

# Calvin Coolidge

Sleepy Time Taciturn  
Thirtieth, 1923-1929



**Nicknames:** "Silent Cal", "The Sphinx of the Potomac", "Puritan in Babylon"

**Birth:** July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1872, Plymouth Notch, Vermont

**Death:** January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Northampton, Massachusetts

**Significant Events During Coolidge's Terms:** Congress Grants Citizenship to Native Americans ... Mississippi River Floods ... Lindbergh Solos Across the Atlantic ... Babe Ruth Sets Home Run Record ... Number of States remains at forty-eight

**Quotes:** *"The greatest grief that can come to a boy came to me."*

-- Calvin Coolidge, referring to the death of his mother when he was twelve

*"There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time!"*

-- Calvin Coolidge, during a police strike in Boston

*"The business of America is business."* -- Calvin Coolidge

*"He didn't do nothing, but that's what we wanted done."* -- Will Rogers, speaking of Coolidge

*"Mr. Coolidge's genius for inactivity is developed to a very high point. It is far from being an indolent inactivity. It is a grim, determined, alert inactivity which keeps Mr. Coolidge occupied constantly... Inactivity is a political philosophy and a party program with Mr. Coolidge."*

-- Walter Lippmann, 1926

*"If you keep dead still they will run down in three or four minutes."* -- Calvin Coolidge to President-elect Herbert Hoover, advising him how to get rid of unwanted visitors to the White House.

*"Four-fifths of our troubles in this life would disappear if we would only sit down and keep still."*

-- Calvin Coolidge

*"When more and more people are thrown out of work, unemployment results."* -- Calvin Coolidge

*"You hear a lot of jokes every once in a while about 'Silent Cal Coolidge.' The joke is on the people who make the jokes. Look at his record. He cut the taxes four times. We had probably the greatest growth and prosperity that we've ever known. I have taken heed of that because if he did that by doing nothing, maybe that's the answer."* -- Ronald Reagan, 1981, disregarding the likelihood that Coolidge's actions/inactions paved the way for the Great Depression which followed his administration (especially the Revenue Acts of 1924 and 1926, which, by favoring the wealthy, contributed to unchecked speculation that led to the stock market crash). Similarly, Reagan's "supply side" economics may well have contributed to the stock market crash of 1987.

**How his term ended:** Coolidge chose not to run again. Some think he could foresee the depression coming and didn't want to have to deal with it or be associated with it.

**Other Professions:** Lawyer, Bank Vice President

**Worst Mistake:** Coolidge didn't do much, so he didn't do much wrong (however, see the explanatory remarks appended to the last quote above).

**Saving Grace:** Coolidge didn't do much, so he didn't do much right.

**Notes:** As the first quote above makes clear, Coolidge's mother died when he was twelve. He carried a picture of his mother in his watch all his life.

Coolidge's first name was John. Other Presidents besides John Calvin Coolidge who went by their middle names were: David Dwight Eisenhower (he later reversed his first and middle names to Dwight David), Stephen Grover Cleveland, and Thomas Woodrow Wilson. Additionally, Ulysses Grant's real first name was Hiram, and Gerald Ford's name was changed from Leslie Lynch King, Jr. to Gerald Rudolph Ford when his mother remarried.

Coolidge received a 40-acre farm from his grandfather when he was six years old. While in the White House, he would sometimes ride a mechanical horse, whooping and hollering like a cowboy all the while.

Although he occasionally played urban cowboy, Coolidge slept a lot (up to twelve hours per day), and so he caused fewer problems than most Presidents do.

Coolidge's son John Coolidge (1906-2000) was of the opinion that his father probably would not run for President in the modern age, and even if he did would probably be defeated. He also predicted his father would look on today's world "dimly and sorrowfully."

The first time Cal's future wife Grace Anna Goodhue saw him, she looked up and laughed. He was shaving himself while wearing only long underwear and a hat. Grace was standing outside in the courtyard. Cal was in an upper-story room of a boardinghouse, but was visible to her through his window. When Grace laughed, Cal turned to look down at her. When they were eventually formally introduced some time later, a mutual attraction instantly developed.

Coolidge was better prepared for the presidency than others whose predecessors had died or been assassinated, as he had been regularly invited to sit in on Cabinet meetings as Harding's (#29) Vice President.

Coolidge's sixteen-year-old son, Calvin Jr., died while he was in office (Jr. contracted blood poisoning from a blister he got while playing tennis on the White House lawn).

Coolidge's father was a notary public, and thus became the only father to swear in his son as President when, shortly after midnight on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1923, a telegraph messenger brought the news that President Harding had died. Coolidge, calm as usual, promptly went back to bed following the ceremony. In actuality, the father-son swearing-in ceremony was not valid, as a notary in Vermont can only swear in people who are to work in Vermont--but it makes for an interesting human-interest story regardless.