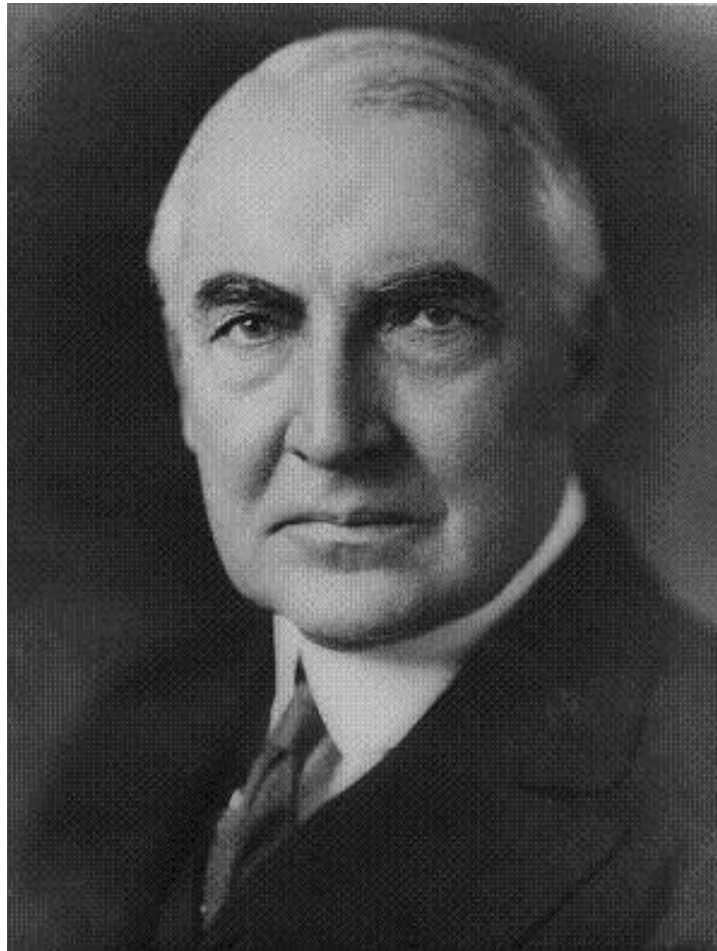


Warren Harding

Smoke-Filled Administration

Twenty-Ninth, 1921-1923



Nicknames: “President Hardly”, “Wobbly Warren”

Birth: November 2nd, 1865, near Blooming Grove, Morrow County, Ohio

Death: August 2nd, 1923, San Francisco, California

Significant Events During Harding's Partial Term: Teapot Dome Scandal ... Number of States remains at forty-eight

Quotes: *"Warren, it's a good thing you wasn't born a gal, because you'd be in the family way all the time. You can't say No."* -- Warren Harding's father George

"I like Harding. I like him very much, but I can't conceive of his being President of the United States. He's done nothing to deserve it." -- Senator Hiram Johnson, 1920

"He was not a man with either the experience or the intellectual quality that the position requires."
-- Herbert Hoover (#31), who was Harding's Secretary of Commerce

"I feel like a man who goes in on a pair of eights and comes out with aces full."
-- Warren G. Harding, after being nominated for President in 1920

"Senator Harding is the kind of man who, on his way to the legislature, would empty his pockets to some poor creature, and then vote with the conservative Republicans for a bill that would maintain the conditions making possible the suffering of the recipient."
-- James Cox, who ran against Harding in the 1920 election

"Jud, you have a college education, haven't you? I don't know what to do or where to turn... Somewhere there must be a book that tells all about it...But I don't know where that book is, and maybe I couldn't read it if I found it!...My God, but this is a hell of a place for a man like me to be in!"
-- Warren Harding, to his secretary

"My God, this is a hell of a job! I have no trouble with my enemies...But my damn friends, they're the ones that keep me walking the floor nights." -- Warren Harding, 1923

"Warren Harding had a dim realization that he had been betrayed by a few of the men whom he had believed were his devoted friends. That was the tragedy of the life of Warren Harding."
-- Herbert Hoover

"I would like the government to do all it can to mitigate, then, in understanding, in mutuality of interest, in concern for the common good, our tasks will be solved." -- Warren Harding

"He writes the worst English that I have ever encountered. It reminds me of a string of wet sponges; it reminds me of tattered washing on the line; it reminds me of stale bean soup, of college yells, of dogs barking idiotically through endless nights. It is so bad that a sort of grandeur creeps into it. It drags itself out of the dark abyss of pish, and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of posh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash." -- H.L. Mencken, writing of Harding

"It is my conviction that the fundamental trouble with the people of the United States is that they have gotten too far away from Almighty God." -- Warren Harding, himself a serial adulterer

"That's good. Go on; read some more." -- Warren Harding's final words, directed to his wife, who was reading to him on his sickbed from a flattering magazine article about him

"The only man, woman or child who wrote a simple declarative sentence with seven grammatical errors is dead." -- Poet e.e. cummings, expressing himself on Harding's death

How his term ended: Harding died in the middle of his term; he was possibly poisoned.

Other Professions: Teacher, Newspaper Editor and Publisher, Insurance Salesman

Worst Mistakes: Harding was an adulterer. He carried on long-term affairs, some of them right in the White House.

Harding reportedly became a member of the Ku Klux Klan in a then-secret White House ceremony. If true, it's a *bit* strange, when one considers his plea for equality noted in the "Saving Grace" section below. Perhaps Harding joined the KKK so as to "prove" that he was not part black, which some people, in an attempt to harm his chances of being elected, had charged. And if Harding really *did* have African-American blood, it would make it even more odd that he would join such an organization, whether in secret or otherwise.

At the very least, Harding chose his Cabinet poorly. Along with Ulysses S. Grant's (#18), his was considered among the most corrupt ever. The current (George W. Bush, #43) administration may eclipse even these in this dubious distinction, though.

Saving Grace: Harding did not follow Über-racist Woodrow Wilson's (#28) lead in barring blacks from federal appointments. In fact, Harding delivered a speech in Birmingham, Alabama--in the deep South, no less--wherein he called for political, economic and educational equality for all, regardless of race.

Notes: Harding's full name was Warren Gamaliel Bancroft Winnipeg Harding.

Although Prohibition was on and Harding had voted for it, bootleg alcohol flowed freely at the White House during Harding's residence there.

Regarding the rumor that Harding had African-American blood: It was considered believable enough, at least by some, that his future father-in-law went so far as to accost Harding during the time his daughter and the future President were courting. He called his future son-in-law "nigger" and threatened Harding's life if he didn't leave his daughter alone. Florence Kling had other ideas, though, and married Harding in 1891 over her father's objections.

This rumor, which had apparently been passed down through Harding's own family for generations, persisted. Material claiming that Harding descended from blacks from the West Indies was published during the 1920 Presidential campaign. Similar rumors had surfaced before about Abraham Lincoln (#16) and would again later concerning Bill Clinton (#42) also.

In giving the pro-equality speech mentioned above, Harding became the first President since the Civil War to speak out for civil rights for blacks while in the South.

The race riots that had begun during Woodrow Wilson's second term continued into 1921. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, that year, a black neighborhood was bombed when whites dropped dynamite from planes onto it, resulting in seventy-five people being killed and eleven

hundred homes being destroyed. This senseless slaughter may have been what prompted Harding's call for a change of heart, or at least of policy.

Harding carried on two long-term extramarital affairs with women from Marion, Ohio, one of which resulted in the birth of Harding's only child, a daughter. Harding's mistress Nan Britton wrote a best-selling exposé about it in 1927 entitled *The President's Daughter*. Miss Britton had developed a "crush" on Harding when she was a schoolgirl, decorating her bedroom with Harding campaign posters (her future beau was a Senator at the time). The affair sometimes took place within the White House itself.

Although his dalliances with other women was kept secret during his lifetime, other scandals plagued Harding's administration beginning in late 1922, most infamously the "Teapot Dome Scandal." Land held in reserve for future military use had been opened up to private oil companies by Harding's Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall, who first saw to it that the land was transferred from the Department of Defense to the Department of the Interior. Fall had taken a large bribe from the oil companies to perform this service for them. "Teapot Dome" was the name of one of the oil fields in Wyoming that had been dishonestly transferred.

During the first part of his term (until the scandals began), Harding remained a very popular President (I say "remained" because he was elected in a landslide, and so was quite popular from the outset). Of course, Harding's popularity since then is quite another matter ("how history has judged him," as they say), some viewing him as the worst President ever. Records are meant to be broken, I suppose.

Not long after the Teapot Dome Scandal, Harding took ill while on a speaking tour in the West. What at first was considered to have been crab meat-caused indigestion was later found to have been a heart attack. When Harding died, doctors requested to do an autopsy, suspecting that they would find a blood clot. His widow Florence refused, however. Because of the doubt over the precise cause of the President's death, it has been speculated that Harding may have been poisoned to prevent him from testifying against his "friends." Mrs. Harding burning all of her husband's papers and correspondence following his death only adds to the suspicions.

A 1930 book entitled "The Strange Death of President Harding" claimed that Mrs. Harding was the one who had poisoned the President, either as revenge for his marital infidelity, to save him from the pain of being impeached after the Teapot Dome Scandal, or possibly for both reasons. Mrs. Harding was listed as the chief benefactor in Harding's will, and received approximately \$850,000 on his death.