Today, we are in the flow of the "about" series in Whitestone podcast. The "about" series is where we profile a person that should be of particular interest. And today, we're going to spend our time focusing on a man who is clearly one of the best U.S. Presidents in history. The trouble with that is this: for decades, this man has been ranked very low as a U.S. President by many scholars and academicians. And, no surprise here, some of the reasons for these widely different assessments is because the very same data is viewed so differently by different people. So, what's new about that? Well, the answer to that is *absolutely nothing.* So, here we go, *you* can be the judge after hearing the profile today of U.S. President Cal Coolidge in this podcast.

Cal Coolidge was President of the United States about a century ago, from 1923 to 1929. And if your ears just perked up, you likely noticed that Coolidge served about six years as President…and that's unusual, because U.S. presidents are only elected to four-year terms. Well, the reason why was that Coolidge was Vice President when President Warren G. Harding died of a heart attack while he was holding office.

The date was August 2, 1923, and as the country's Vice President, Coolidge was sworn into office by his father at his family home's parlor in Vermont by the light of a kerosene lamp at 2:47 early the next morning. You guessed it, Coolidge's family home had no electricity…and no telephone, for that matter. Then Cal Coolidge simply left the reporters that had assembled and went back to bed.

And that set the tone for Coolidge's tenure. Low-key, straightforward, just addressing those things that needed handling…but perceived as handling them well. And the record shows that Coolidge led the country into and during one of the most prosperous times in the country's history. In fact, historians now call the decade when he served the "Roaring Twenties," a time of economic freedom and well-being for many Americans.

But Coolidge had inherited leadership of the executive branch of the U.S. government when it was in crisis. His predecessor President Harding's tenure is best remembered in history as corrupt due to what is known as the Teapot Dome scandal—considered the greatest scandal in America until President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal of the 1970s. Harding's Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall ultimately served time in prison, convicted for taking bribes related to government oil leases. A number of others involved resigned under the U.S. Senate's scrutiny of the scandal.

In his handling of Teapot Dome, now-President Coolidge took a firm but even-handed approach, believing every person accused is innocent until proven guilty. But he also demanded accountability and reporting on the happenings. In this way, one of the earliest perceptions of Coolidge was his steadily working to erase the stench of official Washington's corruption. But President Harding also had other domestic issues, too, and Coolidge stepped right up to them.

Interestingly, before he became Vice President, the key issue that gave impetus to Coolidge's political career was his handling of the Boston Police Strike as Governor of Massachusetts. The Boston police had pursued unionization and Samuel Gompers, the famous union leader, sent a telegram confronting Coolidge—who replied with these words to Gompers: "Your assertion that the Commissioner was wrong cannot justify the wrong of [the police] leaving the city unguarded. That furnished the opportunity; the criminal element furnished the action. There is no right to strike against the public safety by anyone, anywhere, any time."

Coolidge's stance was acclaimed by many, essentially launching Coolidge's journey into the public eye nationally. That event also assisted Coolidge to be re-elected as Governor by a much wider margin than before. And it's interesting that about 60 years later, President Ronald Reagan marked a defining moment in his presidency when he fired all of the nation's striking air traffic controllers under the same philosophy…that there is no right to strike against the public's safety. It's no wonder that some consider Coolidge and Reagan as cut from the same cloth of leadership.

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Soon after the Republican Party's convention in 1920, the party bosses elevated Warren Harding to the nomination, but when they departed, the rank-and-file Republicans in the trenches squeezed Coolidge into the nomination for Vice President. Alongside the Boston Police Strike, Coolidge's book titled *Have Faith in Massachusetts* was a factor. Here's an excerpt of a speech recounted in that book that captures a sense of Coolidge's even-handedness in his leadership framework…

"Do the day's work. If it be to protect the rights of the weak, whoever objects, do it. If it be to help a powerful corporation better to serve the people, whatever the opposition, do that. Expect to be called a stand-patter, but don't be a stand-patter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. Don't hesitate to be as revolutionary as science. Don't hesitate to be as reactionary as the multiplication table. Don't expect to build up the weak by pulling down the strong. Don't hurry to legislate. Give administration a chance to catch up with legislation." Well, Coolidge was elected VP alongside Harding as President…and you know what happened thereafter—Coolidge assumed office when President Harding died in San Francisco while on a national speaking tour.

Then President Coolidge built an interesting track record. In 1925, Coolidge said that "the chief business of the American people is business." And his approach supported that: free markets, economic growth and avoiding stifling regulation. And that helped put the "roar" in the Roaring Twenties.

Coolidge oversaw the cutting of personal income taxes for everyone and reduced the top marginal income tax rate from 58% to 46% and liberated a vast number of citizens from paying any income tax at all. …Coolidge was a proponent for women's suffrage, their right to vote. …Coolidge said in his State of the Union address that Black's rights were "just as sacred as those of any other citizen" and that it was a "public and private duty to protect those rights." …Coolidge called for lynching to become a federal crime across all states. He signed legislation granting U.S. citizenship to Native Americans living on reservations.

And in a 1924 speech, Coolidge stressed tolerance of differences in America and said immigrants "contributed much to making our country what it is." Remember, this was a man who traced his family roots back to early America. Coolidge also said that the U.S. should assist immigrants and urged immigrants to reject "race hatreds" and "prejudice." But Coolidge also didn't hesitate to reject some specific immigration to America as unwise. So, was this typical political flip-flopping or the thoughtful prudence of a President who understood a measured, thoughtful handling of issues?

Well, one additional fact stands out about all this: Americans robustly voted for Coolidge in 1924 to remain at the White House for a full term as the duly-elected President. Coolidge was known as a man of very few words—his widely known nickname was "Silent Cal." The legend is that a guest sitting next to Coolidge at a party said that he had bet with someone that he would be able to get President Coolidge "to say more than two words." And what was Coolidge's response? "You lose."

But here's the thing: historians say that the supposedly Silent Cal who supposedly never said much held 525 press conferences during his six years in office! Only President Donald Trump has surpassed that level of engagement with the press. So, Coolidge was notoriously silent but highly engaged when he needed to influence others, to create meaningful transparency with the public…yeah, to keep the nation moving in the right direction. Many today would surely find Cal's personal silence refreshing in this era of the "loud politics" in the social media world. Perhaps Coolidge just believed his small-government, common-sense policies spoke for themselves!

Nevertheless, Coolidge declined to run for the Presidency the next time around, indicating that ten years in the Oval Office would be too many. So he didn't run for reelection. And now the debate still continues for those interested in the mistakes and successes of the past revisiting in the future: those who favor a blend of economic freedom and lower taxes and advocating for all ethnicities and wise immigration find Cal Coolidge to be a very strong model for a President, perhaps especially for this era. Those who disagree tend to place Coolidge at the bottom of good stewardship in the Presidency. *So, what's your vote on that?*

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A&A: Application & Action

1. In the current political era of significant, top-down environmental regulation and other virtue cram-downs requiring supposedly better behavior of the entire populace, do you think that Coolidge's pervasive philosophy of small government is hopelessly outdated? Discuss.

2. Do you believe a modern political leader can thrive using Coolidge's personal style of few words until real substance is at stake, like his then using many press conferences? Discuss.

3. Do you think that Christians should be using bigger government to work to ensure that Christians and non-Christians alike are conforming better to God's rules for living? Discuss.

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