7. In 1905, Coolidge married Grace Anna Goodhue, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Vermont. Grace was gregarious and had a lively personality, unlike her husband. When Coolidge was president, one prominent Washington hostess noted that “Mrs. Coolidge ... has vivacity and savoir-faire and was ... beloved by Republicans and Democrats alike.” When she first met her husband-to-be, Grace taught at the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton. Aware of Coolidge’s reputation as a man of few words, one of her fellow teachers noted, “Well, Grace has taught the deaf to hear. Maybe she can teach the mute to speak.” In his autobiography, Coolidge wrote, “We thought we were made for each other. For almost a quarter of a century, she has borne with my infirmities, and I have enjoyed her graces.”

When they were first married, they rented half of a two-family house and shared a party telephone line. Describing this time later, Coolidge wrote in his autobiography, “I had to plan very carefully for a time to live within my income. I know very well what it means to awake in the night and realize that the rent is coming due, wondering where the money is coming from with which to pay it. The only way I know to escape from that constant tragedy is to keep running expenses low enough so that something may be saved to meet the day when earnings may be small.”

8. By 1919, Boston’s predominantly Irish Catholic police department had been threatening to strike for several years. The city had not given recruits a pay raise since 1857. Officers worked as much as ninety-eight hours a week with one day off every two weeks. Boston’s Protestant establishment ignored the problem, and the police officers wanted to form a union to get some leverage. The Boston Police Commissioner, Republican Edwin Curtis, refused to let them do so. The policemen’s lead negotiators opted to unionize anyway, affiliating with the American Federation of Labor. Curtis promptly fired the eight police leaders who had made the deal and had them tried under administrative procedures. All eight – and soon another eleven – were convicted.

The Boston mayor, Andrew Peters, assembled a committee to find a solution centering on independent arbitration. Peters then appealed to Coolidge to support this plan. (Curtis was answerable to Coolidge, not Peters.) Coolidge refused and sided with Curtis.

In sympathy with their leaders, 1,117 out of 1,544 police officers went on strike. Rioting and modest property damage ensued. Curtis then fired all the striking police officers, and Coolidge supported his decision. Also, Coolidge called out the state militia to calm things down.

When AFL president Samuel Gompers asked Coolidge to reinstate the police officers, Coolidge refused and announced, “There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime.” It was a stance that Ronald Reagan, who counted Coolidge among his heroes, would assume years later in dealing with striking air traffic controllers. Coolidge’s message resonated with the general public. On the strength of his handling of the police strike, Coolidge was re-elected Massachusetts governor and won the vice-presidential nomination in 1920.

9. After the 1920 Republican National Convention nominated Warren G. Harding for president, Harding and the party bosses offered the vice-presidential nomination to Senator Hiram Johnson of California. Their motivation was to balance the conservative Harding with the more progressive Johnson. When Johnson turned them down, they offered the nomination to Wisconsin Senator Irvine Lenroot, who accepted. However, when Illinois Senator Medill McCormick rose to nominate Lenroot, the delegates shouted for Coolidge. In a rare occurrence for a political convention, a stampede of support by rebellious delegates overrode the bosses choice and gave the vice-presidential nomination to Coolidge.

10. As vice president, Coolidge used three opportunities to learn how the federal government and the city of Washington worked. First, President Harding made him the first vice president to be part of the cabinet. In addition to learning about policy in the cabinet meetings, being in the cabinet helped him understand Harding’s men, their strengths, weaknesses, trustworthiness, and, presumably, who was corrupt. In his autobiography, Coolidge wrote. “My experience in the Cabinet was of supreme value to me when I became President.” Second, he learned about Congress by presiding over the Senate, although he did not befriend many senators. Third, he attended the many dinner parties that his office required. At the parties, he and Grace met representatives of the Cabinet, the Congress, the Diplomatic Corps, and the Army and Navy. While few could have guessed it, since he rarely spoke, Silent Cal enjoyed the dinners and listened intently to the conversations swirling around him, learning the ways of the nation’s capital.

Coolidge found one thing about the vice presidency awkward. As a man of limited means, he could not

afford the kind of house he wanted in the District of Columbia. (The vice president would not be provided with an official residence until 1977.) Instead, Calvin and Grace rented four rooms at the New Willard Hotel.

11. When President Harding died on August 2, 1923, Calvin and Grace were on vacation, visiting John Coolidge in Plymouth Notch. The old family home was not equipped to receive long-distance calls, so a telegram was carried to the house, arriving at 10:30 p.m. When a Coolidge aide arrived with the message, he blurted out the contents to John Coolidge, who had poked his head out a bedroom window. John ran upstairs yelling, "Calvin! Calvin!" and barged into his son's room to wake him up. After John told Calvin and Grace what had happened, they got dressed in preparation for going downstairs to figure out what to do next. But, before leaving the room, Coolidge knelt and "asked God to bless the American people and give me the power to serve them."

Eventually, Calvin went to a house with a long-distance phone and called Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes about taking the oath of office. Hughes said, "[The oath] should be taken before a notary." Coolidge told him, "Father is a notary." Hughes responded, "That's fine."

Calvin returned to the Coolidge home; someone located a copy of the Constitution in its library and typed up the oath of office. At 2:47 a.m., John Coolidge swore his son in as the thirtieth president of the United States by the light of a kerosene lamp. (The house did not have electricity.) There were four witnesses: Grace, U.S. Senator Porter H. Dale of Vermont, and Coolidge's chauffeur and stenographer. It was a special moment between father and son. Calvin was particularly moved by having his father be the first to address him as President of the United States. It was the culmination of the lifelong desire of a father for the success of a son. Shortly after taking the oath, Calvin and Grace went back to bed.

Coolidge was humbled when he succeeded to the presidency, but he was not intimidated. He told an acquaintance, "I believe I can swing it."

12. Upon returning to Washington, the Coolidges graciously allowed Florence Harding to remain at the White House for an extra week by staying at the Willard Hotel. Mrs. Harding spent this time burning and destroying documents, presumably to erase any evidence of Harding's complicity in the scandals of his administration and of his marital infidelities. The White House staff noted that she continually kept a fire blazing in the Treaty Room, despite the warm August weather.

13. When Coolidge became president, three significant scandals of the Harding administration came to light: embezzlement in the Bureau of Veterans Affairs, bribery in the Department of the Interior in the Teapot Dome scandal, and an assortment of illegalities perpetrated by Attorney General Harry Daugherty in the Justice Department. Coolidge was not involved in any of these scandals, and he deftly handled them to ensure that they did not harm the GOP in the 1924 elections. The Veterans Affairs scandal was already over; Harding had demanded the resignation of the guilty party. Coolidge appointed a bipartisan commission to investigate the Teapot Dome scandal, and he forced Daugherty to resign to resolve the issues in the Justice Department. In addition, Coolidge fired William Burns, head of the Bureau of Investigation and Daugherty's close friend. He replaced Burns with young J. Edgar Hoover.

14. In 1921, Harding signed the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, which favored northern and western Europeans (e.g., Irish and Germans) over southern and eastern Europeans (e.g., Italians and eastern European Jews). The act restricted the number of immigrants admitted from any country annually to 3% of the number of residents from that country living in the United States as of the 1910 Census. Since the U.S. had a relatively large number of northern and western European residents in 1910, people from those regions had a higher quota and were more likely to be admitted to the U.S. than those from southern and eastern Europe or non-European countries.

In 1924, Coolidge signed into law the more restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. The act restricted the number of immigrants admitted from any country annually to 2% of the number of residents from that country living in the United States as of the 1890 Census. This act favored northern and western Europeans over southern and eastern Europeans even more than the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921. It also forbade the immigration of Chinese and Japanese people. According to the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Historian, the act's purpose was "to preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity." Versions of this law were kept in place until it was replaced by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed discrimination against southern and eastern Europeans, and Asians. The Immigration Act of 1924 kept the United States from admitting Eastern European Jews fleeing the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s.

15. At the 1924 Republican National Convention in early June, Coolidge received 1,162 out of 1,209 votes on the first ballot to win the nomination for president. The convention nominated Illinois Governor Frank Lowden for vice president on the second ballot but he declined the nomination. The convention then

selected Charles G. Dawes for vice president.

What should have been a joyous high-point of Coolidge's life was soon overshadowed by every parent's worst nightmare. Calvin and Grace had two sons, John and Calvin Jr., ages eighteen and sixteen, respectively. Calvin Jr. looked like his father and had his red hair.

On June 30, 1924, the two boys played tennis on the White House courts, and Calvin Jr. wore sneakers without any socks. He developed a blood blister on the middle toe of his right foot. A staphylococcus infection set in and began poisoning his bloodstream. Modern antibiotics for treating such infections, e.g., penicillin, had not been discovered yet, and Calvin Jr. died on July 7. The president blamed himself, and the tragedy took the joy of the presidency away from him. He said, "If I had not been president, he would not have raised a blister on his toe, which resulted in blood poisoning, playing tennis on the South Grounds. In his suffering, he was asking me to make him well. I could not. When he went, the power and the glory of the presidency went with him. ... I do not know why such a price was exacted for occupying the White House."

16. In 1924, the Democratic Party was deep in the throes of a culture war between a rural, Protestant, pro-Prohibition, "100 percent American" faction and an urban, mostly Catholic, anti-Prohibition, pro-immigration faction. After 103 ballots at the Democratic National Convention, the delegates compromised and chose John W. Davis, a conservative corporate lawyer from West Virginia. Davis was a one-term congressman who had served as Solicitor General and Ambassador to the United Kingdom in the Wilson Administration. In addition, the Progressive Party nominated Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollette for president. In the general election, LaFollette won Wisconsin (13 electoral votes), Davis won the Solid South (136 electoral votes), and Coolidge won the rest of the states (382 electoral votes).

17. As president, Coolidge was a great believer in delegating responsibilities and not personally getting caught up in the details of a problem. He said, "In the discharge of the office [of president], there is one rule of action more important than all others. It consists of never doing anything that someone else can do for you." His corollary to this principle was: "It is not sufficient to entrust the details to someone else. They must be entrusted to someone who is competent."

18. Coolidge's domestic agenda was conservative. He favored a light hand in regulating business, low taxes, and balancing the budget by minimizing federal expenditures.

The centerpiece of Coolidge's domestic plan was tax cuts for the wealthy. The most significant piece of legislation passed during his presidential tenure was the Revenue Act of 1926. The act was pushed through Congress by Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, one of the three wealthiest men in America. It cut estate taxes in half, cut the surtax on great wealth by fifty percent, repealed the gift tax, and significantly lowered income tax rates across the board. Almost all the savings went to upper-income Americans. All told, the act cut federal revenues by ten percent in just one year. Another tax cut in 1928 reduced corporate taxes. Coolidge believed that less money in the hands of the federal government and more money in the hands of the wealthy made for a more productive nation.

19. Coolidge's policies in four areas helped cause the Great Depression. First, he refused to regulate the stock market, which grew out of control due to unsound practices, leading to the Stock Market Crash of 1929, just seven months after he left office. In particular, unwitting investors were left vulnerable to stockjobbers' schemes to drive up prices – such as selling stocks back and forth to each other to create a false impression of strong interest in a stock. In addition, margin trading – buying stocks with a minimal down payment and a loan from one's broker – was a Ponzi scheme because it depended on the buyer not getting caught short when the bill came due. Nothing was done to regulate these activities because of Coolidge's hands-off attitude towards regulating business.

Second, Coolidge promulgated a fiscal policy that encouraged speculation and ignored inequality. His tax cuts had given investors more dollars to feed the market, helping push the healthy investment of the mid-1920s into the gambling that followed. A flat tax on capital gains encouraged investors to buy rapidly appreciating stocks instead of bonds. And because corporations (thanks to lower taxes) were showing higher profits, they became alluring to investors – an allure they did not deserve in retrospect.

Third, Coolidge twice vetoed the McNary-Haugen bill to aid the depressed agricultural sector while thousands of rural banks in the Midwest and South were shutting their doors and farmers were losing their land. Coolidge proposed insubstantial reforms in place of these two bills, and the hard times for farmers dragged on – with repercussions for the entire economy.

The fourth factor was the high tariffs Coolidge implemented. By 1928, Germany was crippled by the World War I reparations it was forced to pay, and the Allies still owed large sums of money to the United States. Lower tariffs would have helped European nations sell their goods in the U.S., but Coolidge

supported high tariffs as a means of protecting American businesses. The result was bad news all around – a burden for foreign economies, a risk for American banks, and a recipe for trade-wrecking international retaliation.

20. Coolidge offered little leadership on the great social issues of the day. On August 8, 1925, 30,000 Ku Klux Klan members paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., in their white robes and hoods. Klan members nationwide, numbering some five million, attacked not only African Americans but also Jews, Catholics, and women who refused to accept subordination to men. During and after the Klan march on Washington, Coolidge was silent. (N.B. Klan membership was not limited to the South. States as diverse as Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Ohio, and Oregon had substantial Klan presence in rural areas where old-stock white Protestants feared the swelling urban immigrant population.)

Also, Coolidge went along with the national Republican Party's deliberate attempt throughout the 1920s to shun the legacy of Lincoln and Reconstruction by turning its back on African Americans and courting the votes of white supremacists in the South. Coolidge stated that "Nordics deteriorate when mixed with other races" in one of his rare public statements on racial issues.

21. Coolidge was not well-versed or genuinely interested in foreign affairs. To handle international issues, he looked to Treasurer Secretary Mellon, Commerce Secretary Hoover, and his Secretaries of State, Charles Evans Hughes, and in the second term, Frank B. Kellogg. Coolidge was neither a Wilson internationalist nor an isolationist. He believed in expanding America's commercial interactions with other nations, policing the Western Hemisphere in keeping with the Monroe Doctrine, and refraining from entangling alliances such as the League of Nations.

22. Coolidge authorized Charles Dawes to help settle a set of European financial issues stemming from World War I. The Dawes Plan of 1924 reduced German reparations payments and temporarily stabilized the shaky German economy. Dawes received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1925 for his efforts.

23. With the economy performing well and no major foreign policy problems, Coolidge could have easily been re-elected in 1928. But he felt very strongly that being president was so taxing that no one should do it for more than eight years. In his autobiography, he said:

The presidential office takes a heavy toll of those who occupy it and those that are dear to them. While we should not refuse to spend and be spent in the service of our country, it is hazardous to attempt what we feel is beyond our strength to accomplish. ... The Presidential office is of such a nature that it is difficult to conceive how one man can successfully serve the country for a term of more than eight years.

He added, "The chances of having wise and faithful public service are increased by a change in the Presidential office after a moderate length of time."

24. In his retirement, Coolidge returned to Northampton, Massachusetts, where he spent the next four years writing his autobiography and articles for national magazines. His nationally syndicated column for the McClure Newspaper chain, "Thinking Things Over with Calvin Coolidge," ran for a year in 1931. On January 5, 1933, just after lunch, Coolidge collapsed in his bedroom where he had gone to take his usual two-hour nap. His wife found him dead from coronary thrombosis (heart failure).

See the next page for a list of references.

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