



Calvin Coolidge

Calvin Coolidge, whose restrained leadership came to symbolize the prosperity of the 1920s.

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Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President of the Roaring Twenties

President he succeeded: Warren G. Harding

Term of office: August 2, 1923–March 4, 1929

Calvin Coolidge was visiting his family home in rural Vermont when news arrived that Warren G. Harding had died. In the early hours of August 3, Coolidge took the presidential oath in the parlor. His father, a notary public, administered it by the light of a kerosene lamp.

The modest ceremony suited the man. Coolidge's reserved manner and economy with words earned him the nickname "Silent Cal." Following an administration increasingly associated with scandal, his reputation for honesty and restraint reassured the public.

Coolidge believed government should interfere as little as possible with private enterprise. He supported tax reductions, limited federal spending and paid down part of the national debt. The economy expanded, automobile ownership grew and new consumer products entered American homes. Voters rewarded him with an easy victory in 1924.

The apparent prosperity was not shared equally. Farmers struggled with falling prices and heavy debts throughout the decade. Coolidge twice vetoed legislation intended to support agricultural prices. His administration also favored business interests and did little to restrain risky financial practices.

Coolidge encouraged international cooperation while avoiding permanent political commitments. His administration participated in the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, through which participating nations renounced war as an instrument of national policy. The agreement expressed noble intentions but lacked an effective enforcement mechanism.

On civil rights, Coolidge's record was mixed. He spoke in favor of equal rights for Black Americans and condemned lynching, but he was unable to secure federal antilynching legislation. He signed the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, granting citizenship to Native Americans born in the United States, although citizenship did not guarantee voting rights under state law. He also signed the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924.

Coolidge chose not to run again in 1928 and left office months before the stock-market crash. Admirers view him as a model of honest, limited government. Critics argue that his passivity and pro-business policies helped create conditions contributing to the Great Depression.