President Herbert Hoover

The American President who was often considered the "reason" for the Great Depression, Herbert C. Hoover was born in 1874 in Iowa. His parents were Quakers but young Herbert lost both of them, his father to a heart attack, when Herbert was a lad of six, and his mother who died of pneumonia when he was barely nine. Herbert was not a good student but he was driven to improve. His goal to attend Stanford University was fulfilled in 1895 when he graduated as a mining engineer.

The young engineer worked at a gold mine and later as a field analyst evaluating mines for his new employer. This work took Herbert all over the world. He became highly respected for his knowledge and his hard work ethic. In fact, when he proposed to his girl friend Lou Henry, he was actually in Australia. He sent his proposal by telegram and his future wife accepted his proposal by return wire. By 1899, Herbert and Lou were married. He had already been working in China and they continued to reside in China while Herbert pursued his company’s projects. But the famous Boxer Rebellion of 1900 found the new Mrs. Hoover working as a nursing assistant to care for wounded soldiers while Herbert was involved in the defense of the city of Tianjin. It would be seventeen long years before the Hoovers would tread on American soil again.

His wife had been the only female student in the Stanford geological engineering program when Herbert was studying there. The obviously bright and energetic Lou Hoover learned to speak eight languages while her husband worked in many countries around the globe. This was a skill that would serve her well in future years. Their years of working around the world had brought Herbert and his wife a broad understanding of the world and how America interacted within it. Now very wealthy, the Hoovers began to look to politics as a new endeavor.
President Herbert Hoover (Cont’d)

Even though Hoover was a Republican, Democratic President Wilson knew that Herbert was the right man for the job to head up the American Food Administration Office. He coordinated supplies and helped to insure that the European countries had adequate food to survive during the World War I years. He was so effective in his efforts that when the war ended President Wilson sent him to the Versailles Peace Conference.

Hoover was a part of the progressive wing of the Republican Party and yet Wilson, a Democratic President, relied heavily upon him and trusted him deeply. Anxiously wanting to be in politics, Herbert Hoover had hoped to win the Republican nomination in 1920 but it was not to be. Warren G. Harding was the party’s nominee and also the ultimate choice of the American people for President. Harding then picked Hoover to be the Secretary of Commerce. While in the position, Hoover created the National Bureau of Standards, and initiated the standardization of tools and parts in industry. He also strongly supported foreign trade and commerce.

Hoover was a great believer in individualism and that individualism was at the core of the American culture. In 1922, while he was Secretary of Commerce, Hoover wrote a book titled American Individualism that compared the American way of life with socialism and communism.

In 1924 Hoover was considered for the position of running mate for Calvin Coolidge but this too fell through. His efforts to provide aid and assistance for all of the displaced people along the Mississippi when there was a great flood catastrophe in 1927 were recognized by the American people. This tragedy was a literal showcase of Hoover’s abilities to organize and be a real leader in times of crisis. With initial campaign efforts starting in 1927, Herbert Hoover won the Republican nomination in the summer of 1928 at the party convention in Kansas City. It was Andrew Mellon, the Secretary of the Treasury, who put all of Pennsylvania’s electoral votes behind Hoover that sealed his nomination.
President Herbert Hoover (Cont’d)

Running against the New York Governor, Democrat Al Smith, Republican Hoover waged a skillful and calm campaign. Hoover was seen by Americans as the administrator, the businessman, the specialist in world commerce who would lead America to even greater heights.

But everything would come crashing down with the collapse of the Stock Market in October of 1929. It seemed that nothing Herbert Hoover tried to do could reduce the suffering of millions of Americans during the Great Depression. By 1932 Americans wanted no more technocracy, or big business, and they wanted an end to bread lines and poverty. They did not want to hear that the Depression was really a result of the First World War. Nor did Hoover’s warnings of a giant Federal Government that would overwhelm individual freedoms, and the loss of a limited form of government hold any sway. The Federal Farm Board Hoover worked so hard to create could not restore the massive losses and set backs of the American farmer.

The Great Depression occurred because of four very fundamental but enormously powerful factors. These have been defined as: 1) the entire European economy was in chaos from the tragedy of the First World War; 2) massive over-speculation in an unregulated American stock market; 3) serious overproduction in the American agricultural economy; and 4) industrial workers saw no increase in their wages while company profits soared. Thus American workers were unable to purchase many of the products necessary to keep the economy going. As the depression continued, the people of the United States were becoming hopeless and they did not see in Herbert Hoover the leadership or actions necessary to end the economic crisis.
President Herbert Hoover (Cont’d)

In 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt easily won the first of his unprecedented four presidential campaigns based upon bringing to Americans a New Deal. President Herbert Hoover won only six states in his bid for re-election.

After leaving office the former President returned to his home in Palo Alto, California. Because he was held responsible for the Depression, Mr. Hoover was not consulted on any issues for a long time. But by the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s he again began to be involved in the political arena by his support of various governmental programs and occasionally of particular candidates who he felt supported the causes he believed in.

Active until the very end of his life the former President supported President Eisenhower in both elections, and early in 1964 he voiced his support for Senator Barry Goldwater as the Republican Presidential candidate because of his sound and conservative thinking.

But later that very same year, at the age of ninety, former President of the United States Herbert C. Hoover died of colon cancer. His beloved wife Lou had passed away fifty years earlier in 1944. Together they are buried in West Branch, Iowa the town where he had been born back in 1874.
President Herbert Hoover Questions

Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True  False  Many presidents have studied law but Herbert Hoover was an engineer.

2. True  False  Hoover and his wife spent many years working at gold mines in South Africa.

3. True  False  Hoover, a Republican, worked in the administration of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson.

4. True  False  Hoover attended the Versailles Peace Conference at the end of World War I.

5. True  False  Hoover was Secretary of Standards for President Warren Harding.

6. True  False  Hoover was the vice presidential candidate with Calvin Coolidge.

7. True  False  Hoover was not re-elected president because of the Great Depression.

8. True  False  One of the causal factors in the Great Depression was World War I.

9. True  False  Hoover lost his bid at re-election to Theodore Roosevelt.

10. True  False  The American people blamed Hoover for not stopping the Great Depression.
President Herbert Hoover Answers

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. False
7. True
8. True
9. False
10. True