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THE MAKING OF A NATION - November 22, 2001:

Calvin Coolidge

By Nancy Steinbach



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VOICE 1:

THE MAKING OF A NATION -- a program in Special English on the Voice of America.

This is Shirley Griffith. Today, Steve Ember and I tell about Calvin Coolidge and how he became president of the United States.

VOICE 2:

The early nineteen-twenties were a troubled time for the United States. Congress and the public began to discover crimes by several officials in the administration of President Warren Harding. Harding himself became seriously sick during a trip to Alaska and western states. He died in a hotel room in California in August nineteen-twenty-three.

Harding's vice president, Calvin Coolidge, became the new president. Both men were Republicans. Their policies on issues were much the same. Coolidge, however, was a very different man. He was completely honest. He was the kind of president the country needed to re-build public trust in the government.

VOICE 1:

Calvin Coolidge was quiet and plain-looking. He was the son of a farmer and political leader from the small northeastern state of Vermont.

Young Calvin worked at different jobs to pay for his college education. He became a lawyer. He moved to another northeastern state -- Massachusetts -- where he became active in Republican Party politics. First he was elected mayor of the town. Then he was elected to the state legislature. Finally he was elected governor of Massachusetts.

It was as governor that Coolidge first became known throughout the United States.

VOICE 2:

In nineteen-nineteen, a group of policemen in the city of Boston tried to start a labor union. This violated the rules of the police department. So the commissioner of

police suspended nineteen of the union's leaders. The next day, almost seventy-five percent of Boston's policemen went on strike.

Criminals walked freely through the city for two nights. They robbed stores and threatened public safety. Frightened Americans all across the country waited to see what Governor Coolidge would do.

VOICE 1:

He took strong action. He called on state troops to end the strike. He said: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by any body, any where, any time. "

Most Americans approved of what Coolidge did. The people of Massachusetts supported him, too. They re-elected him governor by a large number of votes. Then, in nineteen-twenty, Republicans nominated Warren Harding for president. They nominated Calvin Coolidge for vice president. When President Harding died in California, Coolidge, his wife, and two sons moved to the White House.

VOICE 2:

America's thirtieth president was, in some ways, an unusual kind of person to lead the country. He said little. He showed few feelings. Coolidge's policies as president were not active. He tried to start as few new programs as possible. He was a conservative Republican who believed deeply that government should be small.

Coolidge expressed his belief this way: "If the federal government should go out of existence, most people would not note the difference. " And once he said: "Four-fifths of our troubles in this life would disappear if we would only sit down and keep still."

VOICE 1:

Coolidge believed that private business -- not the federal government -- should lead the country to greater wealth and happiness. He continued President Harding's policy of supporting American business both inside the United States and in other countries. The government under President Coolidge continued high taxes on imports in an effort to help American companies.

VOICE 2:

Many Americans shared Coolidge's ideas about small government and big business. In the early nineteen-twenties, many of them were living better than ever before.

At that time, companies were growing larger. The prices of their stocks rose higher and higher. There were lots of jobs. And the wages of many workers increased. Americans agreed with their president that there was little need for government spending and government programs, when private industry seemed so strong.

VOICE 1:

The American economy grew in the nineteen-twenties for several reasons. The world war had destroyed many factories and businesses in Europe. The United States did not suffer the same destruction. It was still a young country. It had great natural resources, trained workers, and a huge market within its own borders. When peace came, Americans found their economy stronger than any other in the world.

VOICE 2:

Changes in the American market also helped economic growth. "Installment buying" became popular. In this system, people could buy a product and pay for it over a period of several weeks or months. The total cost was higher, because they had to pay interest. But the system made it possible for more people to buy more goods. It also made the idea of borrowing money more acceptable to many Americans.

VOICE 1:

The growing importance of the New York stock markets also helped economic growth in the nineteen-twenties. Millions of Americans bought shares of stock in companies that seemed to grow bigger every month. Such investment almost became a national game. People would buy shares of stock, then sell them when the stock rose in value. There were many stories of poor people who became rich overnight by buying the right stocks.

The American Congress also helped the economy by lowering income taxes. People had more money to spend on new goods. Another important reason for economic growth was a change in the way American companies were operated.

VOICE 2:

During the nineteen-twenties, the idea of manufacturing goods in the most scientific way became very popular. The father of this idea of "scientific management" was an engineer, Frederick Taylor.

Mr. Taylor developed a system to study manufacturing. He studied each machine involved in the process. He studied how much work each person did. He studied how goods moved from one part of a factory to another. Then he offered ideas to business owners about ways to produce goods faster and for less cost.

VOICE 1:

Taylor's ideas of scientific management appealed to business owners. Automobile manufacturer Henry Ford proved that the ideas could work in his new car factory in the state of Michigan. Ford used the assembly line system of production. In this system, each worker did one thing to a product as it moved through the factory.

...the thing to a product as it moved through the factory.
This helped cut prices and increase wages.

VOICE 2:

Ford and other businessmen learned a great deal about how to control costs, set prices, and decide how much to produce. All these changes in production and marketing helped Ford and other American companies grow larger and stronger.

Henry Ford's Model-T car became popular throughout the country. So did other new products. Radios. Refrigerators for cooling food. Vacuums to clean carpets. Ready-made cigarettes. Beauty products.

Americans in the nineteen-twenties began to buy all kinds of new products they had never used before.

VOICE 1:

Calvin Coolidge was in the White House. However, business led the nation. Times were good. Americans trusted business and its leaders. It became an honor to call someone a businessman. Colleges organized business classes. Middle-class citizens in almost every city and town gathered to discuss business ideas.

President Coolidge spoke for millions of Americans when he said: "the chief business of the American people is business. "

VOICE 2:

Coolidge represented traditional values and a simple way of life. He knew exactly how every dollar he earned was saved or spent. And he spent no more money than was necessary.


The strange thing was that Coolidge was extremely popular with a public that was spending large amounts of money. Some economic experts warned that the country's quick economic growth would end in economic depression. Most Americans, however, believed that the good times had come to stay. They enjoyed the good things in life that work and success in business could bring.

On our next program, we will see how the economic growth of the nineteen-twenties brought exciting changes to the day-to-day life of millions of Americans.

(Theme)

VOICE 1:

You have been listening to the VOA Special English program THE MAKING OF A NATION. Your announcers were Shirley Griffith and Steve Ember. Our program was written by Nancy Steinbach. Join us again next week at this same time for another report about the history of the United States.

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