

Herbert Hoover

Vacuum

Thirty-First, 1929-1933



Nicknames: "Bert", "The Great Humanitarian", "The Great Engineer", "The Defender of Helpless Children", "The Savior of Belgium", "The Hermit Author of Palo Alto"

Birth: August 10th, 1874, West Branch, Iowa

Death: October 20th, 1964, New York, New York

Significant Events During Hoover's Terms: Stock Market Crash ... Depression ... Bonus Marchers ... Number of States remains at forty-eight

Quotes: *"Well, we have another General Grant on our hands."*

-- Hoover's father Jesse, when Herbert was born

"He is certainly a wonder and I wish we could make him President of the United States. There could not be a better one." -- Franklin D. Roosevelt (#32), who would defeat Hoover in 1932

"We in America are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land." -- Herbert Hoover, 1928, one year before the Great Depression began

"Many persons left their jobs for the more profitable one of selling apples."

-- Herbert Hoover, trying to explain the abundance of street-corner apple mongers

"I never reflected on the personal character or integrity of Herbert Hoover. I never doubted his probity or his patriotism. In many ways he was superbly equipped for the Presidency. If he had been President in 1921 or 1937 he might have ranked with the great Presidents." -- John Nance Garner, 1948

How his term ended: Hoover was defeated in his attempt at reelection by Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Other Professions: Laborer in a gold mine, Typist, Engineer, Investor

Worst Mistake: Hoover's worst mistake was his failure to act more decisively in relieving the economic suffering a great number of citizens were undergoing during the Great Depression. However, he did more than many people realize or give him credit for (see the "Notes" section below for the details).

Saving Graces: Hoover opposed the bombing of Japan at the end of World War II. He also opposed the Korean War.

Notes: Hoover's middle name was Clark.

The family's original Swiss-German surname was Huber; It was anglicized to Hoover.

Hoover was the first President born west of the Mississippi, although West Branch, Iowa, is only forty-six miles west of that main artery.

Hoover was a double orphan: His father died when he was six, and his mother when he was nine. Hoover himself came close to preceding his parents in death: When he was two, he got so sick that his mother and father could perceive no vital signs — they could detect neither breathing nor a pulse. So sure were the Hoovers that their boy was dead that they placed pennies over his eyes and pulled his bed sheet over his head. But Herbert's uncle, a doctor, arrived just in time to revive him. After the death of his mother, Herbert was relocated from Iowa to Oregon to live with that uncle and aunt, who had just lost a son.

Although Hoover never graduated from High School, he later attended Stanford University in California, and subsequently worked as an engineer all over the world (Australia, China,

etc.)

Hoover was not really a politician, not in the sense of the other Presidents. Although he had filled other governmental offices as an appointee ("Food Administrator," etc.) his only elective office ever was that of President.

Having worked in China during their engineering careers, the Hoovers sometimes conversed in Chinese at the White House when they wanted to keep their conversation secret.

Hoover administered war relief in Europe during World War I (from whence came his nickname "The Great Humanitarian"), but seemed unwilling to help the poor people "at home" much during the Great Depression that marked and marred his time in office. As many do today, Hoover apparently viewed "The Market" as a self-correcting and beneficent machine that should not be tampered with save only minor and rare calibrations.

Although Hoover viewed this laissez-faire approach as best, it made him seem at least a bit like a modern-day Marie-Therese, wife of Louis XIV, who had famously said of suffering peasants: "Let them eat cake" (a sentiment often mis-attributed to Marie Antoinette).

Vacuums suck and are abhorred by nature. Hoover was not too popular with the populace, either, due to his perceived refusal to do much to ameliorate their misery. "Hoovervilles" (hastily erected shanty towns used by migrant workers and other homeless people during the Depression), "Hoover blankets" (newspapers), "Hoover hogs" (armadillos consumed by people lacking other sources of meat), "Hoover flags" (empty pockets turned inside out), and "Hoover Pullmans" (empty boxcars used by an army of vagabonds looking for scarce work opportunities) were all commonly used pejoratives of the day.

Ironically, Hoover's campaign slogan had been "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage."

During the Depression, just one block on West 43rd Street had nineteen shoe shine "boys," ranging in age from sixteen to seventy.

In spite of appearances, Hoover was not completely hands-off, as was his general reputation, when it came to dealing with the Great Depression. In fact, he initiated public works projects, at least partially to provide employment for people. Also, he had the government lend money to businesses to keep some of them from going bankrupt.

Similar to "Coxey's Army" in 1894 and Grover Cleveland's response to it, the Bonus Marchers of 1932 (a group of tens of thousands of World War I soldiers and their families who were agitating for an early payment of a bonus scheduled to be paid out in 1945) were brutally driven out of Washington at Hoover's behest by General Douglas MacArthur, with the assistance of George Patton and Dwight Eisenhower. In the aftermath of that attack on their camp, four people were dead: two veterans who had been shot, and two infants who died from tear gas inhalation. Additionally, an eleven week old baby was in critical condition as a

result of the tear gas, and an eleven year old boy had been partially blinded by the same substance.

When FDR heard of this, he immediately understood the implications for his run for the presidency, telling a friend, "Well, this elects me."

Another possible result of the Bonus Marcher debacle is that it probably had something to do with the passing of the G.I. Bill in 1944, a measure taken at least in part to prevent a reprise of such a situation with World War II vets later.

Hoover was a distant cousin of Richard Nixon.