

# Coolidge vs. Wilson

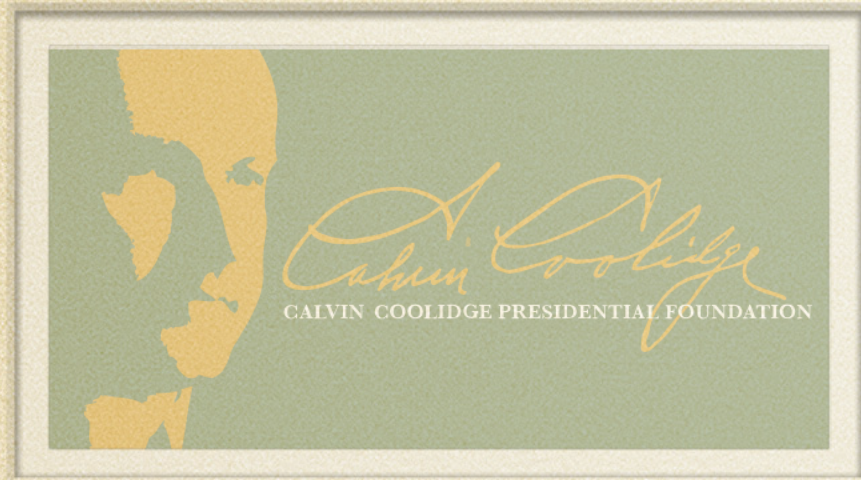
Mary Hardin Baylor University  
Presidents Day  
2019  
Dr. Ben Voth



Calvin Coolidge greets an African American man on the grounds of the White House in 1925 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress).

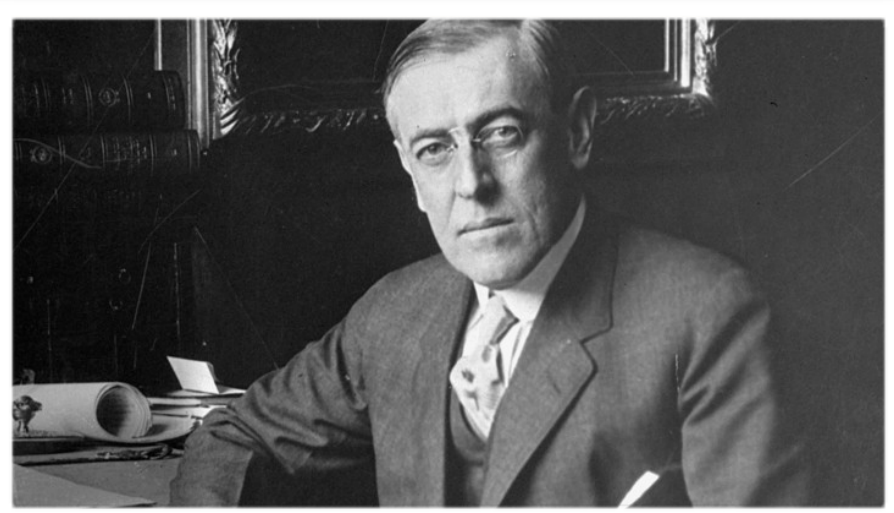


# Understanding President Calvin Coolidge and Contemporary America Civil Rights History



- President from 1923 to 1929
- Re-Elected in 1924
- Republican President
- Garnered almost no electoral support from the South

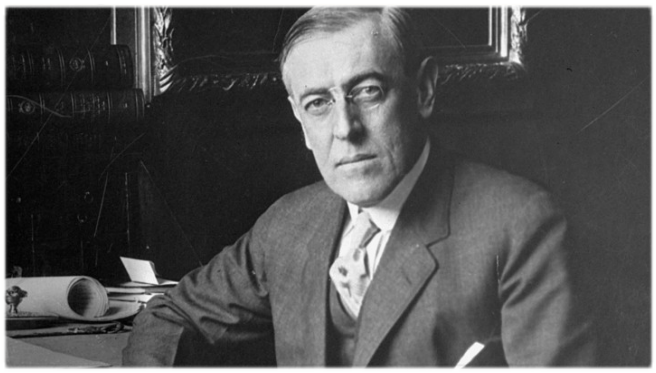




## **The Political Communication of President Woodrow Wilson versus President Calvin Coolidge**

Rankings of American Presidents suggest that Woodrow Wilson is among the top ten greatest Presidents in all of American history. Wilson was President for eight years from 1913 to 1921. He is considered a foundational progressive in American politics. His reification as one of America's greatest Presidents speaks to the intellectual corruption of our intellectual life that is designed to cynically denigrate the enduring idealism of the United States found in the Constitution and replace it with rejectionist politics affectionately termed as "progressivism."





The term [progressivism] should be ironically understood—we should cynically understand its cynical application to Wilson—as an affirmation of one the most regressive notions of human politics: racism. Though racism received a considerable boost from intellectual science heroes such as Charles Darwin who titled his seminal work —“*Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*”—racism is in fact a diminution of human worth as a practical matter of political idealism. Wilson thoroughly endorsed racism as a necessary political practice within American governance and one which would lead to “progress” for our society.



## The Political Communication of

### President Woodrow Wilson versus President Calvin Coolidge



The federal workforce was explicitly segregated on the basis of race by Wilson because he believed whites would better advance the human condition as part of his larger belief in progressivism. As President of Princeton, Wilson told a black applicant to the school it is “altogether inadvisable for a colored man to enter Princeton.” Wilson’s academic textbook “A History of the American People” described Reconstruction-era efforts to free the South from “the incubus of that ignorant and often hostile” black vote. The effort to sanitize and isolate Wilson’s cynical racist assumptions about America are rooted in equally cynical contemporary efforts to play politics with American Presidential rhetoric and valorize through subversive means the inherently racist notions of progressivism that continue to our present day.





Coolidge is ranked #28 among 45 American Presidents in the most recent ranking by scholars. Coolidge's Christian humanist upbringing at Amherst College laid the foundation for an exceptional American idealist to begin reversing the "progressivism" of Wilson and defend the dignity of African Americans in the United States. Coolidge's political rhetoric on race in America is remarkable and stands as an ethical beacon of discursive complexity within our intellectual webs of deceit attached to contemporary studies of political rhetoric. Several key incidents of Coolidge's political communication demonstrate the American ethical model.

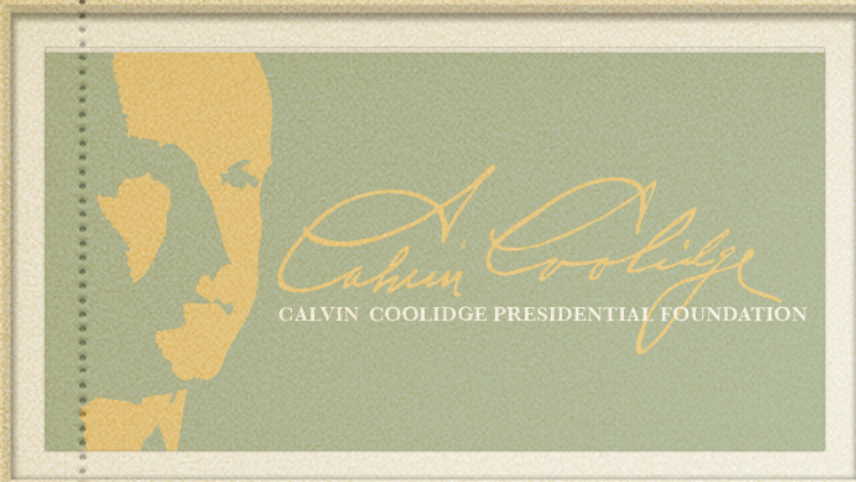




Initially, Coolidge made a deliberate point of speaking at Howard University in 1924 for their commencement ceremonies not long after being elevated from the Vice Presidency in August of 1923. Howard was and is arguably the pre-eminent HBCU in the United States. His remarks there stand as a stark clarion call against the outrageous racism of Wilson:

“The nation has need of all that can be contributed to it through the best efforts of all its citizens. The colored people have repeatedly proved their devotion to the high ideals of our country. They gave their services to the war with the same patriotism and readiness that other citizens did. The propaganda of prejudice and hatred which sought to keep the colored men from supporting the national cause completely failed. The black man showed himself the same kind of citizen, moved by the same kind of patriotism as the white man. They were tempted, but not one betrayed his country. They came home with many decorations, and their conduct repeatedly won high commendation from both American and European commanders.”





Coolidge's remarks echoed rhetoric offered before the United States Congress in 1924:

“Numbered Among our population are some 12,000,000 Colored people. Under our Constitution their rights are just as sacred as those of any other citizen. It is both a public and a private duty to protect those rights.”





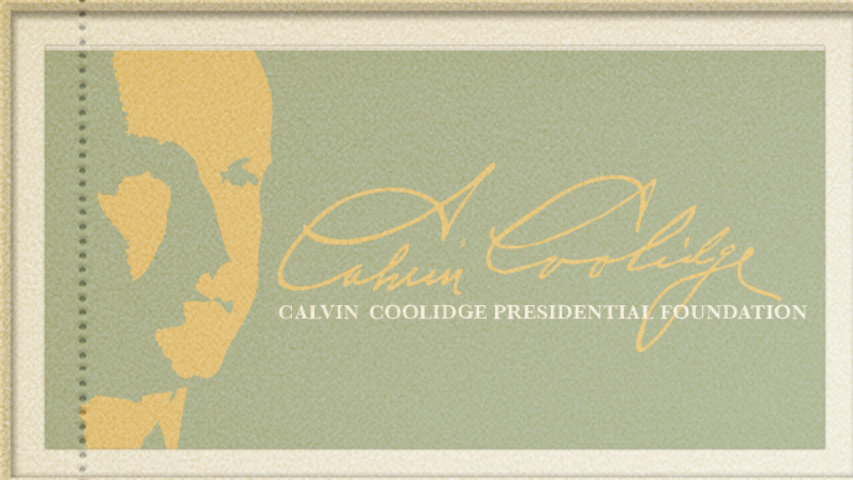
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President Calvin Coolidge speaking  
at Howard University at commencement in 1924



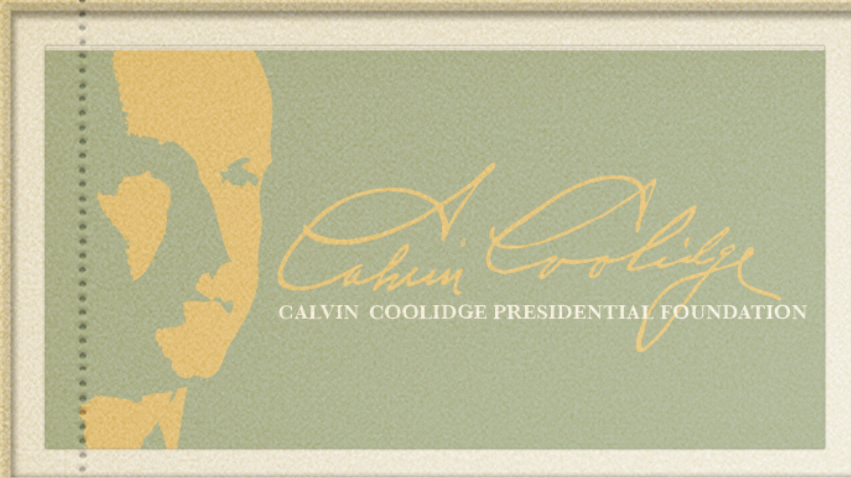
Calvin Coolidge greets an African American man on the grounds of the White House in 1925  
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress).





Coolidge's stance on race was not strategic, cynical or manipulative. It was consistent with an idealistic notion of American rights and clearly juxtaposed against the increasingly entrenched racist premises of progressivism. Coolidge's ethical stance on race was clear in public remarks he chose to take against members of his own political party. In 1924, political leaders in New York City demanded that a black man not be allowed to run for public office on the basis of his race. President Coolidge wrote the following letter published in a Brooklyn paper:





"My dear sir,

Your letter is received, accompanied by a newspaper clipping which discussed the possibility that a colored man may be the Republican nominee from one of the New York districts. Referring to this newspaper statement, you say:

"It is of some concern whether a Negro is allowed to run for Congress anywhere, at any time, in any party, in this, a white man's country. Repeated ignoring of the growing race problem does not excuse us for allowing encroachments . . ."

Leaving out of consideration the manifest impropriety of the President intruding himself in a local contest for nomination, I was amazed to receive such a letter. During the war 500,000 colored men and boys were called up under the draft, not one of whom sought to evade it. They took their places wherever assigned in defense of the nation of which they are just as truly citizens as are any others. The suggestion of denying any measure of their full political rights to such a great group of our population as the colored people is one which, however it might be received in some other quarters, could not possibly be permitted by one who feels a responsibility for living up to the traditions and maintaining the principles of the Republican Party.

Our Constitution guarantees equal rights to all our citizens, without discrimination on account of race or color. I have taken my oath to support that Constitution. It is the source of your rights and my rights. I purpose to regard it, and administer it, as the source of the rights of all the people, whatever their belief or race. A colored man is precisely as much entitled to submit his candidacy in a party primary, as is any other citizen. The decision must be made by the constituents to whom he offers himself, and by nobody else. You have suggested that in some fashion I should bring influence to bear to prevent the possibility of a colored man being nominated for Congress. In reply, I quote my great predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt: ". . . I cannot consent to take the position that the door of hope—the door of opportunity—is to be shut upon any man, no matter how worthy, purely upon the grounds of race or color."

Yours very truly, etc.

Calvin Coolidge"



## REPORTED BLACK VICTIMS OF LYNCHING; 1882-1963

YEAR	NUMBER	YEAR	NUMBER	YEAR	NUMBER	YEAR	NUMBER
1882	49	1903	84	1924	16	1945	1
1883	53	1904	76	1925	17	1946	6
1884	51	1905	57	1926	23	1947	1
1885	74	1906	62	1927	16	1948	1
1886	74	1907	58	1928	10	1949	3
1887	70	1908	89	1929	7	1950	1
1888	69	1909	69	1930	20	1951	1
1889	94	1910	67	1931	12	1952	0
1890	85	1911	60	1932	6	1953	0
1891	113	1912	61	1933	24	1954	0
1892	161	1913	51	1934	15	1955	8
1893	118	1914	51	1935	18	1956	0
1894	134	1915	56	1936	8	1957	0
1895	113	1916	50	1937	8	1958	0
1896	78	1917	36	1938	6	1959	1
1897	123	1918	60	1939	2	1960	0
1898	101	1919	70	1940	4	1961	1
1899	85	1920	53	1941	4	1962	0
1900	106	1921	59	1942	6	1963	1
1901	105	1922	51	1943	3	1964	1
1902	85	1923	29	1944	2		

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States: From Colonial Times to the Present (1975)